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Dutch Jews in the Imperial Space: The Social Mobility and Integration of Jewish ‘Indies travellers’, 1870-1940

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Abstract

From the last decades of the nineteenth century, Dutch Jews increasingly moved to the Dutch East Indies, which at this time were opened up to individual citizens to pursue a career. Members of the Dutch political, financial, and cultural elites were overrepresented among the (Jewish and non-Jewish) ‘*Indiëgangsters*’, or ‘Indies travellers’. Colonial society provided Jews with novel opportunities, as their Jewish background seemed to matter less than their Dutch citizenship, their education, their occupational position, their connections, their wealth, or the colour of their skin. This article sheds light on the meaning of this imperial dimension for Jews in the pre-war Dutch East Indies, by analysing the patterns of upward social mobility and integration of 38 Jewish migrants whose lives were recorded in the Dutch Biography Portal. These Jews were well-represented in traditional occupations, but they also attained important positions in the colonial civil service. Compared to their counterparts who did not migrate, they were less likely to be religious Jews or members of Jewish organisations. They were more often married to non-Jewish, as well as non-religious, spouses. High levels of integration did not, however, protect these Jewish migrants from antisemitism, particularly directed at those who supported Indonesians’ rights.

Keywords: Dutch East Indies, Dutch Jews, migration, colonial/imperial space, upward social mobility, integration, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

Introduction

Emancipation processes in the Dutch East Indies and in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, more than 10,000 kilometres apart, ran parallel in some instances, but diverged in others. This article will examine how the specific colonial environment of the Dutch East Indies offered Jews from the Dutch political, financial, and cultural elites unique opportunities.¹ Whereas Jews in the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean formed a substantial minority beginning in the early modern period, the situation in the Indonesian archipelago was entirely different.² The Dutch East India Company (VOC) excluded Jews from settlement under the pretext of not being able to provide for their religious needs. Nevertheless, Jewish merchants from Arab countries played an important role in a trade network between India and China, and in times of labour shortages, the VOC did employ Jews, though they sometimes concealed their Jewish identity.

This situation changed, albeit slowly, at the end of the eighteenth century, when the Dutch Republic granted Jews civil rights. After emancipation and the dismantling of the VOC, European Jews were permitted to work for the colonial government, and they started to migrate to the Indonesian archipelago. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards, due to increasing educational possibilities, industrialisation, commercial growth, urbanisation, and the emergence of labour unions, a substantial number of Jews in the Netherlands began to enjoy the benefits of political emancipation, although poverty was still a severe problem. Concurrently, in 1870, Europeans who were not employed by the colonial civil service were finally permitted to work in the Dutch East Indies. More Jews, Dutch as well as Germans, British, and Americans, began to settle in the colony, and economic activity intensified.

Not all Jews in the Dutch East Indies were of European origin. Apart from some Chinese and Armenian Jews, a significant segment of the Jews in the colony came from the region of what would later become Iraq, Yemen, and Palestine. This group, called 'Baghdadis' or Iraqi Jews, began arriving in the

1 Wieke Vink describes 'colonial environment' in its entirety in a way that is applicable to the Dutch East Indies as well: 'tropical climate, population, and local colonial authorities, as well as unequal social relationships imbued with a colour-coded racism, the relationship with the Dutch colonial state and her representatives, and the colonial power structures that defined this relationship'. Vink, *Creole Jews*, 4.

2 In the twentieth century the size of the Jewish communities in the Dutch colonies in 'the East' and 'the West' were comparable, but Jews remained far more visible in the West where they comprised a much larger part of the European population.

middle of the nineteenth century, often via British India. They primarily lived in the port city of Surabaya (Soerabaja), as most of them worked in trade. In 1848, a law had been introduced that divided the population of the Dutch East Indies into two categories: 'Europeans' and those 'equated' (*'gelijkgesteld'*) with them on the one hand, and 'natives' (*'inlanders'*) and those associated with them on the other. In 1854, Jews (*'Israëlieten'*) were formally equated with the European group in a new classification system, which differentiated between three classifications: 'Europeans', 'natives', and 'Foreign Orientals' (*'Vreemde Oosterlingen'*), with other groups associated or equated with them.³ Most Baghdadis were included in the last category, although lighter skinned, affluent Baghdadis could 'pass' as European, and some also identified as such. This official hierarchy was significant. It offered European Jews economic, social, and cultural advantages, as they were legally and politically acknowledged as 'whites'.

The number of (Indo-)Europeans increased greatly from the last decades of the nineteenth century and especially in the interwar period. The 1920s formed the heyday of civilian migration. Between 1812 and 1922, 1.5 per cent of the inhabitants of the metropolitan Netherlands who reached the age of sixteen left for the East.⁴ After 1900, one in forty Dutch-born men and women would spend part of their lives in the Dutch East Indies.⁵ Yet compared to the native population of the Indonesian archipelago, the (Indo-)European community remained very small. Estimates vary from 246,000 in 1930 to 290,000 people in 1940: less than 0.5 per cent of the entire population, which around this time was nearly 70 million.⁶ The number of Jewish immigrants in the Dutch East Indies also increased after 1900. Approximately 1,100 Jews lived in the colony in 1930, 41 per cent of them women. On the eve of the Pacific War (World War Two), this number had increased to some 3,000-5,000, which would approach the percentage of Jews in the general Dutch population at the time, which was almost two per cent. The rapid expansion of the Jewish communities in the 1930s can be explained primarily by the arrival of Jewish refugees from Germany, Austria, and Eastern Europe.⁷

3 Lijnkamp, *De 'Japannerwet'*, 15-21.

4 Bosma, *Indiëganggers*, 30.

5 Bosma and Mandemakers, "Indiëganggers", 167.

6 De Neve, *Asal Oesoel*, 96-102. Blom and Cahen, "Dutch Jews", 323. Bosma, *Indiëganggers*, 16. Cassuto, "Joden". Touw, "Zwijgen", 18. Kowner speaks of 360,000 Europeans and Eurasians in the 1930s, yet it is unclear where this figure comes from. Kowner, "An Obscure History".

7 Berg, Candotti, and Touw, "Selamat Sjabbat", 4-6. Blom and Cahen, "Dutch Jews", 323. Goldstein, "Memory", 101. Hirschel, "Joden", 615. Kowner, "An Obscure History". Kowner, "The Japanese Internment", 349. Rosen Jacobson, "A Welcoming Refuge?", 157-158. Touw, "Zwijgen", 18.

For decades, European Jews had been too few in number, and too dispersed over the entire archipelago, to organise themselves religiously, nor did they seem eager to do so.⁸ In the twentieth century, a small Jewish community came into being. European Jewish life expanded from the 1920s onwards, partially due to Zionist initiatives. Although the European Jewish community would never establish a synagogue (whereas the Baghdadis did in 1923), nor attract a rabbi, the rabbinate in the Netherlands eventually authorised someone to perform circumcisions (*brit milah*) and marriage ceremonies. Religious services were held regularly in hotels or freemasons' lodges. On the eve of World War Two, the Jewish community in the Dutch East Indies was one of the largest Jewish communities in Southeast Asia.⁹ With the establishment of lasting Jewish organisations, Jews became a visible group in the colony.¹⁰

Jews in the Dutch East Indies encountered exclusion and antisemitism, mainly from other Europeans. The Javanese Bank, the Dutch East Indies Commercial Bank, and the state shipping companies refused to employ Jews, particularly in higher-level positions, until 1925, and the Netherlands Trading Company excluded Jews from membership on the board as late as 1936. Although it seems that as a group Jews were rarely attacked in the newspapers, the local newspaper *Nieuws van den Dag* periodically published antisemitic stabs targeted at individuals with a Jewish background. A large number of Jews hid their Jewish origins or even denied them.¹¹ Moreover, the Dutch Nazi Party (NSB) was fairly popular in the Dutch East Indies.

Historiography

The history of Jews in the Dutch East Indies is underresearched, especially in comparison with the history of Jews in the Dutch Caribbean. There are some pioneering studies by Jeffrey Hadler, Liesbeth Rosen Jacobson, Theo Kamsma, and Rotem Kowner. They deal primarily with antisemitism, the

These figures might have been even higher, because most authors agree that in the twentieth century, many Jews did not identify as such anymore, intermarriage rates were high, and some Jews purposely concealed their Jewish origins. Wilton van Reede and Arjen Onderdenwijngaard estimate the number of Jews in the late 1930s at 5,000-10,000, although they have not officially published these findings. Dümpel, "Joden", 46, 49.

8 Blom and Cahen, "Dutch Jews", 322-323.

9 Berg, Candotti, and Touw, "Selamat Sjabbat", 11.

10 Hadler, "Translations", 300.

11 Hadler [citing Israel Cohen], "Translations", 299. De Neve, "Afstammelingen", 20.

period of the Second World War, and its leadup and aftermath.¹² Contemporary authors of much-cited works such as Joost Glaser, Louis Hirschel, and Samuel van Creveld, were often religious and ‘conscious’ Jews.¹³ The latter’s publications are often focused on the 1920s and 1930s, when a Jewish community¹⁴ became established.¹⁵

There could be several reasons for the relative lack of research on Jews in the Dutch East Indies. First of all, the imperial turn came late to Dutch Jewish history, and is only now slowly beginning to take real shape.¹⁶ At the 15th International Symposium on the History and Culture of the Jews in the Netherlands, themed ‘The Imperial Turn in Dutch Jewish History’, Jessica Roitman called attention to the fact that, with a few exceptions, and despite the visible presence of Jews in the former Dutch colonies, until the early 2000s, there seems to have been a reluctance to study Jews and the Dutch empire. Only lately, new research has been initiated, questioning what the colonial space, as a place of both opportunities and exclusion, meant to Jews in the Dutch colonies. Roitman also stated that the in-between position of Jews, as both colonisers and members of a minority, offers many interesting angles to study different processes within the imperial space.¹⁷

In general, little sociohistorical research has been done into European colonial society in the Indonesian archipelago. The most notable exceptions are Caroline Drieënhuizen and Ulbe Bosma who have studied how the European elite in the Dutch East Indies gathered items for collections, and the background, motives, and activities of Dutch migrants in the colony, respectively.¹⁸ Although both authors omit Jews as a group, they do offer valuable perspectives. Drieënhuizen has described how European migrants

12 Hadler, “Translations”. Kamsma, “Echoes”. Kowner, “The Japanese Internment”. Rosen Jacobson, “A Welcoming Refuge?”.

13 By ‘conscious Jews’ in this context, I mean those who identified as Jewish outside of their close circle of family and friends, organised themselves in Jewish organisations, or took up Jewish social and cultural causes.

14 Vink has rightfully claimed for the Jews of Surinam that the use of the word ‘community’, for lack of a better option, is problematic, because it implies an ‘organic wholeness’ that does not match historical reality. In the case of the Dutch East Indies, where Jews enjoyed much less of a communal life, it is even more important to stress this difficulty in terminology. Vink, *Creole Jews*, 17.

15 Brakel [citing Jacob Saphir], “Joodse bezoeker”. Glaser, “Joden”. Hadler [citing Israel Cohen], “Translations”. Hirschel, “Joden”. Van Creveld, “De Joden”.

16 The imperial turn came earlier to British Jewish history, although David Feldman has pointed out that there, too, a lot of work still needs to be done. Feldman, “Jews”, 71-73.

17 Roitman, Introduction.

18 Bosma, *Indiëgangsters*. Bosma and Mandemakers, “Indiëgangsters”. Drieënhuizen, *Koloniale collecties*.

were able to redefine and distinguish themselves in terms of culture and social class, but ultimately also in sense of identity. Bosma has stressed that the racial hierarchy implemented by the Dutch imperial forces and based on pseudoscientific Social-Darwinist ideas about 'race', placed white Europeans at the top.¹⁹

Another potential explanation for the modest body of work on the experiences of Jews in the Dutch East Indies, relates to this topic itself. The consensus seems to be that Dutch Jews who migrated to the East largely felt Dutch over Jewish, and mostly ignored their Jewish background in their day-to-day lives. They allegedly were often religiously non-observant or Christian, and did not feel any special connection to other Jews in the colony. In sum, Jews in the Dutch East Indies appear to have been merely 'individuals among the masses', an 'assimilated' minority, not able or willing (at least for a long time) to establish and maintain a real community.²⁰

If, indeed, many Dutch Jewish migrants did not consider themselves Jewish, this does not exclude them from study. Although it might feel paradoxical or even problematic to set them apart *as Jews*, or as a homogeneous group in a certain respect, the Jewish '*Indiëgang*' or 'Indies travellers' who left the Jewish fold do deserve scholarly attention. First and foremost, secularisation should not be mistaken for radical 'assimilation'. In addition to religious affiliation, networks of family and friends and membership in associations could still link them to (European) Jewish communities. Moreover, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, individuals with a Jewish background encountered a new form of antisemitism, based on the same Social-Darwinist ideas which permeated colonial society.

There seems to be a dichotomy between the dominant idea that Jewish migrants 'totally blended in' in colonial society, and the current body of literature, which focuses on Jews who were visible as such: the Jewish communities of 'conscious' (refugee) Jews in the colony from the 1920s onwards. I would like to put the opportunities as well as the challenges for Jews in the perspective of the wider Dutch migrant experience. This approach also makes it possible to shed light on individuals who were less

19 Bosma, *Indiëgang*, 13, 15, 17-18, 25. Drieënhuizen, *Koloniale collecties*, 24-26. Although according to both authors, sociocultural notions about occupations, education, networks, and wealth were generally deemed more important than the social construct of 'race', and the image of European superiority tends to disregard ongoing processes of mixing, exchange, and migration. Categorising people based on ethnicity became increasingly common from the turn of the century onwards and was chiefly focused on skin colour.

20 Blom and Cahen, "Dutch Jews", 324. Glaser, "Joden" no. 2, 30. Hirschel, "Joden", 615. Rosen Jacobson, "A Welcoming Refugee?", 154, 158, 168.

conscious of their Jewish background, or perhaps even wished to distance themselves from it. It is then possible to differentiate them from the Jews who organised themselves in the interwar period, and study them over a longer period of time. The lives of Jews in the colony were, just like those of their counterparts in Europe, complex, and deserve to be examined in aggregate. In this article, I will analyse how the spatial context of the Dutch East Indies affected the upward social mobility and integration patterns of 38 Dutch Jews. I focus on the period between 1870, when Europeans who were not employed by the colonial government were first admitted (in large numbers), and 1940, the start of the Second World War in the Netherlands.

Methodology

One third of the Dutch migrants to the Dutch East Indies came from an upper middle or upper class background. The upper classes, or what might be called the elite, were, at nine per cent of the migrants, overrepresented, as only 1.2 per cent of Dutch society could be considered upper class. The elites had a ten times higher chance of ending up in the East at some point during their lives than did those from other classes.²¹ Jewish migrants often belonged to the upper echelons of colonial society.²² To analyse their patterns of upward social mobility and integration, I use a prosopographical approach. Such an analysis forms an important addition to the historiography, because it allows for a focus on a substantial number of Jewish migrants without losing sight of them as individual actors.

To operationalise this, I use the Dutch Biography Portal, or BioPort, an online database holding biographies on deceased prominent figures with a connection to the Netherlands or its former colonies.²³ I identified 733 people born between 1850 and 1920 who were of Jewish descent.²⁴ These include converts, as well as sixty people with only one Jewish parent, allowing

21 Bosma, *Indiëgangsters*, 30-37, 220. Bosma and Mandemakers, "Indiëgangsters", 168-171, 177.

22 Blom and Cahen, "Dutch Jews", 324. Van Creveld, "De Joden". Do Passo Vaia, "Jahoedi", 8. Kowner, "Indonesia's Jews". Rosen Jacobson, "A Welcoming Refuge?", 158.

23 I explored the option of comparing Jewish 'Indies travellers' in the Dutch Biography Portal to those in the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN) at an early stage. However, such a comparison proved impossible, as there were no data to work with.

24 These Jews held, or during their lives acquired, a distinguished or influential status in society, whether in Jewish communities, in Dutch society at large, or both. This was not a homogeneous group. These Jews were affluent representatives of the *haute bourgeoisie*, descendants of a few Sephardic families, as well as successful industrialists, politicians, liberal professionals, entrepreneurs, civil servants, religious leaders, intellectuals, performers, and artists.

research on people who considered themselves Jewish, as well as those who were considered so by others, regardless of religious affiliation. Jews are overrepresented in BioPort. The total number of people born between 1850 and 1920 in BioPort is 18,000+, which means over four per cent had a Jewish background. This amounts to more than twice the percentage of Jews in the total Dutch population, which was almost two per cent on average. Therefore, an *n* of 733 is sufficient for a predominantly qualitative study with quantitative elements.

Of the 733 Jews in BioPort, 38 (5.2 per cent) lived in the Dutch East Indies for a certain period.²⁵ This is a high percentage considering the total of Dutch migrants in the colony at this time. Compared to the one in forty Dutch-born men and women who migrated to the East, it is also significantly higher ($p < 0,05$).²⁶ However, since social background was a decisive determinant for migration, and people from the upper (middle) classes were overrepresented, it does not come as a surprise that a relatively substantial number of the prominent Jews in BioPort moved to the colony in the East. Their stays could cover decades or only a few years. The average duration was almost sixteen years, which means they had an extended colonial experience.

BioPort is a rich, yet limited (re)source. The selection criterion of prominence is subjective and ambiguous. Therefore, all BioPort biographies are biased to a degree. This does not necessarily pose a problem because there are often several different biographies available for one person, which cancel biases out to a degree. I also use additional primary and secondary source material: marriage certificates, population registers, publications by these Jews themselves, secondary literature about their lives, newspaper articles, and entries in the Jewish Biographical Dictionary.²⁷ Whereas the male/female balance among Jewish migrants to the Dutch East Indies, nine women and 29 men, is in line with the numbers in the entire database, men are overrepresented. Women's lives, especially those of homemakers, were not deemed important enough to include in the past. Fortunately, the BioPort sample does include a fair number of homemakers, as well as

25 At least another twenty Jews travelled through the colony at one point, often for months on end. They were artists in the broadest sense (painters and draftsmen, cabaret players, singers, and actors), but also businessmen owning local branches of their companies in the Dutch East Indies.

26 $38/733$ versus $168.850/6.750.000$ (this last number relates to the total population of the Netherlands in 1920 as listed by the Dutch Central Agency for Statistics).

27 Although the Jewish Biographical Dictionary is not yet incorporated in BioPort, a collection of several hundred biographies of the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam is.

women who were too young to have an occupation during the time they lived in the colony.

The sample of Dutch Jews in BioPort is not representative for all Dutch Jews with a high(er) social status, nor for all Jewish migrants to the Dutch East Indies in the research period. Indeed, BioPort does not present a quantitatively precise picture. However, the ‘prominence’ of Jews in BioPort makes them a suitable proxy for Jewish members of the Dutch financial, political, and cultural elites. Moreover, with a sample of Dutch Jews from the upper (middle) classes, BioPort provides a sample of people who comprised the largest share of migrants to the Dutch East Indies, and who have not yet been researched in aggregate. I will contrast my findings for the 38 Jewish migrants, most of whom settled or were born in the colony before the 1920s, with those for the larger group of 733 Jews in BioPort, as well as with the literature on Dutch migrants to the Dutch East Indies in general.²⁸

In the Dutch East Indies, many Jews, like other European colonisers, lived a fairly autonomous and also luxurious life, which included servants, lots of travel, and grand houses. Moreover, although members of a minority, they were able to redefine their identity in a colonial environment in which sociocultural identity was fluid and constantly in the making. They had different opportunities than in the Netherlands, where divisions based on class and religion ran deep. In colonial society, their Jewish background seemed to matter less than their Dutch citizenship, their education, their occupational position, their connections, their wealth, or the colour of their skin.

Analysis

Reasons to migrate

Dutch Jews who migrated to the Dutch East Indies might have tried to flee the Jewish milieu or strict orthodox life.²⁹ This was probably a broader phenomenon which also applied to Christian migrants to the colony. It applied to at least one person in the data set³⁰: Alexander Co-

28 With humanities database tool nodegoat, I built my own data model for a data set with qualitative information on the lives of Jews in BioPort. This allowed me to filter, visualise, and analyse data through networks, time, and space.

29 Blom and Cahen, “Dutch Jews”, 323. Brakel, “Joodse bezoeker”, 72. Cassuto, “Joden”.

30 Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this paragraph comes from biographies in BioPort [URL <http://www.biografischportaal.nl/en/>], marriage certificates, population

hen (1864-1961), who signed up for the Netherlands East Indies Army or KNIL in 1882 to escape his authoritarian, orthodox Jewish father. Cohen later wrote in his memoirs that the little faith he still had as a child gradually disappeared during his teenage years, and that he only ever prayed when his father told him to do so, while he secretly read books like *Max Havelaar*, the most famous novel about the Dutch East Indies at the time. When the Ministry of Colonial Affairs announced they were recruiting 'soldier-writers' (*soldaat-schrijvers*'), Cohen gratefully seized this opportunity: 'I would have agreed to anything, if only I could get away as soon as possible'.³¹

Another reason for Jews to move to the Dutch East Indies might have been to escape antisemitism by choosing an environment with a more open attitude to Judaism.³² At least one case from the data set supports this idea. Emanuel Moresco (1869-1945) wished to become a consul at a Dutch embassy abroad and had already earned the right qualifications when he learned from his superior that, as a Jew, he would never be able to obtain such a position. He then tried his luck in the East, where he eventually had a remarkably successful career, becoming vice-president of the Council of the Dutch East Indies, the second-highest authority in the colonial government. While Moresco's case demonstrates that despite increasing chances for upward social mobility in the Netherlands, Jews still encountered a glass ceiling, it also shows that the Dutch East Indies formed a legitimate alternative for those who were prevented by antisemitism from fulfilling their ambitions *in patria*.

Most Jews, however, probably opted for migration to make a career, similar to the majority of their non-Jewish counterparts.³³ Jacques Stokvis (1878-1947), for instance, allegedly heard 'the call of the East' when he found the world of education in the Netherlands too provincial and limited. Jacques Abendanon (1852-1925), who grew up in the Sephardic Jewish community of Paramaribo, Surinam, studied law and Indies studies in the Netherlands, because he aspired to become a civil servant in the Dutch East Indies colonial government. Architect Cosman Citroen (1881-1935) and field entomologist Salomon Leefmans (1884-1954) both had a network of business contacts who introduced them to employers in the Dutch East Indies.³⁴ Philippus

registers, and entries in the Jewish Biographical Dictionary [URL <https://joodsbw.nl/cgi/b/bib/bib-idx?c=jbw;lang=nl;tpl=index.tpl>].

31 Cohen, *In opstand*, 60, 63.

32 Cassuto, "Joden". Dwek and Dwek, "Het onbekende verhaal", 62.

33 Blom and Cahen, "Dutch Jews", 322. Cassuto, "Joden". Van Creveld, "De Joden".

34 De Zeeuw, "C. Citroen".

van Ronkel (1870-1954) was so eager to become a civil servant specialised in languages of the region, that he travelled to the colony at his own expense when his funding application was rejected.

Nearly all the Jewish women in the data set who had not already been born in the Dutch East Indies migrated to the colony for the careers of their husbands, as did many of their non-Jewish counterparts.³⁵ Writer Carry de Haan (1881-1932), for example, followed her first husband Kees van Bruggen to the colony where he had been offered a job as a journalist. She resented her years in the East. The double standards and views on sexuality were, however, an inspiration for her novels. Illustrator Ro Keezer (1905-2003) was married by proxy to journalist Judah Harrison in Amsterdam in 1937. He was by then already living in the Dutch East Indies – someone else acted as his stand-in. These so-called marriages ‘*met de handschoen*’ (‘with the glove’) were a frequent occurrence, also among Jewish brides and grooms.³⁶

Difficult family situations could trigger migration to the Dutch East Indies.³⁷ Like Alexander Cohen, Ivo Samkalden (1912-1995) migrated for this reason. He studied Indies studies with a scholarship and then became a civil servant in the colonial Domestic Government to be able to make a career after his father lost his job and his mother died after years of illness. Moreover, many of the Jews in the data set had relatives with connections to the colony. Of the 38 Jewish migrants to the Dutch East Indies, thirteen were born there and at least another six had parents or siblings who had migrated before them. Failed business adventures or careers, such as that of Cohen before he joined the KNIL, could also lead to migration, whether voluntary or under pressure from family members. In the case of Jacques Hartog (1895-1942), a tragic love affair may have contributed to his choice of a career in the Dutch East Indies. In 1913, he had met a Catholic girl with whom he fell in love, yet their different religious outlooks made it impossible for them to marry. Their affair lasted until he left for the East seven years later.³⁸ World crises naturally also spurred migration. Doctor Johann Neuberger (1887-1976) had seemed destined for a prestigious academic position in Austria-Hungary. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire, he joined a foreign

35 Bosma, *Indiëgangsters*, 20-22.

36 Glaser, “Joden” no. 2, 33.

37 Bosma, *Indiëgangsters*, 33, 220.

38 Buijs, “Jacques Hartog”.

military service by becoming government doctor in a Military Hospital in Palembang.³⁹

Places of origin, places of residence

The bulk of the migrants to the Dutch East Indies originated from the bigger cities, primarily from The Hague, the centre of the colonial migration circuit.⁴⁰ This is also partially true for the Jews in the data set. Of those who had been born outside the colony, only one grew up in a village, whereas the others all came from urban centres throughout the Netherlands, as well as (originally) from Central Europe. Six Jews lived in The Hague before they migrated to the Dutch East Indies, which probably influenced their choice to migrate, and a majority was born in or lived in The Hague at some point during their lives. This link with The Hague is significant compared to all Jews in BioPort ($p < 0,05$).⁴¹ Yet The Hague was not the only place where the Dutch empire was over-present. Journalist Margaretha Wigerink (1920-1992) was born in Arnhem, another town, in the east of the Netherlands, with an important 'Indies affiliation'. It was also referred to as 'The Hague of the East' (*het Haagje van het Oosten*).⁴² Furthermore, the fact Abendanon grew up in Surinam, and subsequently spent most of his life in another colony, is perhaps telling.

In the Dutch East Indies itself, Jews supposedly lived primarily in the urban areas of the Indonesian archipelago, mainly on Java, and to a lesser extent on Sumatra, Celebes, and Sulawesi, while only a few per cent resided in other regions.⁴³ Although the picture for the Jews in the data set is definitely more diverse than (the suburbs of) Batavia (now Jakarta), Soerabaja, Bandoeng (Bandung), and Semarang, their places of residence were indeed largely urban areas (albeit differing in size), rather than far-away outposts. As I will demonstrate in the next section, most of their occupations did not require long-term stays in distant parts of the colony.

39 Grond, "J.K.W. Neuberger", 751.

40 Bosma, *Indiëgangsters*, 31. Bosma and Mandemakers, "Indiëgangsters", 168-171.

41 21/38 versus 138/695.

42 "Haagje van het Oosten".

43 Berg, Candotti, and Touw, "Selamat Sjabbat", 6. Kowner, "An Obscure History". Kowner, "The Japanese Internment", 349. Rosen Jacobson, "A Welcoming Refuge?", 157-158.

Educational levels

The educational levels of all Dutch migrants to the Dutch East Indies were high.⁴⁴ As can be seen in table 1, this is indeed true for the Jewish migrants in the data set. Ten people enjoyed some form of professional education and 21 went to university, of whom the majority received a doctorate (mostly awarded for a monograph). It is not surprising that Jews in the data set were well-educated, given their often affluent background. Those born in the Dutch East Indies went to the Netherlands to go to university. Nel Cohen Stuart (1881-1964), for example, was sent to Leiden to finish high school, after which she studied medicine in that same city. She married Jacques Stokvis and settled in Semarang as a general practitioner.

Table 1. Accumulative educational levels of Jewish Indies travellers in the Dutch Biography Portal (1870-1940). Data derived manually from the Dutch Biography Portal+ and processed with humanities database tool nodegoat. Important to note is that individuals could enjoy both professional and university education, or either. *1 unknown, **5 unknown, 2 none.

	Primary education	High school education	Professional education	University education	Doctorate
Jewish Indies travellers (n=38)	97.4% (n=37)*	81.6% (n=31)**	26.3% (n=10)	55.3% (n=21)	76.2% (n=16 of 21)

Those who did not receive more than high school education, apart from women from affluent families who married well, still managed to find the means to live comfortably in the colony. In addition to the army, journalism also was a stepping-stone. Karel Zaalberg (1873-1928) made a successful career as a journalist with the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, eventually becoming its decades-long editor in chief. The case of Zaalberg is even more remarkable because he was of Indo-European descent. Jo Stokvis (1875-1951), Jacques's older brother, took evening courses while working as a journalist, and, in 1910, came to the Dutch East Indies at the instigation of his sibling and sister-in-law, to become editor in chief of newspaper *De Locomotief*.⁴⁵ That trade, too, offered the possibility to make a career with a high school diploma, is

44 Bosma, *Indiëgangsters*, 32, 216, 220, 232. Bosma and Mandemakers, "Indiëgangsters", 163. Except for soldiers. Not many Jews opted for the Netherlands East Indies Army or KNIL. Blom and Cahen, "Dutch Jews", 323.

45 Stokvis, "Curriculum Vitae", 44.

demonstrated by Hartog, among others. He spent several years in the Dutch East Indies, where he quickly rose to manager and eventually director of a metal company. Thus, although well-educated people were increasingly welcomed in the East, it seems this was certainly not a prerequisite for success.

Colonial occupations

Trade, the liberal professions, and the colonial government were the general occupational sectors for all (Jewish) migrants to the Dutch East Indies.⁴⁶ Liberal professions, such as journalism and medicine, are traditionally well-represented among Jews in the entire database. However, most of the Jewish migrants to the Dutch East Indies in BioPort were colonial civil servants. Entrepreneurs are underrepresented. This is interesting, because the colonial government formed a relatively new occupational field for Jews, and, based on the literature, trade would be expected to be their main profession in the colony. It is even more striking because entrepreneurs are seen as the driving force behind Jewish community life, as they could settle in one place for a longer period of time, unlike colonial civil servants who were transferred regularly.⁴⁷

Several Jews in the data set reached quite high positions in the colonial government even before the 1920s. Abendanon, for example, became counselor for the Dutch East Indies Supreme Court in 1894, and director of the colonial department of Education, Service, and Industry in 1900. Jacob van Gelderen (1891-1940) established the Department of Statistics at the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade in 1919, subsequently becoming the first director of the Bureau of Statistics in 1925, associate professor of political economics at the Batavia Law School in 1928, and chief official of Economic Affairs for the entire colony in 1932. Two years later, Karel Enthoven (1887-1962) became director of the Department of Justice, after a long and steady colonial career, in which he had gradually climbed within the same department.

During the 1920s and early 1930s, Jo Stokvis and Zaalberg were members of the People's Council of the Dutch East Indies and its College of Delegates, semi-legislative bodies advising the Dutch government on colonial affairs. The People's Council consisted of Europeans, Indo-Europeans, Indonesians,

46 Blom and Cahen, "Dutch Jews", 322-324. Bosma, *Indiëgangsters*, 32, 37, 216, 226-227, 260. Bosma and Mandemakers, "Indiëgangsters", 163. Christiaans, "Joden". Glaser, "Joden" no. 2, 31. Hirschel, "Joden", 615.

47 Kamsma, "Echoes", 389-390.

and 'Foreign Orientals', most of whom were elected, although some were appointed by the colonial government. Abraham Cohen Stuart (1880-1955), Nel's brother, was its first secretary, a job he held for twelve years. The civil service jobs Jews in the data set held were diverse. Assuming they represented the most prominent figures in their fields, it seems reasonable to believe others with a Jewish background, presumably mainly men, worked in their respective departments as well. However, some of these Jews may well have been the exceptions to the rule.

Their stays in the colony generally did not form a *caesura* in the occupational lives of Jews in the data set. In several cases, their colonial stay was a catalyst for the rest of their careers. A period in the colonial government seems to have helped several Jews in gaining skills and contacts in politics, which they used when making political careers in the Netherlands after repatriation. Most stayed in the same social layer in which they had been born, chiefly because their parents were already social climbers (eighteen people), or they belonged to *haute bourgeoisie* families, risen to wealth and prominence before the 1870s (thirteen people). However, seven Jewish migrants were social climbers themselves, and in most cases, their colonial career contributed to their social ascent. Moreover, it was easier to pioneer in certain disciplines in the colony. Doctor Cohen Stuart, for example, established a school for midwifery and nursing (previously non-existent in the Dutch East Indies), as well as the Association for the Promotion of Native Nursing.

Religiosity and spouses

It was not easy to maintain a religious life in the colony. The religious ties of Jewish migrants to the Dutch East Indies, if they had them in the first place, probably loosened even more with the passing of the years. This presumably also applied to Christian migrants, in a colonial environment which was predominantly Islamic. A large percentage of the Jews in BioPort were already religiously unaffiliated, and some converted to Protestantism. Yet, as can be seen in table 2, Jewish migrants to the Dutch East Indies were even less often raised in the Jewish faith, a relatively high number of them were baptised as Protestants, and only a minority was still religiously affiliated with Judaism in adulthood (all $p < 0,05$).⁴⁸ Compared to the whole sample, migrants often just had one Jewish parent ($p < 0,05$).⁴⁹ This makes it more likely they were not brought up as Jews. Regrettably, the number of

48 23/38 versus 569/695; 7/38 versus 36/695; 6/38 versus 359/695.

49 9/38 versus 51/695.

unknowns among adult migrants is quite high, because their paper trace is often hard to follow.

Table 2. Religious affiliations of Jews and Jewish Indies travellers in the Dutch Biography Portal (1870-1940). Data derived manually from the Dutch Biography Portal+ and processed with humanities database tool nodegoat.

	All Jews in BioPort (n=733)	Jews Dutch East Indies (n=38)
Jewish (child)	80.8% (n=592)	60.5% (n=23)
Jewish (adult)	49.8% (n=365)	15.8% (n=6)
Protestant (child)	5.9% (n=43)	18.4% (n=7)
Protestant (adult)	7.2% (n=53)	13.2% (n=5)
Non-religious (child)	9.0% (n=66)	13.2% (n=5)
Non-religious (adult)	27.6% (n=202)	39.5% (n=15)
Catholic (child)	0.4% (n=3)	0.0% (n=0)
Catholic (adult)	1.9% (n=14)	2.6% (n=1)
Other (child)	0.1% (n=1)	0.0% (n=0)
Other (adult)	1.0% (n=7)	2.6% (n=1)
Unknown (child)	3.7% (n=27)	7.9% (n=3)
Unknown (adult)	12.6% (n=92)	26.3% (n=10)

The descent and religious affiliations of the spouses of Jews in the data set provide a very diverse picture. Almost all of them were (Indo-)Europeans, either born in Europe or in the Dutch East Indies. Most marriages were conducted in the Netherlands, before the crossing or on furlough, and primarily in The Hague. In several cases, this might have been because a marriage in the Netherlands allowed for a proper orthodox ceremony. Quite a few of the marriages, however, took place in the colony. These cases often involved spouses who had grown up in the Dutch East Indies. At least five brides had Asian foremothers: two of Edward Jacobson's (1870-1944) wives, Anna Secherling and Lucie Janet Kohn, Karel Enthoven's wife Fifine Rancuret, and Zaalberg's wife Maria Taunay, who was of Jewish-Asian descent just like him. Moreover, engineer Asser Baars (1892-1944) married the Indonesian woman Onok Sawinah when she was only sixteen years old.

A large majority of the men in the data set chose non-Jewish over Jewish brides, and although these women were often non-religious, there were also quite a few Protestants and Catholics. The women also mostly married non-Jews, and in only one case a Jewish partner who was religiously observant. It seems safe to say that for these Jews, the colony broadened their horizons

to the degree that they (or their families) would consider a match with a non-Jewish and/or non-religious partner. On the other hand, in many of the families, the outlook was already non-religious or even Christian, making it easier to adapt to life (and the marriage market) in the colony.

Associational life

Looking at Jewish community life in the Dutch East Indies, it is striking that just a few Jews in the data set were members of Jewish associations. Only two of those organisations had colonial branches: the Dutch Zionist Organisation and the transnational Zionist organisation Poale Zion.⁵⁰ It is hardly surprising these were Zionist organisations. After all, Zionists were the driving forces behind the organisation of Jewish life. However, prominent Jewish figures in the Dutch East Indies were members of colonial associations. There were traditional ones, mostly devoted to culture, as well as political associations which advocated the rights of the Indonesian people. These organisations included, for example, the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences in the Indies, the Indies Social Democratic Association (later *Partai Komunis Indonesia* or Indonesian Communist Party), and the Indo-European Alliance.

It seems a colonial affiliation played a much more important role in the associational lives of Jews in the data set than a Jewish connection. The cultivation of an imperial identity through membership in organisations like the ones described above allowed them to establish and perpetuate important positions within colonial society and within its elite. Interestingly, some of them were involved in political causes for Indonesians. This could be interpreted in different ways. First and foremost, it might be an ultimate indication of integration into the top social layer of colonial society, in which Jews may have felt at ease to such a degree they were even willing to defend unpopular political views. Additionally, it might be that the Jewish struggle for emancipation, still not completed, provided some Jews with a sense of justice which stimulated their involvement in the fight for independence of the people of Indonesia. At the beginning of his colonial career, Jo Stokvis still sympathised with the 'ethical policy' which was the Dutch version of 'the white men's burden' or '*mission civilisatrice*'. Ultimately however, he developed into an ardent supporter of self-government under Indonesian leadership with complete independence as end goal. Together with Van

⁵⁰ I might have missed associations which were not named in the biographies in BioPort, however it is safe to assume the important organisations, in which people were truly active, were mentioned.

Gelderer, he formulated the *Koloniaal Beginselfprogramma* or ‘Colonial Manifesto’ of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party, which proposed the dissolution of the Dutch East Indies as a colony, and the acknowledgement of the independence of Indonesia.

Confrontations with antisemitism

The biographies of Jewish migrants to the Dutch East Indies in BioPort make no explicit mention of antisemitism in the colony. To be able to say something about the antisemitism these Jews encountered, I chose to focus on the colonial newspaper *Nieuws van den Dag*, known for its regularly published antisemitic attacks on individuals. Because it is incorporated in newspaper database Delpher, focusing on this journal allows for a relatively straightforward search through all editions for the names of the Jews in the data set.

There were Jewish migrants who were mentioned in *Nieuws van den Dag* in a neutral or sometimes even positive fashion. Several prominent Jewish figures were not attacked, although their background must have been well-known. Nevertheless, it turns out others were targeted. Antisemitic undertones and outright attacks in *Nieuws van den Dag* conform to the racist context of Dutch East Indies colonial society and to the popularity of the local branch of the NSB. In a colonial environment where people were consigned to social positions on quite complex, sometimes minor grounds, antisemitism could always resurface. Jo Stokvis, editor in chief of *De Locomotief*, was attacked many times. He was, among other things, called ‘the kike, card-playing editor in chief’ (*de smous jassende hoofdredacteur*) and ‘this Levite in the temple of journalism’⁵¹, as well as ‘the tropical Moses’⁵². As a reaction to his open membership in the Social Democratic Workers’ Party, *Nieuws van den Dag* commented: ‘Good luck with it! It is the destiny of all political Jews. And now without being an anti-Semite, one does wonder sometimes: whether Judaism in these turbulent times does not pose a danger to the State and to Society’.⁵³ The curious yet classic defence about not being antisemitic returns in another article about Stokvis in 1921: ‘It would almost

51 “Een Held naar den geest”, *Nieuws van den Dag*, 4 May 1916 [URL <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010169115:mpeg21:a0006>].

52 “Wat Gisteren in de Krant stond!”, *Nieuws van den Dag*, 1 October 1925 [URL <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010220376:mpeg21:a0020>].

53 “Naar de Roode Haven”, *Nieuws van den Dag*, 20 August 1919 [URL <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010179968:mpeg21:a0012>].

make one antisemitic, if one was not aware of the fact that Mr Stokvis is not that well-liked by the other members of his race either'.⁵⁴

Jo's brother, Jacques Stokvis, was also singled out several times in *Nieuws van den Dag*. He was targeted for his socialism, and was described as the 'overzealous colporteur of the red scriptures of his spiritual and carnal brothers' ('*volijverig colporteur van de roode geschriftjes zijns geestelijken en vleeschelijken broeders*').⁵⁵ Van Gelderen, 'that weird man'⁵⁶, was derogatorily described as having an 'Assyrian voice'⁵⁷, and, on the whole, distrusted for his connections with Indonesians, as well as for his socialist ideals. The fact that socialist Jews were portrayed as provocateurs and Bolsheviks undermining white colonial society, is in line with the existing literature on Jews in the Dutch East Indies.⁵⁸ Additionally, in the *Nieuws van den Dag* articles, it seems that antisemitism grew strongest when Jews took up the cause of Indonesian independence. This appears, for example, from the following reference about Van Gelderen and Jo Stokvis: 'Hated in the Indies are they, who act against the Netherlands and live off the Netherlands, who reject its own nationalism to encourage that of others'.⁵⁹ By voicing these kinds of tropes, adversaries of socialism or Indonesian independence opportunistically made use of antisemitic rhetoric.

Conclusion

The dynamic and complex situation of the Dutch East Indies offers an interesting lens through which to investigate upward social mobility and integration processes. Dutch Jews pioneered in diverse lines of work, and gained expertise in politics through positions within the colonial government and organisations advocating for Indonesians' rights. This was often followed by a political career in the Netherlands. All in all, the lives of the Jews in the Dutch Biography Portal seem to match the general picture depicted by Bosma

54 "Ethische' journalistiek", *Nieuws van den Dag*, 26 January 1921 [URL <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010218906:mpeg21:a0002>].

55 "Met pensioen", *Nieuws van den Dag*, 19 February 1927 [URL <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010220813:mpeg21:a0008>].

56 "Wat Gisteren in de Krant stond!", *Nieuws van den Dag*, 15 June 1927 [URL <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010220907:mpeg21:a0018>].

57 "In vertrouwde 'sfeer'", *Nieuws van den Dag*, 24 August 1927 [URL <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010220967:mpeg21:a0007>].

58 Hadler, "Translations", 305.

59 "Aan het Zoeklicht. De Gehaten", *Nieuws van den Dag*, 18 May 1931 [URL <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010229189:mpeg21:a0081>].

of all Dutch migrants to the Dutch East Indies, living the 'interstitial' lives of migrants in an extensive colonial migration circuit, such as described by Drieënhuizen, among others. Most Jews migrated for career reasons, came from urban areas, and followed family members who had gone before them. In terms of the distribution of different sub elites these Jewish migrants to the Dutch East Indies belonged to, they seem to have been much like their non-Jewish counterparts. However, they differ from the entire sample of Jews in BioPort in some important respects. Confirming the image depicted in the historiography, Jewish migrants to the Dutch East Indies were less likely to be religious Jews. Moreover, only few of them were members of Jewish organisations during their time in the colony. They married partners from diverse backgrounds, many of whom were non-Jewish and non-religious. Although the liberal professions were traditionally well-represented, most of the Jews in the data set worked as colonial civil servants, an occupational field they had only been allowed to enter a century earlier.

The existing literature on Jews in the Dutch East Indies has posed a paradox of sorts. While there is a consensus that Jews in the East were mainly 'individuals among the masses', the emphasis in most studies lies on Jewish communities, whether it be those of 'conscious' Jews, Jewish refugees, or both. As a result, the focus on the 1920s and 1930s, as the start of a period of religious and cultural Jewish 'revival', has led to the occlusion of other chronologies and Jewish experiences. By studying the lives of 38 individual migrants with disparate attachments to their Jewish background, I have focused on a longer period, and was able to study their in-between position as both colonisers and members of a minority.

In the Netherlands, due to antisemitic prejudice, their background hindered many Jews in their upward social mobility and integration. The imperial space provided them with different opportunities. This was mainly because Jews in the Dutch East Indies were able to redefine their identity as white colonisers at the top of the colonial social hierarchy, resulting in fewer obstacles for upward social mobility as well as integration into European colonial society. Being Jewish in the colony was fundamentally different from being Jewish in the Netherlands. The imperial space not only sustained emancipatory developments, it also reinforced them. Jews cultivated an essentially colonial identity, and they accumulated the necessary social, economic, political, and cultural-linguistic capital to integrate in colonial society. Whereas Jews in the Netherlands were constantly reminded of their minority position, there were already other 'Others' in the Dutch East Indies: native people of the Indonesian archipelago, but also Chinese and so-called 'Foreign Orientals'.

Ultimately, the in-between position of Jews in the Dutch East Indies brings the dynamics of structures of in- and exclusion to light, which were very different in overseas territories than in Europe. A Jewish perspective on the history of colonialism shows that different identities could be shaped, and inflicted, in different contexts. In the essentially racist colonial hierarchy, antisemitism also persisted, and increased in the twentieth century. Many Jews seem to have moved around restrictions – which was in some ways easier in the colony than in the Netherlands. Yet as Jews became increasingly visible as a group, individual Jews encountered vicious racism, and opportunistic antisemitism, especially targeted at those who went against the common practices and attitudes of colonial society.⁶⁰

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