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Nação legal consciousness and its contribution to the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic debate on slavery and the slave trade

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2.

The Birth of the *Nação*

“Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”

(Turner 95)

The Other Within—The Four Classes of Conversos—The Jewish Expulsion From Spain—The Forced Conversion in Portugal—The Conversos in the Salamanca School—The Port Jews—The Nação in Amsterdam

2.1 Introduction¹

At the turn of the seventeenth century, a new community with a powerful global network arrives to Amsterdam from Southern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Part of their lifestyles necessitates slaves (discussed at length in Chapter 6), but the Amsterdam city authorities render the practice of slavery illegal (Chapter 5). The community develops legal innovations during a time when legal conventions of natural law and law of nations are taking form (Chapter 4). In order to understand how they accomplish this, one must explore and analyze the different elements and the use of *ius gentium et naturae*, *dominium*, *servitus*, and *libertas* in relation to or within the bodies of law or thought mentioned hereafter: Jewish law, Dutch Roman law, Catholic theological notions, and Jewish philosophy (discussed in Chapter 4, 5 & 6). The aim of this chapter is to introduce the protagonists of this research. Without this background, it is not possible to understand where their contributions stem from.

Before I delve into the legal consciousness of the *Nação*, I will discuss briefly the pre-seventeenth-century Amsterdam history of how the *Nação* came to be. I will offer a macroscopic historical account of the Sephardim in the Iberian Peninsula from the *Reconquista* to their

¹ This chapter contains some information from my article Spanish and Portuguese conversas: A model for Sephardic Jewry under the Ashkenazic hegemony. *Journal of Student Research*, 1.1 (2015): 25-35, reproduced here with permission. I gratefully acknowledge the publisher Journal of Student Research for providing me the venue to publish some of the content that appears in this project."

expulsion. This will be necessary in order to understand how they acquired so many crucial skills in commerce and forged political ties between the Old and New Worlds. I will describe how the conversion to Catholicism of some of the Sephardim afforded the *Nação* an advantage in international trade. Overall, an analysis of their trade network, their culture, and intellectual tradition will serve as the basis for understanding *Nação legal consciousness*.

2.2 The *Other Within*

As indigenous and *Other*; i.e. the native Other, the Jews' status afforded them high ranks within Christian Spain. According to Yirmiyahu Yovel, "the Jews were more dependable than their Spanish peers in doing the Crown's work because, as members of an irremediably stained group, they did not have sufficient political legitimacy to contend for real power" (Yovel 33). Essentially, their illegitimacy allowed them to attain high office and flourish in Spain. Thus, they lived inside the city, yet separated from it. The tension between alienation and acceptance played in their favor. Thus, they were resented and tolerated simultaneously.

In the fourteenth century, Spanish Jews suffered harsh decrees and forced conversions to Christianity, under the penalty of death. The clergy became jealous of the wealthy Jews' positions within the Kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, and Valencia (*ibid*). The Jews' money business gained them prestige and influence. For many generations, Jews transmitted Arab knowledge and civilization to Christian Spain, maintaining a mixed cultural identity; they preserved their Arabic names, language, and other aspects of Arab culture (Yovel 31). Also, they held vital skills to rebuild Christian Spain. Their greatest trait was their loyalty to the Crown.

With the rise of anti-Jewish sentiments, many Jews from Castile and Aragon emigrated. In 1360, Henry II of Castile executed all of the Jews of Najera. The centers of Jewish scholarship in Villadiego and Aguilar were utterly destroyed. In Valladolid, the synagogues and Jews' homes were pillaged by sympathizers of Henry II, leaving their Torah scrolls in shreds. The Jewish communities of Paredes and Palencia suffered the same doom. In Jaén, 300 Jewish families were taken captive and sold as slaves to the Moors in the Kingdom of Granada (De los Ríos cit., t. II, doc. VIII). Overall, Spanish Jewry suffered greatly throughout the various Christian kingdoms.

In 1391, the archdeacon of Ecija, Ferrand Martínez became inflamed by the conduct of the young King, Henry III. Martínez accused the Jews of injuring the state through usuries and commerce (Mocatta 17). He went out to the streets of Seville preaching hatred against the “Children of Israel.” Initially, the Christian residents paid no attention to him, but after thinking that their silence had favored the Jews, they began to harass them at their residences. Ferrand Martínez argued that it was a “Christian duty to convert all of the synagogues to churches and to settle the Jewish quarters” (Elazar-DeMota, “Spanish and Portuguese conversas” 28). His inflammatory speech resulted in riots breaking out in throughout Aragon, Castile, Catalonia, Extremadura, and Andalusia (*ibid*).

Many Jews gave up their lives as martyrs, including the rabbinic family of Asher b. Yeḥiel. In fact, “most of the Jews in Madrid were either killed or baptized” (*ibid*). Some of the Jews of Burgos were also baptized, and a whole quarter inhabited by *conversos* emerged (Baer 99). Those Jews who had not converted had to hide themselves within their homes, lest they suffer being mobbed. On the sixth of June of 1391, four thousand Jews in Seville perished by the hands of Christian mobs. Two of the synagogues in Seville became parochial churches—Santa

Cruz and Santa Maria la Blanca (Lindo 174). The Jews of Palma de Majorca met the same fate at that time. About a year later on August 5, the *juderías* [Jewish quarters] of Cordova, Toledo, Burgos, and Valencia were also plundered (Baer 99). In Valencia, eleven thousand Jews received baptism to save their lives. Over two-hundred thousand Jews were baptized in the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon (Wolff, “The 1391 Pogrom in Spain” 6). Many of the Jews that stood firm to the faith of their ancestors left for Algiers (Baer 359).

The rabbinic scholar and jurist, José Faur (1934 – 2020), noted that there were four classes of *conversos* in Spain between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: those who wanted to be Christians and to have no contacts with other Jews; those who wished to remain Jews and were willing to pay a high price to do so; those who wanted to have Jewish and Christian identities simultaneously; and those who wanted neither (Elazar-DeMota, “An Ethnography” 83; Faur 117). Those that did not want to remain in contact with other Jews felt that way because they were tired of being persecuted as Jews (*ibid*; Faur 118). Those that kept practicing the Jewish faith did so because they felt that the Jewish People were being punished due to their backsliding from the Law, and hoped for the final redemption. For them, Christianity was a means to escape violence. The third class of *Conversos* was comprised of sincere Christians that kept Jewish traits. Their education and status allowed them to contribute to the Christian society, while retaining their Jewish characteristics. Among the fourth class of *Conversos* were the skeptics—irreligious as Jews before the conversion, and unbelieving as Christians (*ibid*; Faur 122).

Those *conversos* of the second and third classes became subject to harassment from both the Old and New Christians. In *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*

(1995), Norman Roth states “The strong animosity against *conversos* erupted only in the fifteenth century, and then only in Castile, at least at first. The hostility began to emerge also in Aragón and Catalonia, but only toward the end of the century.” This hostility resulted in widespread rioting against the hated *Converso* class. The motives were chiefly, if not entirely, jealousy over the wealth and power of the *conversos* (Roth 115). This is mostly because as New Christians, the Jews had access to a new area of power, since the average pious *conversos* became monks and nuns, and the more ambitious became bishops and even archbishops (154). Moreover, the *Converso* community in Andalusia, especially in Seville, was among the largest and wealthiest in Spain. It also contained many a covert Judaizer—a fact that supplied ammunition to the *conversos*’ enemies among the clergy and the burghers (Yovel 155). Yovel asserts, “The Jewish Other, who formerly had confronted Christian society from without, had now become an inner component of that society without losing his otherness either in the eyes of the host society or, often, in his own self-perception. For several centuries, Iberian society proved unable to fully assimilate this internal Other or to evict it” (58). When the forced conversions did not work to get rid of *Jewish heresy*, the Inquisition became the political tool of the monarchy to purify Spain of its traces.

After two decades of trying to remove the *Mosaic heresy* from the *Converso* class in Catholic Spain, the Monarchy decided to expel the Jews of Granada. Andrés Bernaldez (1486), the cardinal of Seville, claimed that the Monarchs were convinced of the “perpetual blindness” of the Jews and their influence on the *conversos* (Roth, “Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain” 285). Thus, Fernando and Isabella decreed the expulsion of all Jews from their Kingdom, with the exception of those that had converted to Catholicism. The

Alhambra Decree was signed on March 31, declared publicly on May 1, and executed on July 31, 1492, ending overt Jewish life in Spain. According to Jewish and Christian sources, the majority of the exiles, numbering between one-hundred thousand and one-hundred and twenty thousand, emigrated to Portugal (Baer 433).

The Portuguese monarch, King João II permitted the exiles to enter Portugal for a period of 8 months, in exchange for a payment of 8 *cruzados* (equivalent to 3 months of work for an average salaried worker).² They could stay there with the native Portuguese Jews for a larger payment (Bodian 18). Failure to meet these conditions yielded in enslavement by the Portuguese Monarchy, i.e. they could be sold as slaves to Christian families (Russell-Wood 21). Once again, Spanish Jews are subjected to enslavement by the Crown.

Though a number of *conversos* and their descendants adhered to the tenets of Christianity, such as Dominican Bishops Francisco de Vitoria (1483 – 1546) (Maryks 70) [Through his maternal lineage he was from the Compludos—a Sephardic family of Burgos], and Bartolomé de las Casas (1484 – 1566) (Castro 190-277), and the Jesuit priest, Francisco Suárez (1548 – 1617) [Sephardic family along the maternal lineage], some of them chose to “secretly keep the flame of their ancestral tradition ablaze” (Bernardini and Flering 208). They attended mass during the day, went to confession, and had their children baptized. However, they met for Jewish rites and ceremonies on certain nights (Kritzler 4). It is these latter ones that received the derogatory label of *Marranos*, henceforth, crypto-Jews. After the Alhambra decree, while a number of the Sephardim migrated to the non-papal states of Italy, North Africa, and the

² This calculation was based on the average salary of workers at the end of the fifteenth century in Portugal. The table utilized comes from Antonio Henrique R. de Oliveira Marques. *Daily Life in Portugal in the Late Middle Ages*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1971, 205.

territories of the Ottoman Empire, a great number of crypto-Jews stayed in the Iberian Peninsula. These crypto-Jews became the “other within” the Iberian Catholic societies.

Before escaping Iberia, they had to live a double-lifestyle. Even though they were legally Christians, they were often time repudiated as *cristianos nuevos* [New Christians] because of their *ius sanguinis*, i.e. Jewish blood. Some of them were able to leave Catholic Spain by way of the Kingdom of Navarre, then on to Bayonne and Bordeaux. After Spain and Portugal consolidated their kingdoms in 1580, many Portuguese crypto-Jews resettled in the port cities of Spain. Thereafter, some of them settled in Antwerp and Hamburg. Indeed, a great number of them used aliases in order to continue to go back to the Iberian Peninsula for commercial pursuits.

The Western Sephardim [crypto-Jews and reverted Jews] created a trading network between Portugal, Brazil, and the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The commercial route between Recife and Amsterdam allowed for Portuguese *conversos* to openly practice the Jewish tradition in Brazil. Many of them reverted to the Jewish tradition therein. David Sorkin traces the *conversos* that left the Iberian Peninsula to the Mediterranean port of Livorno and Venice, the Atlantic ports of London, Bordeaux, Hamburg, and Amsterdam, and the New World ports of Suriname, Jamaica, Recife, and New Amsterdam (Sorkin 89). Indeed, many of those who remained in Spain and Portugal were active in commerce at the ports of Lisbon, Porto, Seville, and Valencia (*ibid*). In addition, the Flemish port of Antwerp functioned as an entrepôt and financial center for the port Jews. In fact, the Portuguese *conversos* in Antwerp had excellent ties to the Portuguese monarchy and had practically monopolized the spice trade in the

East Indies (Klooster 131). Ultimately, the Western Sephardim established a trade network, linking the “old Mediterranean routes with the new Atlantic economy” (Sorkin 89).

Some Iberian crypto-Jews traded between Portugal, Morocco, Senegal, and Angola. Their main commodities were gold, ivory, hides, and swords (Antunes and Ribeiro da Silva 14). According to Jonathan Schorsch and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, the crypto-Jews in Portugal, Antwerp, and Hamburg had been engaging in slave trade and taking slaves from West Africa for personal use in the sixteenth century (Schorsch 70). Wim Klooster maintains that when Spain and Portugal united, Seville was infiltrated with Portuguese *conversos*. This consolidated their strong position in the transatlantic slave trade, since the Spanish Crown held the *asientos* to supply slaves to its American provinces (“Communities of port Jews and their contacts in the Dutch Atlantic World” 131).

In 1560 some Portuguese *conversos* were publicly practicing the Jewish tradition at Rio de São Domingos [northern Guinea-Bissau] (Torrão 122-23). In the seventeenth century, the Sousa brothers—Diogo and Filipe—went from Senegal to Amsterdam to revert to the Jewish tradition (Mark and da Silva Horta 23). Many others followed suit. Upon returning to Senegambia, Diogo Vaz de Sousa established a synagogue therein. At that time, other *Nação* merchants went from Amsterdam to Senegal. Among these traders were Simon Rodrigues Pinhel and Jacob Peregrino. The former had connections to Portugal, Holland, and England, and the latter had ties to Portugal, Holland, and Milan. Cultural historian Peter Mark (2004) posits that the Dutch were motivated to maintain close ties with the *Nação* in Petite Côte because of commerce, since members of the *Nação* had established trading alliances with local rulers (Mark

and da Silva Horta 244). As a matter of fact, Dutch Sephardim utilized their contacts in West Africa to encourage commerce. The *Memoria* of 1612 contains details Sephardic contacts with West Africa. It is a manuscript which combines the eyewitness accounts which took place at the coast of Rio de *São* Domingos, of two different authors. It details the activities of fifteen Jews from Flanders who served the French and the English, trading between Rio de *São* Domingos and Cape Verde. Therein it states:

Item from the Rio de *São* Domingos which is much further down [the coast] than Joal, where there is a church called Our lady of Victory and where all the ships of the *registro* go, and in this port [Cacheu] there are a lot of white people and all “*da Nação*” who came from this city [Lisbon] to the above mentioned river [S. Domingos] in “*registro*’s” [legal trade] vessels which load there with Blacks for the *Indias* [Spanish Americas] and from there they go to where the aforementioned vessels go and they go to this Coast named Jalofo coast [the Petite Côte] and they go by way of Flanders and they return to the said coast, and from there also depart Jews who came from this city in the ships of the undermentioned people.³

The historiographer, José da Silva Horta questions the use of *whiteness* in these records “But who was European? In sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Upper Guinea, many who were considered ‘Portuguese’ or *white* and who were not subject to enslavement were in fact, dark-

³ This comes from an anonymous source. *Memoria, e relação do resgate que fazem francezes, ingrezes, e framengos na costa de Guiné a saber do rio de Snaga atee Serra Leoa*, cód. 51-VI-54, n. 38, ff. 145-46v.

skinned Eurafrians” (Mark and da Silva Horta 18). Da Silva Horta also maintains “in Senegambia the appellation *white* applied to wealthy traders regardless of their skin color” (54). Furthermore, the aforementioned registry evidences the slave trading activities and routes of the *Nação* in West Africa, before the Dutch became involved in the Atlantic slave trade.

2.3 The *Nação* in the Slave Trade

Slave trading had been going on in Africa since the Arab-Berber trade. After the Muslims sacked Constantinople, Nicholas V (1452) issued the papal bull *Dum Diversas*, allowing the king of Portugal to “subdue Saracens, pagans, and other unbelievers—even to reduce them to perpetual slavery” (Thomas 65). Facing the threat of the Islamization of Europe, pope Calixtus III (1456) vowed to recover Constantinople and reinstate Christendom in the eastern Mediterranean (66). Accordingly, with the authority of the Vatican, the idea of the Spanish and Portuguese *Reconquista* encouraged maritime expansion and “mistakenly equated non-Muslim Africans with Moors” (Orique 87-118).⁴

The Portuguese initiated the Atlantic slave trade by kidnapping and capturing Africans on the coast of Arguin. Prince Henry “the Navigator” had approved of these expeditions. He collected a fifth of the booty therein. Due to the loss of lives on these expeditions, the Portuguese began to buy slaves instead of capturing them. In 1445 under the approval of King Henry, captain João Fernandes stayed on the Bay of Arguin. In a year’s time he had acquired invaluable knowledge about markets and had won over the locals. He learned where European goods could be traded for gold and for slaves. The transactions were made through the Muslim merchant,

⁴ See also Davis, “The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture”, especially chapters 4 and 6.

Ahude Meymam. The merchants living there were called “Moors” by the Portuguese, even though many of them were sub-Saharan Africans. These Muslim merchants sold heathen slaves, being mostly war captives or confiscated through raids. Since African rulers did not have kinship to other kingdoms, they did not care to sell their captives or slaves to other Africans or Europeans. The Portuguese slave trade in Africa represented a continuity of the Arab-Berber slave trade, and not an innovation (Thomas 57-9). The Atlantic slave trade could have never happened without the collaboration of local African merchants and monarchs. The details of these matters will be discussed fully in chapter 4.

Some Portuguese *conversos* engaged in the African slave trade thereafter. They established both clandestine and openly-public communities in Senegal, Angola, Guinea, and on the Atlantic islands. During the course of the sixteenth century, the *Nação* established commercial networks between Lisbon, Seville, Antwerp, London, Brazil, and West Africa. These networks proved later to be vital to the Dutch West India Company in the seventeenth century (discussed at length in Chapter 5).

Already in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese had initiated slave trading markets between the Iberian Peninsula, West Africa, and the Atlantic islands—São Tomé, Madeira, Cape Verdes, Azores, and the Canary Islands.⁵ Many *conversos* were prominent in the slave trading markets. Historian Hugh Thomas asserts that the most important Portuguese Jewish slave-trading merchant in the mid-sixteenth century was Fernando Jiménez. Though he was based in Lisbon, he had close ties in Italy and in Antwerp (Thomas 117). The largest contractors in Africa, especially in Angola were Jiménez’s descendants.

⁵ For detailed information see Duncan, “Atlantic Islands: Madeira, the Azores and the Cape Verdes in seventeenth-century commerce and navigation.”

Following the Jiménez family in wealth was another *converso*, Emanuel Rodrigues, and his family. Essentially, the Cape Verdes' slave trade was dominated by Simón Rodrigues, a close kin of Emanuel. Another *converso*, Manuel Caldeira, reached his commercial peak through slave trading in the early 1560s, becoming the chief treasurer of financial affairs in the Cape Verdes. By the mid-century there were about sixty to seventy slave trading merchants in Lisbon, with the large-scale companies led by *conversos* Damião Fernandes, Luis Mendes, and Pallos Dias (Thomas 117). Furthermore, Fernão Noronha and his descendants became monopolists in the odious trade in its early days along the delta of Niger. Also in Seville the slave trade was dominated by *conversos*, such as Diego Caballero and the Jorge family.

The most remarkable merchants were those that held the *asientos* for sending slaves to the Spanish territories between 1580 and 1640, such as Antônio Fernandes Elvas (1614 – 1622) (Martineau 224). Elvas was connected by blood with almost all the major slave traders of the Spanish-Portuguese empire (299). It is remarkable that so many *conversos* were involved in slave trade, considering the *limpieza de sangre* [purity of blood] decree, which held that New Christians could not travel to the colonies (Martinez 270). These *converso* slave traders were in fact secret Jews (Martineau 458).

The Portuguese War of Independence dramatically impacted the long-distance trade networks. After the partial expulsion of the *conversos* from Antwerp in 1550 and the establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal in 1543, they began arriving to Rotterdam and Amsterdam (Israel, "European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism" 13). Subsequently, when the Dutch lost Brazil to Portugal in 1653, there was a mass exodus of Sephardim to the Caribbean,

Europe, North America, and other South American territories. The crash of the financial market in Madrid, together with the Inquisition, forced many Sephardim to search for a new place to reside. Thereafter, the war between Venice and Turkey also aggravated trade and threatened life for the Jews. All of these factors forced Sephardim to move from the Ottoman Empire to Amsterdam, from Venice to Amsterdam and the Caribbean, from South America to the Caribbean and back to Amsterdam.

2.4 The *Nação* in Amsterdam

The Sephardim began arriving to Amsterdam at the end of the sixteenth century, in the course of the Eighty Years' War. Sometime between 1602 and 1608, they founded *Beth Jacob*, under the leadership of a Thessaloniki rabbinic scholar David Pardo (1591 – 1657). Then *Neveh Shalom*, initially under the spiritual leadership of Judá Vega (b.1550) from Constantinople, then Isaac Uziel of Fez, was established between 1608 and 1612. A third community called *Beth Israel* was founded in 1618. Approximately two-hundred Portuguese Jewish families lived in Amsterdam by 1619 (Roth, “A History of the Marranos” 244). By 1621, the community had reached circa twenty-three hundred people (Mansfeld-Fuks 67).

The first two congregations followed the communal structure of the Sephardic community from Venice. This meant that the community board of seven members [*Mahamad*] stood above the rabbis (59). In fact, when there was a discrepancy between the rabbis and the board members, the latter took precedence (60). The board members were an elite class of merchants who made negotiations with the Amsterdam city authorities on the rights and

privileges of the *Nação* community⁶. The community enjoyed a degree of autonomy to establish ordinances and regulations for itself, as long as it did not conflict with the law of the land. With such influence, they were able to steer the community. After much debate and internal conflicts, the communal leaders of the three congregations united under one roof to form *Kahal Kadosh Talmud Torah Ez Haim* in 1639 (Liemburg 70).

David Franco Mendes details the history and organization of Jewish learning at *Talmud Torah Ez Haim* in his *Memoria do Establecimento e Progresso dos Judeus Portugueses e Espanhois* (1769) (Fuks-Mansfeld and Teesma 1-171). Saul Levi Mortera, David Pardo, Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, and Menasseh b. Israel were the main rabbinic teachers [*Hakhamim*] at the Seminary. Mortera was appointed to teach advanced Talmud and commentaries. Pardo was in charge of the cemetery and the ritual functions of the community. Menasseh was responsible for delivering a monthly sermon. Aboab da Fonseca instructed the students in Hebrew grammar and Talmud and exegesis for beginners.

In addition, there were other teachers [*Rabbanim*] who imparted several other courses. Shelomoh b. Joseph taught a course on the Prophets with commentaries. Abraham Barukh taught the weekly Torah portion in Spanish. Jacob Gomez taught the same, but in Hebrew with the cantillation notes. Joseph Faro taught beginner's level on reading the weekly Torah portion in Hebrew. Mordekhay de Crasto taught the children the Hebrew alphabet and how to join the letters to form words (Fuks-Mansfeld and Teesma 47-8). The Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam inherited this educational structure from the Sephardic community of Venice

⁶ For more information on negotiations see Julia van der Krieke's doctoral dissertation on the evolution of the concept of citizenship arising out of the negotiations for legal recognition and rights of the Sephardic Community in seventeenth-century Amsterdam and other Dutch cities.

(Hyamson Chap. X)⁷. Within one generation, this community became one of the most important in the world; it exported rabbis throughout the Sephardic diaspora (Arbell 15).

Portuguese Jews in the Dutch Republic practically had a monopoly on trade with Portugal, the Portuguese colonies, and a soon major role in the Dutch colonies (Rooden, “Theology, Biblical Scholarship and Rabbinical Studies” 161). Jonathan Israel (1997) argues that Jews handled a large part of the Dutch trade between Holland and the WIC in northeastern Brazil between 1630 and 1654, because of Jews’ “indispensable skills and resources” (Israel, “European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism” 87). Peter van Rooden asserts, “Brazilian sugar trade in the thirties and forties [of the seventeenth century] for example was mainly in the hands of the Jews...which led...to one of the few outbursts of an economically motivated anti-semitism in the Republic” (161).

After the Treaty of The Hague [1641], between the Dutch and the Portuguese, many opportunities were bestowed to the *Nação*. Ribeiro DaSilva notes that after the 1640s, due to the high risks involved with slave trading, the constant altercations between European States for the power of the imperial spaces, and the persistent privateering, several members of the *Nação* in Amsterdam decided to purchase shares of the WIC in the Amsterdam stock exchange, and credit offers to other Jewish merchants based in the Antilles and the Dutch Guianas (Ribeiro da Silva, “Portuguese Sephardi of Amsterdam and the Trade with Western Africa” 12). By that time, the *Nação* had “demographic strength, wealth, and rabbinic stature” to have a political impact (Bodian 51).

⁷ For more detailed information on the similarity between the Amsterdam and Venice Sephardic communities, see Stiefel, “Jewish Sanctuary in the Atlantic World: A Social and Architectural History.”

Once established as a merchant community in the Netherlands, the *Nação* challenges public policy in Amsterdam by bringing enslaved Africans there (to be discussed at length in Chapters 6 and 7). Furthermore, Dutch theologians from the Leiden Circle and the Hartlib Circle are influenced by *Nação* rabbis and Sephardic thought, such that they begin to introduce the so-called “Curse of *Ham*” myth into their theology. This idea then contributes to the construction of racial difference, which then influences the conception of the law of nations and nature.