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### Defying mercantilism

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DEFYING MERCANTILISM. ILLICIT TRADE, TRUST, AND THE JAMAICAN  
SEPHARDIM, 1660-1730

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The rise of Atlantic history since the 1980s, and the more recent global turn, have encouraged a reconfiguration of the borders within early modern historiography. The mercantilist framework inherited from the nineteenth century with its focus on individual nation states, and self-contained imperial systems, has given way to a new emphasis on cooperation and complementarity across dividing lines.<sup>1</sup> A high proportion of this activity was illegal, and cannot be measured in any systematic way but, nonetheless, it is clear that large volumes of people and goods moved between empires. In the case of Jamaica, a smugglers' emporium, estimates suggest that, in the late seventeenth century, the island's contraband commerce out-valued trade in its own commodities.<sup>2</sup> Smuggling was more than a marginal activity, and

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<sup>1</sup> Jack P. Greene and Philip Morgan, eds., *Atlantic history: A critical appraisal* (New York, 2009); Thomas Bender, 'Foreword' in Jorge Canizam-Esquerria and Erik R. Seeman, eds., *The Atlantic in global history: 1500-2000* (Upper Saddle River, N.Y., 2007), p. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> 'An estimate of what value is shipt every year from Jamaica to England' 24 July, 1700, TNA CO 138/10, fo. 76; The National Archives (TNA) Cust 3/3-5; Nuala Zahedieh, 'The merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish contraband trade, 1655-1692', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 63 (1986), pp. 570-93.

according to Bernard Bailyn, illegal flows were integral to the working of the intensely competitive Atlantic system.<sup>3</sup>

Despite heightened awareness of the porousness of national boundaries there has been relatively little analysis of how economic cooperation functioned in illicit trade but it is clear that its importance complicates narratives of ‘modernization’ which find favour with many economists. According to Douglas North and his followers, the development of long-distance trade required an institutional evolution in which traditional, communitarian, and supposedly inefficient, private-order institutions, gave way to modern, individualistic, and efficient markets characterized by impersonal corporations and state-backed contracts.<sup>4</sup> Illicit trade does not fit the story. Of necessity, smugglers eschewed formal contracts and were reliant on private order institutions for enforcement which created new opportunities for traditional forms of business organization, such as the merchant diaspora, to adapt, survive, and flourish.

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic history. Concepts and contours* (Cambridge, Ma., 2005), p. 88; P. Andreas, *Smuggler nation: How illicit trade made America* (New York, 2011); Wim Klooster, ‘Inter-imperial smuggling in the Americas, 1600-1800’ in Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault, eds., *Soundings in Atlantic history. Latent structures and intellectual currents, 1500-1830* (Camb. Mass., 2009), pp. 141-80; Christian J. Koot, *Empire at the periphery. British colonists, Anglo-Dutch trade and the development of the British Atlantic* (New York, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Douglass C. North and Robert P. Thomas, *The rise of the western world: A new economic history* (Cambridge, 1973); Douglass C. North, ‘Institutions’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 5 (1991), pp. 97-112. Although the work of Avner Greif, and others, has stimulated debates about the role of rules, beliefs, and norms in long-distance trade most economists consider that they were outperformed by impersonal, individualistic institutions in a process of ‘modernization’. For example, in Greif’s work, the modern Genoese institutions outperformed the Maghribis. For a summary of his arguments developed over two decades see Avner Greif, *Institutions and the path to the modern economy: lessons from medieval trade* (Cambridge, 2006).

An examination of Jamaica's contraband commerce highlights the costs and risks attached to the defiance of mercantilism and the difficulty of securing trust across imperial boundaries. As English merchants struggled to make a profit, the economic arguments for opening island doors to members of the strategically networked Jewish diaspora proved persuasive and a small group of Sephardic merchants played a prominent role in establishing Jamaica's illicit trade.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as Francesca Trivellato has forcefully demonstrated, the diaspora did not conform to common stereo-types and was not an 'idyllic consortia of cooperative kith and kin' any more than it was an 'inefficient relic of a pre-modern world'. Any assessment of the reasons for the Sephardim's success should avoid totalizing explanations which conceive of trustworthiness as an innate attribute of kinship, ethnicity, or religion.<sup>6</sup> Family, countrymen, and co-religionists can often disappoint each other and any 'ethnically homogeneous middleman group' needs to develop a strategy which is appropriate to its context.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the Jamaican Sephardim, they built on a favourable geographical and historical legacy and used restrictions on entry, high mobility, good information and credible punishment power to develop an intense

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<sup>5</sup> Josiah Child expressed the common view that religious toleration and an open policy towards aliens and 'even Jews' had contributed to Dutch commercial success. Josiah Child, *A new discourse of trade* (London, 1698), p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> Francesca Trivellato, 'Sephardic merchants in the early modern Atlantic and beyond: toward a comparative historical approach to business', Richard Kagan and Philip Morgan, eds., *Atlantic diaporas. Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the age of mercantilism, 1550-1800* (Baltimore, 2009) pp. 99-122.

<sup>7</sup> Janet Landa drew on field work in south east Asia to argue that in an environment with a weak legal infrastructure and positive transaction costs, a 'rational' trader, will choose trading partners with shared and easily identifiable kinship and ethnic characteristics. Janet Landa, 'A theory of the ethnically homogeneous middleman group: An institutional alternative to contract law', *Journal of Legal Studies*, 10 (1981), pp. 349-362.

'diasporic sociability' which gave them important competitive advantages in a high-risk business environment.<sup>8</sup>

## I

Cromwell launched an ambitious attack on Spanish America in 1655. After a humiliating defeat at Hispaniola, the English forces seized the smaller and much poorer island of Jamaica by way of a consolation prize. Initial disappointment soon gave way to high hopes that the island would prove a valuable asset as it was situated 'within [the Spaniards] bowels', straddling the richest trade routes, and within easy sailing distance of their major ports.<sup>9</sup> Jamaica would provide an ideal base for a trade which would allow the English to profit from Spanish America's wealth without the labour and expense of working the mines.<sup>10</sup>

From the first Discoveries, the Spanish empire was seen as a source of almost limitless riches. The fabled wealth of the Peruvian and Mexican silver mines was seen to falter in the early seventeenth century, but it recovered and, between 1660 and 1700, annual average output of Spanish American silver has been valued at £2.5 million and far exceeded that of any other New World commodity including sugar.<sup>11</sup> A population of six to eight million (compared with around 400,000 in British

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<sup>8</sup> Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, 'La Nacion among the nations. Portuguese and other trading diasporas in the Atlantic, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries', Kagan and Morgan, eds, *Atlantic diasporas*, pp. 75-98.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Hickerlingill, *Jamaica view'd* (London, 1661), p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Barrington to Sir John Barrington, July 14<sup>th</sup> 1655, Barrington Papers, vol. V, BL Egerton MS 2648, fo. 249. Nuala Zahedieh, 'Trade, plunder and economic development in early English Jamaica, 1655-89', *Economic History Review*, 39 (1986), pp. 205-22.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, trade and war. Spain and America in the making of early modern Europe* (Baltimore, 2000), p. 24. Noel Deerr, *History of sugar*, 2 vols. (1949-50), I, p. 24.

America), strong regional economies, and large towns created a buoyant market for enslaved labour, provisions, and manufactured goods which were exchanged for bullion, cochineal, cocoa, dyewoods, indigo, precious stones, and other valuable commodities.<sup>12</sup>

The Spanish crown took measures to limit access to its American markets and maximize rents. Colonial commerce was strictly regulated by the *Casa de Contratacion* in Seville and most commodity trade was confined to two supposedly annual fleets from Cadiz: the *galeones* serving Peru via Cartagena and Portobello and the *flota* serving New Mexico via Vera Cruz.<sup>13</sup> Although the law excluded foreigners they had little difficulty in penetrating the system and, by 1600, they dominated the trade. However, in the seventeenth century, profits were squeezed as competition intensified; taxes, fees, bribes, and other rents rose; and the fleets became increasingly irregular so that capital invested in Cadiz was tied up for years and Spanish America was starved of supplies.<sup>14</sup>

Mounting difficulties in trading with the monopoly fleets encouraged foreigners to attempt to place what had been a rather irregular and opportunistic direct smuggling trade on a more solid footing with permanent bases which could maintain regular commerce with the Spanish colonies. The Dutch provided a model

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<sup>12</sup> John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985), p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Clarence H. Haring, *Trade and navigation between Spain and the Indies in the time of the Habsburgs* (Cambridge, Mass., 1918), pp. 201-230. John Stevens, *The Spanish rule of trade in the West Indies* (London, 1702).

<sup>14</sup> Jean O. McLachlan, *Trade and peace with Old Spain, 1667-1750: A study of the influence of commerce on Anglo-Spanish diplomacy in the first half of the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 1-30. Geoffrey J. Walker, *Spanish politics and imperial trade, 1700-1789* (London, 1979), p. 227.

at Curacao, a small island off the coast of Venezuela, where they settled in 1634 and the West India Company used the slave trade to open Spanish ports.<sup>15</sup> The human traffic was the one commerce which was not controlled by the *Casa* and was in the hands of independent crown licensees. <sup>16</sup> Not only did Spanish colonists pay high prices for enslaved workers but the trade provided cover for contraband commerce and the perceived value of this chink in the Spanish imperial wall does much to explain the very high esteem in which the slave *asiento* was held. Until mid-century, the English were ill-placed to compete with the Dutch as their early settlements were on the eastern periphery of the Caribbean and, given the wind system, they had poor access to Spanish markets. However, Jamaica was admirably well suited to serve as an emporium for Spanish American trade.

The English did not expect the Spaniards to open their doors to free trade without pressure. After all, the English built their own mercantilist walls around their much smaller empire with the Navigation Acts introduced in 1651 and refined after the Restoration: all trade with the colonies was to be carried in English or colonial ships and valuable (enumerated) commodities were to be exported only to

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<sup>15</sup> C. H. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast, 1580-1680* (Assen, 1971); P. C. Emmer, "'Jesus Christ was good, but trade was better'. An overview of the transit trade of the Dutch Antilles, 1634-1795', in Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Lesser Antilles in the age of European expansion* (Gainesville, Fla, 1996), pp. 206-222; Wim Klooster, 'Networks of colonial entrepreneurs. The founders of Jewish settlements in Dutch America, 1650s and 1660s', in Kagan and Morgan, eds, *Atlantic diasporas*, pp. 33-49.

<sup>16</sup> The Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494 divided the globe between Spain and Portugal with Africa in Portugal's sphere and so Spain held back from the Atlantic slave trade. Foreign merchants obtained crown licenses, or *asientos*, to fill the gap and supply African labour to the Spanish colonies. For a detailed account of the slave *asiento* George Scelle, *La Traite Negriere aux Indes de Castille*, 2 vols (Paris, 1906).

English or colonial ports.<sup>17</sup> Even after 1670, when the Treaty of Madrid proclaimed peace between Spain and England in the Indies, and implicitly accepted English ownership of Jamaica, Spain maintained strict prohibitions on commercial exchange or English settlement within its imperial territories.<sup>18</sup> However, the treaty did permit ships of either nation to enter the other's harbours with messages from the governors, or to 'wood and water' when in distress, which were long established vehicles for covert trade. Furthermore, in 1662, the English formed a royal chartered African Company which immediately obtained a contract to supply the holders of the slave *asiento* with 2,400 enslaved Africans a year from bases in the Caribbean and opened Spanish ports to English ships involved in this business.<sup>19</sup> The first contract came to little as English slaving was disrupted by the Second Dutch War, but the business gained strength after the Treaty of Madrid and, in 1677, the *asientistas* settled an agent in Jamaica.<sup>20</sup> The island maintained a strong role in the Spanish slave trade, with its attached smuggling possibilities, down to abolition in 1807 although there were repeated changes in organization most noticeably after

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<sup>17</sup> L. A. Harper, *The English Navigation Laws: a seventeenth century experiment in social engineering* (New York, 1939).

<sup>18</sup> F. G. Davenport, *European treaties bearing on the history of the United States and its dependencies* (Washington, D.C., 1929), II, pp. 187-96.

<sup>19</sup> K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London, 1957); Approval of contract made with Sir Domingo Grillo and Ambrosio Lomelin, Minutes of General Court of African Company, 20 June 1664, TNA T 70/75, fos. 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> Sir Joseph Williamson to Lord Vaughan, 12 May 1677, TNA CO 1/138/2, fo. 150; J. F. Osborne, 'James Castillo – asiento agent', *Jamaican Historical Review*, 8 (1971), pp. 9-18; Zahedieh, 'Merchants of Port Royal', p. 390; Nuala Zahedieh, 'Regulation, rent-seeking and the Glorious Revolution in the British Atlantic economy', *Economic History Review*, 63 (2010), pp. 865-90.



the British crown took the *asiento* into its own hands in 1713.<sup>21</sup> The monopoly contract was bestowed on the South Sea Company which used Jamaica as its main base and, with the advantage of factories in Spanish America, expanded access to imperial ports.<sup>22</sup>

Smugglers who could not colour contraband with some sort of legal business which gave access to Spanish American ports resorted to the many bays, creeks, and islands lying outside the official gaze. This 'coast trade', as it was known, became concentrated at fixed points including Monkey Key in the Sambaloes, a few miles outside Portobello, the Brew which served Cartagena, and the South Keys of Cuba.<sup>23</sup> With a variety of illicit routes into Spanish markets, the English maintained high expectations that, although Spain was unlikely to give them formal access, Jamaica would be able to develop a mutually profitable collusive trade for, as Carlisle argued, 'a little connivance in this matter to ingratiate the people one to another cannot I think amount to any hurt or damage to either crown'.<sup>24</sup>

## II

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<sup>21</sup> Nuala Zahedieh, 'Monopoly and free trade. Changes in the organization of the British slave trade, 1660-1720', in *Proceedings of the Instituto di Storia Economica*, 44 (2014), pp. 651-62.

<sup>22</sup> In 1715, the SSC was allowed six staff at each of its factories in Panama, Portobello, Cartagena, Vera Cruz, and Buenos Aires. Memorandum to Committee of Correspondence, 1715, BL Add MS 25,562, fo. 56.

<sup>23</sup> 'Notes on illicit trade carried on by sloops from Jamaica with the Spanish', undated, National Library of Jamaica (NLJ), MS 1049. Nathaniel Uring, *A history of the voyages and travels of Capt. Nathaniel Uring*, (1726), pp. 164-166. For a detailed description of Monkey Island see Thomas Ekines to Hans Sloane, n.d., British Library (BL), Sloane MS 4047, fo. 170.

<sup>24</sup> Carlisle to Governor of Santiago in Cuba, 21 Sept. 1680, TNA CO 138/3, fo. 432. The English authorities did not disapprove of trade in manufactured goods but refrained from official sanction which would have caused offence to the Spanish crown. Report about Jamaica, 28 May 1679, TNA CO 138/3, fo. 310.

Despite the high hopes of easy profits, the direct contraband trade proved tricky: transactions costs were high and profit margins slim.<sup>25</sup> Smugglers were, of course, subject to all the perils of legal commerce. It was difficult to match supply and demand, as fashion was fickle, and consumer tastes changed. The small, competitive markets in which the Dutch, French and other nations vied with the English for a share, were often over-stocked and goods had to be unloaded at a loss or returned unsold.<sup>26</sup> In addition, smugglers had to risk making bargains without assistance from resident agents or the written documentation expected in legal exchange. Care was taken to avoid incriminating paper trails at every stage of the trade. Supercargoes might carry letters for Spanish merchants but they did not carry invoices or bills of exchange in either direction and little was copied into the letter-books which were usually produced as evidence in court cases. Transactions on the coast rested on verbal agreements and, on return home, the supercargoes did not provide written accounts.<sup>27</sup> Smugglers had limited recourse to formal contract enforcement if they were cheated by traders on either side of the border.

Furthermore, if they were betrayed and information was passed to an official, goods

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<sup>25</sup> Jamaican advocates of clandestine trade provided optimistic estimates that costs would be half those in the Cadiz trade, Peter Beckford to Williamson, 6 Dec. 1675, *CSP Col., 1675-1676*, No. 735.

<sup>26</sup> On competitive conditions see James Houston, *Dr Houston's memoirs of his own life time* (London, 1747), pp. 222-4. Abraham and Diego Gonzalez to Nathan Simson, 9 March 1724, Isaac v. Defriez (hereafter Simson Papers), TNA C 104/13. Tho. Erkinnes to Sir Hans Sloane, n.d., BL Sloane MS 4047, fo. 170. Sardi's memorandum to the South Sea Company (SSC), 10 Sept. 1714, BL Add MS 25,562, fo. 28; Halls to Brailsford, 10 Sept 1688; 11 March 1688/9, Peers and Tooke v. Brailsford (hereafter Brailsford papers), TNA C 110/152; Naval Officer's Shipping Returns, TNA CO 142/14.

<sup>27</sup> A report of 1725 claimed that 'on their return [supercargoes] ordered the persons concerned their proportions without giving them any account of sales'. *Journal of the Assembly of Jamaica, (JA)*, II, p. 483.

were liable to confiscation, and although the trader might obtain restitution, they would be made to 'to pay through the nose for it'.<sup>28</sup> It was important to have access to inside influence and information.

Risks were especially high at sea. As foreign interlopers expanded trade in the late seventeenth century, the Spanish colonial authorities were authorized to take retaliatory action against 'the pirates' and commission coast guards who seized any vessel carrying so-called 'Spanish' commodities.<sup>29</sup> Smugglers not only lost their ship and goods but also their liberty and, in 1681, the Jamaican governor reported that twelve island vessels had been taken in the previous nine months and that between 300 and 400 Englishmen were being held 'as slaves' in the Spanish Indies.<sup>30</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that the mutual hostilities increased in the eighteenth century and, in 1718, Governor Lawes complained that 'pyrates have lately taken up of thirty sail of ships and vessels trading to and from this island'.<sup>31</sup>

Smugglers attempted to improve risk management and reduce transactions costs at every stage of the trade. They sought current information about consumer preferences and market conditions.<sup>32</sup> They employed reputable and experienced captains and super-cargoes to accompany the goods and devised profit-sharing arrangements to reduce opportunism and encourage good performance: the price of

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<sup>28</sup> Houston, *Memoirs*, p. 224.

<sup>29</sup> Harold Bensusan, 'The Spanish struggle against foreign encroachment in the Caribbean', (PhD thesis, University of California, 1974), pp. 96-100, 153, 155. On informers, Lawes to Lords of Trade, 1 Sept. 1718, TNA CO 137/13, Pt 1, No. 16. Copy of the Spaniards commission translated, TNA CO 1/54, No. 101.

<sup>30</sup> Draft of a Memorial to be delivered to Don Pedro Ronquillo touching injuries done to the English in America, Nov. 1681, TNA CO 1/47, No. 97.

<sup>31</sup> Sir Nicholas Lawes to Lords of Trade, 3 May 1718, TNA CO 137/13, Pt 1, No. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Abraham and Diego Gonzalez to Nathan Simson, 1 December 1722, 17 July 1723, Simson Papers, TNA C 104/14, Box 1.

goods was fixed in advance and, if goods were sold, the sloop and supercargo retained half the profit but, if the goods were unsold, the owner paid no freight or charges.<sup>33</sup> Vessels were well-armed and heavily manned (at double wages).<sup>34</sup> Many sailed in fleets of four or five and some secured naval convoy although they paid a hefty fee for protection (in 1718, naval captains charged 12.5 per cent for protection and 5 per cent on sales as commission).<sup>35</sup>

On the coast, everything was done to promote 'uneasy trust'.<sup>36</sup> Although English merchants could not settle permanent agents, they made efforts to establish regular trading partnerships, monitor reputations, and, above all, to forge reliable links with office-holders in the colonial administration.<sup>37</sup> Nathaniel Uring, a merchant who traded on the coast at the end of the War of Succession, described how all negotiations were conducted in Spanish, performed face-to-face, and followed well-established routines and rituals: commodities were subjected to full and open inspection before witnesses, payment was taken on delivery, and credit

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<sup>33</sup> Halls to Aylward, 21 Nov. 1688, Brailsford Papers, TNA C 110/152; Mr Kent and Mr Thornton to SSC, 5 June 1714, Committee of Correspondence, BL Add MS 25,550, fo. 9.

<sup>34</sup> 'The Present State of the Government of Jamaica', 20 Aug. 1671, TNA CO 138/2, fo. 96; 'Memorandum given in by the Naval Officer', 25 March 1679, TNA CO 1/43, fo.59; Lynch to Jenkins, 6 Nov. 1682, National Maritime Museum (NMM); 'An account of the ships and vessels that were lost or received damage in the late hurricane', 1726', TNA CO 137/16, fo. 172b. Zahedieh, 'Merchants of Port Royal', p. 581.

<sup>35</sup> Lawes to Lords of Trade, 21 June 1718, TNA CO 137/13, Pt 1, No. 13; *JAJ*, II, pp. 338, 482-3.

<sup>36</sup> The term is used by Lauren Benton, *Law and colonial cultures: legal regimes in world history, 1400-1900* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 26.

<sup>37</sup> El Gov. de Yucatan contra Alonso Matheos sobre et tratos comercios con el enemigo Ingles, AGI Mexico, 48, R. 1, No. 42; Virrey de Nova Espana a V Magd, 22 Feb 1678, AGI Mexico, 50, No. 27.

was not given.<sup>38</sup> However, all these measures raised expenses and could not fully compensate for the difficulties of establishing trust across a linguistic, religious, and cultural divide. There was huge temptation to betray so-called friends at every link in the long chain of transactions especially in conditions of long-standing mutual suspicion and hostility.

Disappointment and failure were commonplace. In 1672, Thomas Lynch, who, as governor of the island, did all he could to promote a little 'underhand' trade with the Spaniards complained that they were the 'most ungrateful, senseless people in the world' after the seizure and destruction of his own cargo in Cartagena.<sup>39</sup> The Hall brothers who moved to Jamaica in the 1680s, with high hopes of undercutting the Cadiz trade, reported a series of disappointing ventures with low prices, unsold goods, and losses to *guarda-costas*.<sup>40</sup> They largely withdrew from trade 'on the coast' and instead sold their linens to Jewish merchants who remained willing to take the risk of the re-export trade.<sup>41</sup> In 1700, Governor Beeston complained that 'our trade with the Spaniard is much abated by their dishonest and unjust dealing' and, in the 1720s, James Houston, a Scottish merchant who spent

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<sup>38</sup> Uring, *History*, pp. 164-6.

<sup>39</sup> Lynch to Arlington, 2 March 1672, TNA CO 1/28, fos 46-46b; Molesworth to Williamson, 28 Sept. 1672, TNA CO 1/29, fo. 7b.

<sup>40</sup> Halls to Brailsford, 11 Mar. 1688/9, 14 Mar. 1688/9, Brailsford Papers, TNA C 110/152.

<sup>41</sup> By his death in 1696, William Hall had refocused his business away from contraband commerce with only £243 tied up in two small ventures on the coast and £2,763 in island trade, Inventory of William Hall, Oct. 1699, National Archives of Jamaica, Spanish Town (NAJ), Inv. 1B/II/3, Vol. 5, fos. 35-38.

many years in the Indies, complained loudly about the costs and uncertainties of 'private trade'.<sup>42</sup>

It is surprising that, despite the difficulties of trading across linguistic and cultural borders without any formal mechanisms for contract enforcement, Jamaica's collusive commerce did reach sizeable proportions. Although he did not record trade with Spanish America, the Naval Officer reported that, in 1679, 40 of the 89 ships entering Port Royal from North America or England went on to trade with the Spaniards. The continued disparity between entries and clearances in the 1680s suggests that this ratio was maintained and the largest ships from Europe, such as the *Blue Dove*, carried cargoes valued at above £6,000. In addition, the island's own sloops had 'little designs with the Spaniards' which, in 1679, were valued at around £20,000 a year.<sup>43</sup> Evidence from the Royal African Company's records shows that over a third of the Africans delivered to the island in the 1680s were resold to Spanish buyers and this trade provided cover for a comparable trade in dry goods and provisions.<sup>44</sup> A government report claimed that, in 1706, Jamaica exported English goods and slaves to the value of £275,000 to Spanish America.<sup>45</sup> In 1690, Jamaica's bullion exports to England, earned largely in illicit trade, were reputed to be worth above £100,000 and rose to £150,000 a year in 1700 and £250,000 in 1706-7, alongside large quantities of Spanish cocoa, indigo, hides, and

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<sup>42</sup> Beeston to Lords of Trade, 1700, TNA CO 138/10; Houston, *Memoirs*, pp. 222-28.

<sup>43</sup> Zahedieh, 'Merchants of Port Royal', pp. 578-80; 'Memorandum given in by the Naval Officer', 25 March 1679, TNA CO 1/43, fo. 59.

<sup>44</sup> Zahedieh, 'Merchants of Port Royal', pp. 590-1.

<sup>45</sup> According to a report of 1709, in 1706/7, Jamaica re-exported slaves to the value of £56,000; woolens at £149,000, hats, linens at £66,500, and sundries at £3,500, Cambridge University Library (CUL), C(h) H Pa. 122/162

cochineal.<sup>46</sup> Although contemporaries claimed that the island's trade suffered from the South Sea Company's monopoly, it is clear that contraband commerce continued at high levels although much went through different channels. It was with some justice that Jamaica was commonly portrayed as England's 'silver mine'.<sup>47</sup>

### III

According to contemporary commentators such as Governor Lynch much of the island's hard-earned success in the difficult contraband trades could be attributed to the activities of a small group of Jewish settlers who began to move to the island almost immediately after first settlement.<sup>48</sup> These migrants were drawn from a highly mobile Sephardic population descended from Iberian Jews who had been forcibly converted in the late fifteenth century, and had sustained further outflows from the peninsula either to escape religious persecution, or in search of economic betterment, or a combination of both.<sup>49</sup> They developed a compact, decentralized, but well-connected commercial network with populations concentrated at points of strategic significance in Iberian American trade and a 'mother community' in Amsterdam where Jews were made relatively welcome and

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<sup>46</sup> Inchiquin to Lords of Trade, 12 Aug. 1691, TNA CO 138/7, fo. 19; An estimate of what value is shipt every year from Jamaica to England', 24 July, 1700, TNA CO 138/10, fo. 76; Handasyd to Lords of Trade, 19 Nov. 1706, TNA CO 137/7, No. 35.

<sup>47</sup> Introduction, Francis Hanson, ed., *The Laws of Jamaica* (London, 1683).

<sup>48</sup> 'His Majesty cannot have more profitable subjects than they .for they have good stocks and correspondents....Cannot find any but the Jews that will adventure their goods or persons to get a trade'. Lynch to Arlington, 17 Dec. 1671, TNA CO 1/27, fo. 167.

<sup>49</sup> New Christianization meant profoundly different things in different families. Some maintained their Jewish culture in the secrecy of their homes. Others embraced Catholicism. The divide between Old and New Christians was porous with much inter-marriage. Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A nation upon the ocean sea: Portugal's Atlantic diaspora and the crisis of the Spanish empire, 1492-1640* (Oxford, 2007).

where, from the early seventeenth century, they were allowed to practice their religion in the open.<sup>50</sup> After more than a century of making their faith invisible in the peninsula many chose to recover ancient practices and rebuild a public Judaism with customs and rituals which promoted community cohesion but set them firmly apart from the majority population. As Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert has skillfully shown, this self-styled 'nation' combined commercial dynamism and a composite religious culture born of 'conversion, exile, survival, and recovery' which, in many cases, supported fluid identities across territorial boundaries.<sup>51</sup>

The Sephardim played a major role in developing contraband trade in Dutch Brazil and Curacao and, after their eviction from Recife, and their readmission to England in 1656, the Jews were quick to take advantage of parallel opportunities in the English Atlantic world.<sup>52</sup> The Navigation Acts aimed to exclude foreigners from England's plantation commerce but, as seen in Menasseh Ben Israel's petition to Cromwell in 1655, the Jews and their supporters could argue that they possessed valuable financial and social capital which had contributed to Dutch commercial prosperity and would have equal benefits for the English.<sup>53</sup> Like Cromwell, the

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<sup>50</sup> On the importance of decentralized, self-organized networks in Atlantic commerce, David Hancock, *Oceans of wine. Madeira and the emergence of American trade and taste* (New Haven, Conn., 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Studnicki-Gizbert, 'La Nacion among the nations', pp. 75-76. Discussion of Antonio Rodrigues Robles, a resident of mid-seventeenth century London, highlights fluid identities. Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and difference in early modern London* (Farnham, Surrey, 2010), 141-148.

<sup>52</sup> Cecil Roth, *A history of the Jews in England*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (London, 1964) pp. 154-172; Stephen A. Fortune, *Merchants and Jews. The struggle for British West India commerce, 1650-1750* (Gainesville, Fla., 1984); Jonathan Israel, *European Jewry in the age of mercantilism, 1550-1750* (Oxford, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> 'Now in this dispersion....[the Jews] credit one another; and by that means they draw the Navigation where-ever they are, where with all of them merchandizing



Restoration government was persuaded, and with an urgent need to attract people and capital to the infant colonies, Jews who could secure patronage at court and pay a fee of £60 or so, were able to obtain patents of endenization which gave them rights to trade on the same terms as Englishmen.<sup>54</sup> By 1700, there were probably between 2,000 and 3,000 Jews scattered around the empire including about 900 in London.<sup>55</sup>

In 1661, a 'French' Jew, Jacob Joshua Bueno Henriques, who had spent two years in Jamaica after its capture by the English, promoted his case for endenization

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and having perfect knowledge of all the kinds of Moneys, Diamants, Cochinil, Indigo, Wines, Oyle, and other Commodities, that serve from place to place; especially holding correspondence with their friends and kinds-folk, whose language they understand; they do abundantly enrich the Lands and Country's of Strangers, where they live', quoted in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the modern world: a documentary history*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (New York, 1995), p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> Calvin's case, 1608, laid down the English law of nationality. Those born in England, or in countries under the king's dominion, were subjects. All others were aliens and lay under disabilities: they could not own, lease, or inherit real property in England or bring legal action that related to real property; they had no political rights and could not hold office; they were subject to customs duties imposed upon aliens and could not qualify as English under the Navigation Acts. Aliens could apply for naturalization by a private Act of Parliament which granted virtually all the privileges of a subject but petitioners had to have received the sacrament and were required to take oaths which excluded Jews. A grant of denization from the crown, as an exercise of its prerogative power, in the form of a Letter Patent, provided Jews with an alternative and removed the inability to hold real property, but not always the liability to pay aliens' customs duties, as rights varied with the wording of the particular instrument. Daniel Statt, *Foreigners and Englishmen. The controversy over immigration and population, 1660-1760* (Newark, Delaware, 1995), pp. 32-37.

<sup>55</sup> Between 1660 and 1700 approximately 190 Jewish aliens were endenized in British dominions. Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492-1776*, 3 vols. (Detroit, 1970) p. 101. There were 853 Jews listed in London in 1695 of whom 203 were certainly Ashkenazi and possibly another 52 with a balance of 598 Sephardim. A. P. Arnold, 'A list of the Jews and their households in London', *Miscellanies of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, Part VI (1962), pp. 73- 141.

with a well-trying strategy: a claim to knowledge of mineral deposits in the island.<sup>56</sup> Nothing seems to have come of this scheme but, in the following year, a similar ploy was used by two Amsterdam Jews with the backing of Sir William Davidson, the king’s envoy in the Low Countries who had an interest in promoting the Spanish slave trade <sup>57</sup> The bait worked. Prospecting rights were granted with patents of naturalization and, in 1663, six Jews embarked for Jamaica with a ‘rich cargo’ and a clear indication that they intended to trade. The promised gold was not found and two of the Jews soon departed but others set up shop in Port Royal including Moses Jesuran Cardosa, who remained in the island until his death, and played a leading role in establishing a permanent Jewish presence in the island.<sup>58</sup>

Table 1 Jewish settlers with patents of endenization in Jamaica in 1672

Merchant	Arrival	Birth	Probable residence from 1662	Language
Abraham Alvarez	c.1669	Spain	France, England	Spanish
David Alvarez	c.1669	Spain	France, England	Spanish
Joseph da Costa	1668	Portugal	England, Canaries	Portuguese

<sup>56</sup> Wilfred S. Samuel, ‘Sir William Davidson, Royalist (1616-1689) and the Jews’, *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 14 (1942), pp. 66-7. For the same ploy in Dutch territories, Klooster, ‘Networks of colonial entrepreneurs’, p. 40.

<sup>57</sup> Davidson was involved in illegal Dutch trade with Barbados in the 1650s. Samuel, ‘Sir William Davidson’.

<sup>58</sup> ‘The gold finding Jew went home a month since in Capt. Capps bound for London’, Lynch to Bennet, 23 May 1664, TNA CO 1/18, fo. 153b. Nuala Zahedieh, ‘The capture of the Blue Dove, 1664: policy, profits, and protection in early English Jamaica’ in Roderick A. McDonald, ed. *West Indies accounts. Essays on the history of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic economy* (Kingston, 1996), pp. 29-47.

Alveringa				
Moses Jesuran Cardosa	c.1663	France?	Amsterdam	Portuguese
Solomon Gabay	1668	France	Amsterdam, England	Portuguese
David Gomez	1668	Portugal	Holland, England	Portuguese
Abraham Lucena	c.1663	unknown	New York	Portuguese
Jacob Mendes Gutierrez	1670	Portugal	Portugal, England	Portuguese
Abraham Perara	1669	Amsterdam	Flanders, France, Barbados	Portuguese

Sources: TNA HCA 13/77; Jacob A.P.H. Andrade, *A Record of the Jews in Jamaica*

By 1672, Jamaican merchants were complaining about the ‘prejudices and inconveniences’ being caused by the ‘infinite number of Jews who daily resort to the island’ and brought unwanted competition.<sup>59</sup> They were overstating their case, but the governor did confirm that the island had a settled community of thirteen ‘free’ Jews, of whom nine can be identified from court cases (Table 1). Combined with the sixteen Jews ‘which act under them’, women and children, there was a total population of around sixty.<sup>60</sup> These early arrivals did not come as a group but were drawn from dispersed ports scattered around the Sephardic network. Nonetheless, they quickly constructed a community which provided a stable base for further

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<sup>59</sup> Petition of the merchants of Port Royal to Sir Thomas Lynch concerning the Jews, 11 June, 1672. TNA CO 1/28, No. 63.

<sup>60</sup> Lynch to Council of Plantations, 10 Mar. 1671/2, TNA CO 1/28, fo. 57.

Sephardic migration to the island including, at least, two families from Surinam after it was handed to the Dutch.<sup>61</sup> In 1680, the census of Port Royal, where the Sephardim were based, listed twenty-one probable Jewish households (holding 77 whites and 50 blacks) among the total of 507.<sup>62</sup> It also listed 22 Jewish names among the 1,101 militia men belonging to the town.<sup>63</sup> Further recruits arrived in the 1680s, including Diego Gonzalez, who left a collection of letters and business documents arising from a court case, and Aaron Lamego who, in 1685, was expelled, along with other Jews, from French territory. Although Jamaica's overall white population fell back in the 1690s, the Sephardim seem to have more than maintained their numbers (Table 2). After Port Royal suffered massive destruction in an earthquake in 1692, the Jews established new congregations in Spanish Town and Kingston. A document of 1703 claimed that there were eighty Jewish households which suggests a total population of around 300, making it the largest in British America, and the second largest in the entire Caribbean (after Dutch Curacao with around 600).<sup>64</sup> In the eighteenth century, Jewish names became increasingly

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<sup>61</sup>Jacob Selwood, 'Left behind: subjecthood, nationality, and the status of Jews after the loss of Surinam', *Journal of British Studies* 54 (2015), pp. 578-601.

<sup>62</sup>'Inhabitants both masters and servants of Port Royal parish', TNA CO 1/45, fos. 96-107. Six of those in Table 1 appear: Abraham Alvarez; Joseph da Costa Alvaringa; Moses Cardoso; Solomon Gabay; Abraham Lucena; Jacob Mendez Gutierrez. David Gomez had died by this time and David Alvarez lived with his father.

<sup>63</sup>'List of the several regiments of foot and troops of horse in Jamaica', TNA CO 1/45, fos. 1-25. Not all Jews can be identified by name. Most had Spanish or Portuguese names but some were anglicized. In 1718, Abraham Martin, 'of the Jewish nation', gave evidence in court and swore on the 5 Books of David. TNA CO 137/13, No. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Memorandum from the Jews about tax, 1700, TNA CO 138/10, fo. 82.

frequent among surviving probate inventories (Table 3) and according to Benjamin Bravo, a resident in the 1720s, the population numbered 700-800 by 1730.<sup>65</sup>

Table 2      White population of Jamaica

	Jews	Total whites	Total population
1673	c.60	7,768	15,536
1703	c.300	7,365	48,000
1730	7-800	8,230	83,765

Sources: *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica*, I, pp. 20, 28; TNA CO 138/10, fo. 82; TNA CO 137/19/2.; TNA CO 137/22, fo. 34

Table 3      Jewish decedents in Jamaican probate inventories, 1686-1721

	1686-94	1699-1701	1710-1712	1716-1721
Total no.	402	145	254	379
Jews	9	4	6	13
% Jews	2.23	2.75	2.36	3.43

Source: Inventories, The National Archives of Jamaica, Spanish Town, 1B/II/3, vols. 3, 5, 9, 11.

Despite their extravagant claims in the 1660s, the Jews showed little interest in planting or mining ‘for their design was only to insinuate themselves into the

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<sup>65</sup> Benjamin Bravo to William Wood, 17 Feb. 1736, TNA CO 137/22, fo. 34.

country for the sake of trade'.<sup>66</sup> This was choice and not necessity. The Jews had full property rights and it was usual to patent land especially in the early years when prices were low.<sup>67</sup> All nine of the 'free' Jewish settlers who could be identified in 1672 patented, at least, 300 acres, and most developed plantations, but agriculture remained secondary to their commercial activities. For example, at his death in 1693, Abraham Alvarez owned an indigo plantation in Vere with 'seventy-six working negroes and ten pickaninnies'. Nonetheless, he lived in Port Royal and was described as a merchant on his tomb-stone.<sup>68</sup> The Jews plainly calculated that they had an advantage in trade, and perhaps because of their precarious past, a preference for high liquidity. Analysis of 1,180 probate inventories surviving from between 1685 and 1721 confirms contemporary assertions that the Jews were overwhelmingly urban and commercial.<sup>69</sup> At least 24 of the 32 probable Jews lived in towns (Port Royal, Kingston, or Spanish Town) and 23 of the 28 for whom

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<sup>66</sup> 'A journal kept by Coll. William Beeston from his first coming to Jamaica', BL Add. MS 12,430, fo. 28.

<sup>67</sup> In 1692, a list of twelve Jewish plantation owners was submitted to the Lords of Trade to counter claims that they neglected planting. It included five of the nine Jews in Table 1 (David Alvarez, Moses Jesuran Cardosa, Joseph da Costa Alveringa, Jacob Mendez Gutierrez, the widow of Solomon Gabay). TNA CO 390; In December 1706 a group of so-called 'planting Jews' petitioned for an exemption from the separate tax imposed on their community 'in the lump'. 10 Dec. 1706, *JAJ*, I, p. 405.

<sup>68</sup> Inventory of Abraham Alvarez, Oct. 1693, NAJ, Inv. 1B/II/3 vol. 3, 507; Tombstone, 14 March 1693, R. D. Barrett and P. Wright, *The Jews of Jamaica and Jewish tombstone inscriptions, 1663-1882* (Jerusalem, 1997).

<sup>69</sup> Houston, *Memoirs*, p. 277. The series of recopied inventories in the Jamaica Archives is unfortunately not complete. Volumes 4, 6, 7 and 8 are missing from the period 1686-1721. For a discussion of the inventories see Meyers who used a different sample. Allan D. Meyers, 'Ethnic distinctions and wealth among colonial Jamaican merchants, 1685-1716', *Social Science History*, 22 (1998), pp. 47-81.

occupation was given were described as merchants, 4 as planters, and 1 as a widow.<sup>70</sup>

The merchant inventories show that the Jews were especially interested in illicit Spanish commerce and that they were prominent at every stage of the trade.<sup>71</sup> A court case of 1666, showed how they used their European networks to secure direct supplies of the European textiles which sold well in Spanish markets.<sup>72</sup> By making minimum adherence to the Navigation Acts, by simply calling at a south coast port, they kept costs down and could offer advantageous terms.<sup>73</sup> At other times they landed goods from Dutch or French ships in bays and creeks outside Port Royal in a well organized smuggling business.<sup>74</sup> The Jews were also active in

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<sup>70</sup> For the period 1686-1721, Abraham Alvarez, Moses Gabay Faro, David Gabay and Abraham Azavedo are listed as planters, NAJ, Inventories, 1B/II/3 vols 3, 5, 9 and 11.

<sup>71</sup> Over half the Jewish merchant inventories suggest an involvement in Spanish trade compared with 25 per cent of all the Port Royal inventories, Zahedieh, 'Merchants of Port Royal', p. 579.

<sup>72</sup> 'Memoria of what goods may be fit for Sta Marta, the rest of the Tierre Firma', 11 May 1668, Westminster Abbey Muniments 11940. On the importance of foreign goods see the South Sea C'ompany's cargoes, BL Add MS 25,562, No. 15. In 1724, Jacob Alvarez had 40 pieces of fine chintz valued at £100 and 16 pieces of sprig Indian chintz valued at £80.5 on board sloops in the Spanish trade, NAJ, Inv. 1B/II/3, vol. 14, fos. 60-61.

<sup>73</sup> On direct trade, Zahedieh, 'Capture of the Blue Dove'. Samuel Haynes, *An abstract of all the statutes made concerning aliens trading in England*, (London, 1685) pp. 10, 29. For Jewish expertise in smuggling in the Thames see a report to the SSC, BL Add. MS 25,562, No. 15. On the Jews' low prices, Francis Hall to Thomas Brailsford, 11 March 1688/9, 20 Jan. 1689/90, Brailsford Papers, TNA C 110/152. William Wood claimed that, by the 1720s, 'the Jews [are] the only persons almost that have any large quantities of all kinds of goods lying in their houses, warehouses, or shops for .....making proper sortments of goods for the Spaniards'. William Wood to Lords of Trade, 18 Feb. 1735, TNA CO 137/22, fos 35-36. V. L. Brown, 'The South Sea Company and contraband trade', *American Historical Review*, 31 (1926), p. 671.

<sup>74</sup> On the smuggling activities of Isaac Lamego and Isaac Lopez Nunez in collusion with the Marquis du Quesne (Captain of Port Royal) in the 1720s, *JAJ*, II, pp. 325, 482-3, 539.

developing the provision trade with North America from where their co-religionists delivered flour, beef, kosher beef, and even pork for Spanish markets.<sup>75</sup>

The Jamaican Jews seem to have played little direct role in the risky trans-Atlantic leg of the African slave trade but they obtained human cargoes at the Royal African Company's sales. Moses Jesuran Cardosa, an active contraband trader, was the largest single purchaser at the Company's sales in the 1670s and 1680s buying 582 Africans at forty-three sales between 1674 and 1686. He paid an average price of £9.21 compared with the overall average of £21 which suggests either collusion with the Company agent, with whom he at times acted in partnership, or that he was concentrating purchases on children and what were described as 'refuse slaves' (the sick and old) who found ready markets on the poorer parts of the Spanish coast.<sup>76</sup> Court records highlight Jewish involvement in business with the various *asiento* agents revealing large contracts obtained by private merchants such as Isaac da Costa Alveringa in the 1690s and they remained prominent in the smuggling trade conducted by South Sea Company employees.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Nathan Simson left 88 bills of lading from 1719 until 1724 which show the importance of the Jamaican entrepot to his New York provision business although it had not yet outstripped Curacao with 38 per cent of his cargoes consigned to Curacao, 29 per cent to Jamaica, 22 per cent to London, and the remaining 11 per cent for lesser Caribbean ports and Amsterdam. Simson Papers, TNA C 104/13. On Jews and the provision trade in New York, Noah L. Gelfand, 'A transatlantic approach to understanding the formation of a Jewish community in New Netherland and New York', *New York History* (2008), pp. 375-395.

<sup>76</sup> Cardosa acted in partnership with Walter Ruding on occasion. Trevor Burnard, 'Who bought slaves in early America? Purchasers of slaves from the Royal African Company in Jamaica, 1674-1708', *Slavery and Abolition*, 17 (1996), p. 74.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Brown v. Andrew Lopez and Co. TNA HCA 13/82. The SSC examined Mr Dennis's conduct as chief of the Panama and Portobello factory where he was accused of illegal trading in negroes with Benjamin Bravo, Committee of Correspondence, SSC, 9 Oct. 1728, BL Add. MS 25,552, fos. 84-85; Bravo purchased



After assembling the goods and persons for sale the Jews played an active role in taking them to market. By 1679, the island had a fleet of around eighty small, stoutly built sloops of which, at any time, around twenty might be engaged in 'little designs with the Spaniards'.<sup>78</sup> Some Jews such as Jacob Lopez Torres, listed as a mariner in the 1680 census, and an overseer of the Port Royal synagogue, owned a number of vessels but others hired shipping and Christian mariners.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, the Jews played a prominent role as supercargoes to ensure close personal oversight of their own, and their community's, transactions as well as taking on business for Christians, such as the Halls.<sup>80</sup> According to Houston, three Jews dominated the English coast trade in the 1720s: Aaron Diaz Fernandez, Daniel Mendes de Costa, and Moses Mendes and they maintained a sort of floating warehouse on the coast which others used to make up stocks for sale. <sup>81</sup> While, as noted above, the English were formally excluded from settling in Spanish territories before 1713, and found it intensely difficult to forge reliable business relationships across the religious and linguistic divide, the Jews had complete fluency in both the Spanish and Portuguese languages, and an appearance which allowed them to pass unnoticed in Spanish territory. Although Jewish merchants did not name their 'friends' in Spanish territories it is clear from letters such as those of Diego Gonzalez

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176 slaves from the RAC in 1723, T 70/958, fo. 37-38; 41-42; 43-45. Also see Tyndall and Assheton to Isaac Hobhouse, 8 June 1729, 25 Apr. 1729, 20 July 1729, Bristol Central Library, Jeffries Collection, Vol. XIII, fos. 100, 103-5, 107.

<sup>78</sup> 'Memorandum given in by the Naval Officer', 25 March 1679, TNA CO 1/43, fo. 59.

<sup>79</sup> 'List of the Regiments', TNA CO 1/45, fos. 1-25; Naval Officers Returns, 2 April 1703-25 April 1705, TNA CO 142/13.; Petition of Jacob Rodriguez, Deleon, and Jacob Lopes Torres overseers of the synagogue, Journal of Assembly of Jamaica, 23 Mar. 1688, TNA CO 140/2, fo. 114.

<sup>80</sup> Moses Cardosa acted for the Halls in the 1680s. TNA Brailsford Papers.

<sup>81</sup> Houston, *Memoirs*, p. 309.

that they had firm links to co-religionists as they exported kosher beef. Despite prohibitions, and the Inquisition, the Jews had communities in all the major towns and had forged a web of clandestine activity with well-established distribution channels and long experience with dealing with, and even serving, the regulatory regime.<sup>82</sup> They knew who to trust, who to bribe, and how to turn the system to their advantage.

The importance of the Jews in Jamaica's contraband trade was reflected in their importance in trade in re-exported Spanish goods, above all bullion.<sup>83</sup> Over half the Jewish inventories surviving from the period between 1685 and 1721 contained large quantities of bullion with 56 per cent listing above £500 in cash and some owning much larger sums such as Jacob Baruch Alvarez, who died in 1724 with around £3,000 worth of silver and gold.<sup>84</sup> Anecdotal evidence and the lists of debts in the inventories, including bonds and mortgages, show that the Jews played a banking function in the island and during the war of the 1690s, Mennaseh and Benjamin Pereira, had a contract to furnish the island's governor with an annual supply of bullion valued at £5,800.<sup>85</sup> In 1688, a ship's captain listed ninety bullion consignments for London of which fifteen were on behalf of eight Jews and, although not all were valued, they included fifteen barrels of silver worth almost £3,000

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<sup>82</sup> Diego and Abraham Gonzalez to Nathan Simson, 17 July 1723, Simson Papers, TNA C 104/14, Pt1. Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, pp. 42-66. Brown, 'South Sea Company', p. 671. El Gov. de Yucatan contra Alonso Matheos sobre el tratos comercios con el enemigo Ingles, AGI Mexico 48, R. 1, No. 42. Selwood, *Diversity and difference*, p. 143.

<sup>83</sup> Edward Long, *A history of Jamaica* (1774), vol. II, p. 116.

<sup>84</sup> Inventory of Jacob Baruch Alvarez, 10 June 1724, NAJ, Inv. 1B/II/3, vol. 14, fos. 60-61.

<sup>85</sup> Copy of a letter of credit, 17 Jan. 1694/5, TNA CO 138/7, fo. 358.

consigned to Abraham de Paiva who was a leading player in London's bullion market.<sup>86</sup> Another prominent Jew, Jacob Mears, who settled in Jamaica in 1692, was involved with Dummer in the packet boat service used to transport large quantities of Spanish silver to England in the War of the Spanish Succession.<sup>87</sup>

Jews were also conspicuous in organizing the logwood trade – investing in ships used by the cutters and financing export of the product.<sup>88</sup> Island records suggest that, in the early 1670s, Jamaica exported around 900 tons of Spanish logwood a year and, in 1671, around 100 tons were sent to London with 95 per cent assigned to one Jewish merchant, Antony Gomezsera (for whom Cardosa was factor).<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, much of the remainder was shipped to Europe, with minimal adherence to the Navigation Acts. In 1672, the *Providence* was seized at Cowes with a cargo of 60 tons of logwood intended for sale in Amsterdam on account of eight Jamaican Jews.<sup>90</sup> The Jews played a similar role in the indigo trade: in 1717, six Jews accounted for over half London's indigo imports from Jamaica whereas, in the

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<sup>86</sup> 'Book belonging to Thomas Stubbs', TNA HCA 30/664. Gedalia Yogev, *Diamonds and coral: Anglo-Dutch Jews and eighteenth century trade*, (Leicester, 1978).

<sup>87</sup> Dummer's contract with the Post Office in 1704 allowed him to carry cargoes which allowed him to move into Spanish American trade via Jamaica in partnership with his brother and the Mears brothers, Jacob and Sampson. Jacob Mears had spent 16 years trading in Jamaica and claimed knowledge of the trade and contacts with co-religionists in Spanish America. Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic 1675-1740. An exploration of communication and community* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 176-177.

<sup>88</sup> For example, David Gomez owned the *Betty* ketch included in a list of ships trading for logwood, TNA CO 138/1, fo. 105

<sup>89</sup> 'Memo given in by the Naval Officer', 25 March 1679, TNA CO 1/43, fo. 59. Maurice Woolf, 'Foreign trade of London Jews in the seventeenth century', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 24 (1974), 38-58.

<sup>90</sup> Perara and Gomezsera v. Calloway, Sept. 1672, TNA HCA 13/77.

1720s, drawback on duties on re-exported indigo at Port Royal shows that six Jews accounted for over a third of the trade.<sup>91</sup>

Just as it is impossible to estimate the value of Jamaica's illegal trade with Spanish America, it is even more difficult to assess the proportion in the hands of Jewish merchants, although contemporary commentators had no doubt that their share was disproportionate to their numbers and it was often claimed that they dominated the trade.<sup>92</sup> In 1672, at least thirteen Jewish merchants were doing business on a substantial scale and in 1664 Cardoso and Mesquita received a cargo worth around £6,000 on the *Blue Dove* alone.<sup>93</sup> By the 1720s there were at least twenty Jewish merchants with inventories suggesting that they turned over trade in excess of £5,000 a year.<sup>94</sup>

Despite their heavy focus on the riskiest trading sector the Jews prospered. Probate evidence shows that Jews accounted for almost 20 per cent of estates valued at above £2,000 in the period 1686-92 and the mean value of the Jewish estates identified for the period 1686-1721 was £1,930. In a separate survey, Meyers compared the wealth of 32 Jewish merchants he identified from the period 1685-1716 with that of 89 non-Jewish merchants and found that the former were significantly richer. The median wealth of the Jewish estates was £1,509 and 56 per cent were valued above £1,000 while the median wealth of the non-Jewish estates

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<sup>91</sup> London Port Books, 1717. West Yorkshire Record Office, Sheepscar Branch, Leeds. *JAJ*, vol. II, pp. 325, 348, 525, 527.

<sup>92</sup> John Taylor, 'Taylor's history of his life and travels in Jamaica', 1688, NLJ MS 105, fo. 499; Houston, *Memoirs*, p. 277.

<sup>93</sup> Zahedieh, 'Blue Dove', pp. 34-37.

<sup>94</sup> For example see Inventory of Jacob Baruch Alvarez, 10 June 1724, NAJ, Inv. 1B/II/3, vol. 14. Fos. 60-61.

was £406 and 28 per cent were valued above £1,000. Jewish merchants possessed about three times as much wealth as the Anglo merchants, and their wealth was more evenly distributed. Meyers noted that ‘Anglo anxieties about the collective wealth of the Sephardim, while probably exaggerated, would appear to be substantiated’.<sup>95</sup>

#### IV

The evidence suggests that Jamaica’s small Jewish community played a disproportionately large role in the island’s trade, above all, contraband commerce and that, despite the high risks, the Jews flourished economically. Christian rivals denounced the Jews for trading as a ‘perfect monopoly’, and operating as ‘a kind of joint stock company’.<sup>96</sup> In fact, the Sephardim eschewed company organization, and like the private traders whose locally-informed initiatives have been shown to have driven East India Company expansion after 1660, the Jews maintained high levels of individual autonomy and flexible, fluid organization within a decentralized network with thick horizontal links.<sup>97</sup> They drew on strong social capital, which had been accumulated over generations of dispersal, to create local cohesion and high levels of cooperation and collaboration with other groups over a wide geographic area.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Meyers, ‘Ethnic distinctions and wealth’, p. 75.

<sup>96</sup> Petition of the merchants of Port Royal to Sir Thomas Lynch concerning the Jews, 11 June 1672, TNA CO 1/28, No. 63.

<sup>97</sup> Emily Erikson, *Between monopoly and free trade. The East India Company, 1600-1757* (Princeton, 2014).

<sup>98</sup> Social capital is here understood as ‘features of social organization such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions’, Robert D. Putnam, *Making democracy work* (Princeton, 1993), p. 167.

The geographic reach and decentralized structure of the Sephardic diaspora is seen in the backgrounds of the group of 'free' Jews who settled in Jamaica by 1672. Nine of the thirteen can be identified from court cases and other sources (Table 1) and although all but the Spanish Alvarez family (father and son) identified themselves as 'of Portuguese extraction' their birth-places were dispersed: three were born in Portugal, three in France, two in Spain, and one in Amsterdam. All had led peripatetic lives.<sup>99</sup> Most had moved between, at least, three countries (including Jamaica) in the previous 10 years. Between them, they had gained first-hand experience of, at least, eleven countries including Barbados, Brazil, the Canaries, the Dutch Republic, France, Italy, New York, Portugal and Spain. At least two thirds of them had lived for some time in the Iberian peninsula where they would have had to assume a Christian identity. All had passed through London, though often for a very short time, and obtained patents of endenization with a clause which allowed them to trade on the same foot as Englishmen. All had agents in both London and in Amsterdam (where at least four had close kin).

While benefiting from broad networks, Jamaica's early Jewish settlers had to work to mould a group of relative strangers into a cohesive community. Only four of the nine had a close kin connection: Abraham and David Alvarez were father and son; the partners Solomon Gabay and David Gomez married two Perara sisters and so were brothers-in-law. Although all had friends in common, none had first-hand acquaintance with every other member of the group before migration to Jamaica. However, in adjusting to a new environment they clung together, and as Studnicki-

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<sup>99</sup>Perara and Gomezsera v. Calloway, Sept. 1672, TNA HCA 13/77.

Gizbert has argued, they were able to draw on long experience of dispersion and mobility and well established strategies for strengthening ties between members.<sup>100</sup> Until the earthquake of 1692, almost all the Jews settled in Port Royal. The twenty or so families lived, worked, and socialized in close proximity, and according to testimony provided by a young merchant, Abraham Perara Delgado, the Jews met 'in company' on a daily basis.<sup>101</sup> In 1677, the leaders, including Moses Cardosa, purchased a plot in the middle of Port Royal on which they built a synagogue.<sup>102</sup> The building provided a symbol of collective affiliation, and difference, a public declaration of permanence, and an important social centre for the community, used for daily assembly and information exchange, as well as worship.<sup>103</sup> Two new communities were formed in Spanish Town and Kingston after the earthquake, but all three were in a radius of twenty miles, and were in close communication sustained by overlapping membership and common interests, reinforced by a policy of strict endogamy which not only restricted access to the group but also necessitated high levels of intermarriage and the formation of dense

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<sup>100</sup> Studnicki-Gizbert, 'La Nacion among the nations', pp. 77-78.

<sup>101</sup> 117 tombstone inscriptions in the Port Royal burial ground are from between 1680 and 1730. The majority (75 per cent) are in Portuguese and almost all the remainder in Spanish with one in English. Barret and Wright, *Tombstone inscriptions*. Deposition of Abraham Perara Delgado, 1672, TNA HCA 13/77.

<sup>102</sup> The construction of a synagogue is not required for religious services, or practising a proper Jewish life. The necessity for worship is to have a *Mingan* (ten Jewish males) while the space can be anywhere. John Peeke sold a plot measuring 63 feet by 36 feet to the Jewish community represented by Abraham David Gabay, Moses Jesuran Cordosa, Asperius and a further Gabay. Deed, 29 Jan. 1677, IRO, Deeds OS, Vol. VIII, p. 87.

<sup>103</sup> The importance of the synagogue is reflected in wills: it was the custom to leave bequests to the synagogue. Andrade, *Records*.

kin networks.<sup>104</sup> The thick web of personal relationships ensured rapid diffusion of information about personal and business affairs which facilitated oversight and enforcement of norms.

In forging solidarity and social discipline the Sephardim deployed strategies common to the associational culture which flourished throughout early modern Europe as all members of the growing bourgeoisie struggled to adjust to the flux and mobility of urban life and rapid economic and social change.<sup>105</sup> Although Port Royal was notorious for its riotous and unruly life-style; the factionalism of economic, social and political life; and low levels of probity among the business community, the Sephardim stood apart. The Jews successfully promoted the type of conduct which is commonly associated with the protestant work ethic: abstemiousness; thrift, and self-restraint. <sup>106</sup> However, the Sephardim reinforced their common-place sociability with rigorous adherence to a range of customs and rituals which had survived and been adapted from before the forced conversions and which set them apart. As seen in tomb-stone inscriptions they maintained their Iberian languages among themselves until the late eighteenth century.<sup>107</sup> They buried their dead in a well-maintained separate cemetery from the 1660s and worshipped in a public

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<sup>104</sup> R. Cooter and Janet Landa, 'Personal versus impersonal trade: the size of trading firms and contract law', *International Review of Law and Economics*, 4 (1984), pp. 15-22.

<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism? Urban association and the middling sort', Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, eds., *The middling sort of people. Culture, society and politics in England, 1550-1800* (1994), pp. 84-112.

<sup>106</sup> 'By their parsimonious living which I do not charge as a fault in them they have the means of underselling the English', Beeston to Lords of Trade, TNA CO 138/10, fo. 85. Similar quotes abound.

<sup>107</sup> James Knight, *Natural, moral, and political history of Jamaica*, (1742), p. 74b.



synagogue from 1677.<sup>108</sup> They observed their own calendar with its Saturday Sabbath and religious holidays on which they refused to take part in militia training.<sup>109</sup> They followed a kosher diet.<sup>110</sup> Their young people attended the Yeshibah (a school for religious instruction) which inculcated a strong awareness of their Jewish heritage, and their 'difference', and encouraged members to behave for the benefit of the community.<sup>111</sup> At the level of the individual, such practices were costly. They required time and self-discipline and made it difficult to socialize with Christians but, on the other hand, the signaling traits not only strengthened group cohesiveness but also lowered the costs of identifying insiders.<sup>112</sup>

In common with other purposeful associations, and friendly societies, of the late seventeenth century, the Sephardim cemented group commitment with mutuality.<sup>113</sup> Membership of the small, tight-knit Jamaican Jewish community delivered a range of economic and social benefits which provided household security over the life-cycle. Schooling and business training were provided within the community. A good marriage brought a handsome dowry. Interest-free loans

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<sup>108</sup> In 1732, Judith Baruch Alvarez left £100 'for making a convenient causeway or walk from the usual place of landing of corpses....to the burial place of the Jewish Nation'. Will of Judith Baruch Alvarez, 12 Sept. 1732, Andrade, *Records*.

<sup>109</sup> Memo from Baron de Belmonte, 1 Jan. 1700, TNA CO 138/10, fos. 2-3.

<sup>110</sup> Receipts of sale for New York provisions, 1719-23, Simson Papers, TNA C 104/14, pt.1.

<sup>111</sup> The Yeshibah is mentioned in wills. Moses Cardosa left it £5, Will of Moses Cardosa, 9 Dec. 1725, Jacob A. P. M. Andrade, *A record of the Jews in Jamaica from the English conquest to the present times* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1941).

<sup>112</sup> J. Carr and Janet Landa, 'The economics of symbols, clan names and religion', *Journal of Legal Studies*, 13 (1983), pp. 135-156. Laurence Iannaccone 'Why strict churches are strong,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 99 (1994).

<sup>113</sup> Barry and Brooks, *Middling sorts*, pp. 84-112; Phil Withington, *Society in early modern England. The vernacular origins of some powerful ideas* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 102-33; 171-201.

were available and were especially helpful for those in early career. The articles of agreement made between David Lopez Narbona and Solomon Gabay in 1674 show that the newly arrived Narbona obtained start-up funding on easy terms as well as assistance with his family's transport costs and initial subsistence.<sup>114</sup> Although merchants maintained high levels of personal mobility, and flexibility, by avoiding large, long-standing, partnerships they came together as 'a sort of company' when there were clear benefits in collaboration as when eight Jews freighted the *Providence* in 1672.<sup>115</sup> There was well-organized relief for those who fell on hard times, and in old age, with a compulsory contribution to the 'poor fund' levied on all trade transactions. Wills show that it was usual to make bequests to community institutions and the 'poor of the Nation' and there was generous alms giving at funerals.

The tools of sociability and mutuality which were used to bind together the Jamaican Sephardim were also used to create and maintain ties and promote information exchange with communities overseas. Families had a tendency to divide, disperse, and come back together as business opportunities opened and closed. For example, Abraham de Lucena moved to Jamaica from New York in the 1660s but, a generation later, his son returned to New York to take part in the growing trade.<sup>116</sup> Joseph da Costa Alvaringa's son moved to London in the 1690s

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<sup>114</sup> Articles of Agreement between Solomon Gabay and David Lopez Narbona, 9 July 1674, Island Record Office, Spanish Town, Deeds, OS I, vol. 1, fos. 215-6.

<sup>115</sup> Petition to Thomas Lynch, 1672, TNA CO 1/28, No. 63; Zahedieh, 'Blue Dove'; Perara and Gomezsera v. Calloway, 25 Sept. 1672, TNA HCA 13/77.

<sup>116</sup> Gelfund, 'Transatlantic approach', pp. 379, 381; Andrade, *Records*.

and was joined there by his mother after his father's death.<sup>117</sup> Dispersal was reinforced by endogamy which often necessitated a move overseas to find a suitable partner Esther Marques, daughter of a prominent Jamaican family, married Luis Gomez, a large-scale provision merchant trading from New York to the Caribbean and two of her sons also married Jamaican Jews who they met in the course of working as supercargoes in the family firm.<sup>118</sup> The strong family connections between Jamaica and New York Jews are reflected in wills with a third of the New York Jewish testaments from between 1700 and 1750 indicating a close family link with Jamaica.<sup>119</sup> Links could be cultivated and maintained through conversations in written correspondence, as emphasized in David Hancock's work on the Madeira wine business, but the Jews reinforced these ties through frequent face-to-face contact.<sup>120</sup> Jewish merchants commonly travelled with their goods and benefited from direct contact with their customers.<sup>121</sup> Shared religion took these mobile merchants into the Sephardim's tightly confined social spaces wherever they were and ensured rapid transmission of knowledge of personal and business affairs which, at times, extended beyond Sephardic networks to Ashkenazi Jews who

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<sup>117</sup> Inventory of Joseph da Costa Alveringa, 1 Aug. 1700, NAJ, Inv. 1B/II/3, vol. 5, fos. 44-45; Richard Brown v. Andrew Lopez and Co., HCA 13/82; Yogev, *Diamonds and coral*, p. 36.

<sup>118</sup> Will of Isaac Rodriquez Marques, 5 Oct. 1707, in Leo Herschowitz, *Wills of early New York Jews, 1704-1799* (New York, 1967), pp. 8-10.

<sup>119</sup> Herschowitz, *Wills*.

<sup>120</sup> Hancock, *Oceans of wine*. Abraham and Diego Gonzalez's correspondence with the New York merchant Nathan Simson shows that they also had strong links with Amsterdam, Barbados, Bayonne, Bordeaux, Curacao, St Eustatius, St Thomas, and the Iberian empires as well as London. Simson Papers, TNA C 104/14.

<sup>121</sup> On effects of itineracy in managing opportunism in long-distance trade, Leonor Freire Costa, Maria Manuela Rocha, and Tanya Araujo, 'Social capital and economic performance: trust and distrust in eighteenth century gold shipments from Brazil', *European Review of Economic History*, 15 (2010), pp. 1-27.

arrived in small numbers in New York and Jamaica and attended the Sephardic synagogue.<sup>122</sup>

As with Amsterdam's 'global' Jews examined by Jessica Roitman, Jamaica's Sephardim did business with those outside their own community.<sup>123</sup> They bought and sold goods to Christians; they undertook commission business for Christians; and they hired Christian mariners. They also undertook business in partnership with well-placed individuals who could offer political capital. However, at points where most discretion and trust was needed, they relied on insiders, as in generally using Jewish supercargoes on the Spanish American coast. Good information about the moral and business conduct of members of their own small, close-knit island congregation, combined with knowledge of those overseas, to allow early detection of bad behaviour and group discipline was enhanced by the supervisory role accorded to Jewish leaders. Although records have not survived from the early congregation, it is clear that, like other Sephardic communities, the Jamaican Jews elected a governing board (Mahamad) which administered the community's affairs, appointed Rabbis, supervised religious and moral order, dealt with internal disputes, and represented community interests to the government. Leading merchants were also appointed to oversee the rating, assessing, and collection of the extraordinary taxes imposed at various times 'in the lump' from the 1690s: a role

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<sup>122</sup> Simson papers, TNA C 104/14; Robert Cohen, 'Sampson and Jacob Mears, merchants', *Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 67 (1978), pp. 233-45. The inscription on the tomb of Solomon Levy of 5 August 1690 noted that Levy was born in Germany. Barret and Wright, *Tombstone inscriptions*.

<sup>123</sup> Jessica Roitman, 'Us and them. Inter-cultural trade and the Sephardim, 1595-1640', (PhD thesis, Leiden, 2009).

which provided them with detailed financial information about their co-religionists.

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Early English Jamaica was notorious for low levels of business morality.<sup>125</sup> Houston left a colourful picture of the 'burlesque' of Jamaica's business world in the 1720s and claimed that in Jamaica it was 'reckoned no disgrace, or loss of credit, to fail in, or fall from your word, bill or bond'.<sup>126</sup> He was scathing about the corruption of the island's legal system and the difficulties of getting redress for bad behaviour through the courts and his sentiments were echoed by the Jewish merchant Diego Gonzalez who complained that 'it doe signifie nothing to go to law, for after you get judgement and your money goes in the Provost Marshall's hands you are as bad as before'.<sup>127</sup> However, although the Jews did make use of formal contracts within the community, as seen in the Articles of Association between Gabay and Narbona, and did also, on occasion, use the courts to sue for debts, as in the case of Mears and de Lucena, they were generally able to avoid formal institutions and turn to internal mechanisms for settling disputes within the community.<sup>128</sup>

Wills and Deeds reveal that, at best, a damaged reputation within the community reduced access to group benefits such as apprenticeship, a good

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<sup>124</sup> Memorial of the Jews enclosed with letter from Beeston to Lords of Trade, 3 May 1700, TNA CO 138/10, fo. 80; Response of the Council to the Petition of the Jews, 1700, TNA CO 138/10, fo. 86; JAJ, I, p. 257; II, pp. 392, 541.

<sup>125</sup> Long, *History*, I, pp. 79-100.

<sup>126</sup> Houston, *Memoirs*, pp. 79-100.

<sup>127</sup> Abraham and Diego Gonzalez to Simson, 1725, Simson Papers TNA C 104/14.

<sup>128</sup> Cohen, 'Simson and Jacob Mears', p. 234. A sample of 30 Admiralty cases relating to Jamaica between 1674 and 1696 includes four involving Jews but no cases of Jews suing Jews. TNA HCA 13/77-82.

marriage, business collaborations, inheritance, and social welfare.<sup>129</sup> At worst, disgrace threatened partial, or absolute, exclusion from the group which was akin to economic and social death.<sup>130</sup> While the forging of a closed and separate community, with distinct social practices, increased trust among insiders it also defined the Jews as a nation apart. The Hall brothers's business papers show that from 1687 to 1690 they had transactions with seven Jews, of whom four (including Moses Jesuran Cardosa) were large repeat customers but, although they made thirty three references to 'a Jew' in their forty seven letters, they never once endowed these individuals, even repeat customers, by name. – names here have been extracted from invoices and lists of debts<sup>131</sup> The Jews were seen 'in the lump' and, at best, they were viewed with suspicion and, at worst, with envy and venom. According to Houston they were 'the worst set of rogues that ever I knew ....a set of meer low-level thieves'.<sup>132</sup> It was difficult for an expelled Jew to form a new network or join the majority population.<sup>133</sup> Outsider status not only promoted community cohesion among the Jews but also gave the Jewish elders a powerful disciplinary tool and, although early English Jamaica's congregation records have not survived, there is evidence that excommunication was a credible threat within the Sephardic diaspora especially in places with less integrated and highly visible

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<sup>129</sup> Fifteen Jewish wills provide an insight into family discipline. Island Record Office, Spanish Town, Wills, Liber 17, 18.

<sup>130</sup> Barak Richman, 'How community institutions create economic advantage: Jewish diamond merchants in New York', *Law and Social Inquiry*, 31 (2006), pp. 383-420.

<sup>131</sup> The Halls traded with Cardoza, Gomez, Gonzalez, de Leon, Narbona, Nunez, and da Silva Solis. Brailsford Papers, TNA C 110/152.

<sup>132</sup> Houston, *Memoirs*, p. 277.

<sup>133</sup> Council of Jamaica, 1700, TNA CO 138/10, fo. 86.

communities.<sup>134</sup> The capacity to better detect and punish opportunistic behaviour among their brethren gave the Jews a significant competitive advantage where legal enforcement was weak, or entirely absent, as in illicit markets. It could be argued that these economic advantages help explain why a stigmatized group persisted in maintaining its separate identity. If such distinctiveness had had only costs, and no benefits, it would be expected that the signaling traits would have died out through a Darwinian mechanism.

The economic value of high quality information networks and the capacity to curb opportunism cannot be computed with precision. Nonetheless, business records do demonstrate that these community assets allowed the Jews to reduce risk and transactions costs in illicit trade and undercut their Christian rivals. In the 1680s, Francis Hall, complained that the Jews supplied French silks and stuffs at twenty per cent below the usual market price and he repeatedly urged his correspondents to withdraw from these trades as they could not compete.<sup>135</sup> The Jews also charged lower commission rates: a sample of 143 invoices from the period 1681 to 1725 shows that English merchants charged, at least, 10 per cent commission, and their Jewish rivals undercut them by 5 per cent.<sup>136</sup> This

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<sup>134</sup> Yosef Kaplan, 'The place of the Herem in the Sefardic community of Hamburg during the seventeenth century' in *Die Sefarden in Hamburg: Zur geschichte einer meinheit*, ed. Michael Seudemund-Halevy and Peter Koj (Hamburg, 1994). Daniel Swetschinski, *Reluctant cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of seventeenth century Amsterdam* (London, 2000).

<sup>135</sup> In the 1680s, Francis Hall, a Christian competitor, complained that 'I cannot tell how it is but the Jews hath their stuff and silk here so cheape that we sell but little at low prices' and he urged his correspondents to withdraw from trades where they were in competition with the Jews, Francis Hall to Thomas Brailsford, 11 March 1688/9, 20 Jan., 1689/90, Brailsford Papers, TNA C 110/152.

<sup>136</sup> Brailsford Papers, TNA C 110/152; Simson Papers, TNA C 104/14.

competitive edge allowed the Jews to gain Christian customers which provoked the charge that the Jews did 'eat us and our children out of all our trade' and raised the threat of retaliatory action.<sup>137</sup>

Although the Jews had full property rights, they were excluded from voting in Assembly elections, or holding office above constable, and so lacked a voice in island government.<sup>138</sup> Thus the Jews were exposed to discriminatory measures such as the imposition of a separate tax on the community 'in the lump' at regular intervals from the 1690s.<sup>139</sup> Nonetheless, leading Jewish merchants were able to limit the damage through a series of bargains with the political elites. They combined with governors, African Company agents, naval captains, and South Sea Company agents, in various 'exclusive' trading arrangements. In these, the Christians gained the benefits of the Sephardim's social capital, and the Jews gained, both the opportunity to limit competition through manipulating the regulatory regime to their advantage, and also improved security.<sup>140</sup> By giving the Christian elite a stake in their business, the Sephardim raised the cost of the type of retaliatory action which had so often

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<sup>137</sup> Beeston to Lords of Trade, TNA CO 138/10, fo. 85; Petition to Sir Thomas Lynch, 1672, TNA CO 1/28, No. 65.

<sup>138</sup> 'Act declaring what persons shall be qualified to sit in Assemblies', 1711, *JAJ*, II, p. 38.

<sup>139</sup> Memo of Jews about taxes, 3 May 1700, TNA CO 138/10, fo. 80.

<sup>140</sup> Samuel, 'Sir William Davidson'; Lynch to Arlington, 17 Dec. 1671, TNA 1/27, fo. 167; Zahedieh, 'Regulation, rent-seeking'. In 1718, Governor Lawes reported that the naval ships were not enforcing the law: all three were trading on the coast leaving the island without defence. Lawes to Lords of Trade, 21 June 1718, TNA CO 137/13, Pt 1, No. 14. In the 1720s the Assembly claimed that the trade on the coast had been engrossed by the Men-of-War in association with the leading Jewish Supercargoes. Isaac Lamago had been concerned in about ten voyages with Captain Lawes and three or four with Captain Dent. This had been to the detriment of smaller traders who had been excluded. *JAJ*, II, pp. 338, 482-3.



destabilized Jewish life in the past and gained political protection as seen in William Wood's energetic defence of their rights in the 1730s.<sup>141</sup>

## VI

In the last two decades, historians have highlighted the importance of the web of illicit commercial transactions which connected competing national networks to create an integrated Atlantic economy but have paid little attention to how cooperation worked across borders. Of necessity, participants acted without the legal protections and state enforcing institutions which are often afforded a central role in narratives of modernization. In the case of Jamaica, a hub of illicit trade, most merchants found it difficult to survive in this high-risk environment but members of the Sephardic diaspora, a traditional, communitarian group, with strong private-order institutions, had competitive advantages which they exploited with vigour. Equipped with appropriate language skills, and long-standing links to the Iberian empires, the Sephardim did not scatter at random but rather chose to settle communities at Jamaica and other strategic points in the web of illicit commerce which distributed Spanish American riches around the Atlantic and beyond. Here, they did not rely on innate attributes of kinship, ethnicity, or religion but restricted entry and cultivated attributes which ensured that group behaviour could be carefully monitored, and high levels of social discipline maintained, with credible rewards and punishments which were reinforced by their outsider status.

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<sup>141</sup> Wood put forward a petition in support of the Jews with ninety-two signatures of which fifty were from Christians. William Wood to Lords of Trade, 18 February 1736, TNA CO 137/22, fo. 35.

High levels of trustworthiness within the group provided a competitive advantage which did stimulate envy and retaliation but also allowed the Sephardim to combine with the Christian elite to capture rent-seeking opportunities and obtain political protections. Far from falling away, and becoming irrelevant, as modernization gained pace, the Sephardic diaspora survived and flourished because it built on its historical and geographical legacy to construct strong private-order institutions which continued to be necessary in large swathes of the economy where neither impersonal corporations, or state enforcement mechanisms, were able to manage risk. Furthermore, merchant diasporas continue to play a key role in high-risk environments and remain important in understanding the processes of globalization today.