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## “There are no secrets here”: Sex and Scandal in the Streets of Curaçao

**Abstract:** This article challenges the assumptions about what spaces were actually private in the late early modern colonial world. Centered on a case of adultery amongst the Sephardic Jewish community of Curaçao in the late eighteenth century, this piece looks at the entangled lives of enslaved people, Dutch colonial officials, free people of color, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Gossip, private information transition, and the architecture and town planning of Willemstad, Curaçao, are integral to this story of community norms, legal systems, and colonial spaces.

**Keywords:** Curaçao, Jews, enslaved people, gossip, rumor.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Curaçao, Żydzi, zniewoleni ludzie, plotka, pogłoska.

### Introduction

The streets of Willemstad, the main (and only) settlement of any size on the island of Curaçao, were crowded and narrow in the eighteenth century. Despite the often-blazing tropical sun that beat down on this Caribbean island, the alleyways and thoroughfares of this town of around 12,000 people were dark, cast into shadow by the many overhanging balconies of the houses that were jammed together.<sup>1</sup> As one visitor described, “The jumbled mix of people, the black women sitting on the ground selling fruit and other foods, the numberless and nameless residents, all

<sup>1</sup> Bernard R. Buddingh', *Van Punt en Snoa: Ontstaan en groei van Willemstad, Curaçao vanaf 1634, De Willemstad tussen 1700 en 1732 en de bouwgeschiedenis van de synagoge Mikvé Israël-Emanuel 1730–1732* ('s Hertogenbosh, 1994), 158.

move through the streets, making getting anywhere difficult.”<sup>2</sup> Yet two erstwhile lovers did seem to get around these dark and narrow streets quite well. Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr., both members of Curaçao’s Portuguese Jewish community, had an affair that flouted community norms, scandalized the entire island, and eventually wound up being discussed by the States General of the Netherlands.

This relationship was conducted in plain sight of much of the city as they and those who saw them moved through the busy lanes in a constantly shifting mass of people. They were observed together in public often. Witnesses to their affair included a broad swathe of colonial society: housewives, merchants, doctors, colonial officials, enslaved, and free people of color. They revealed their personal knowledge of the relationship and repeated hearsay, most of which was garnered on the streets of Willemstad after the affair became a matter of not only public interest, but intense and long-running legal wrangling that spanned continents. As I will argue in this article, this case challenges assumptions about what spaces were actually private, at least as the term is generally now understood, in the late early modern (colonial) world.<sup>3</sup>

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines “privacy” as a “state or condition of being alone, or free from public attention,” “seclusion,” or “freedom from interference or intrusion” (def. 1).<sup>4</sup> Notions of privacy have always been contingent and constructed. Ideas about the nature of privacy have varied greatly from time to time, place to place, culture to culture.<sup>5</sup> Nothing in these definitions or understandings specifies the indoors. Yet when privacy is thought of, if it is thought of at all, most people do think about indoor spaces. That is because, as social historian Peter Ward writes,

the concept of privacy involves boundaries if not barriers, lines separating the personal from the public, mine from yours, ours from theirs. Within these boundaries

<sup>2</sup> Gerrit Gijsbert van Paddenburgh, *Beschrijving van het eiland Curaçao en onderhoorige eilanden, uit onderscheidene stukken, bijdragen en opmerkingen opgemaakt* (Haarlem, 1819), 18–19.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of what constitutes privacy in the early modern period, see Mette Birkedal Bruun, “Towards an Approach to Early Modern Privacy: The Retirement of the Great Condé,” in Michaël Green, Lars Cyril Nørgaard, Mette Birkedal Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy: Sources and Approaches* (Leiden, 2022), 12–60. The other essays in this volume are also useful for conceptualizing how privacy can be understood.

<sup>4</sup> “Privacy” (def. 1), in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, online edition, <https://www.oed.com> [retrieved: 1 June 2021].

<sup>5</sup> Peter W. Ward, *A History of Domestic Space: Privacy and the Canadian Home* (Vancouver, 1999), 5.

lies the zone of private matters, beyond them the world of general concern. These boundaries may be tangible—walls and fences for example.<sup>6</sup>

The boundaries that we think of, then, are those separating the indoors from the outdoors. When historians focus on indoor privacy, which accords most closely with our own contemporary conception of the private, they may miss the very different spatiality that shaped early modern representations of privacy.<sup>7</sup> In fact, in line with Mary Thomas Crane's conclusions for early modern England, I will suggest that privacy for illicit activities such as sex and gossip was most often found outdoors.<sup>8</sup>

### A cause célèbre in Curaçao<sup>9</sup>

In 1775, the Portuguese Jewish community of Curaçao, then numbering around 1,100, was rocked by a bitter dispute involving allegations of sexual misconduct or, as the sources put it, “unpermitted familiarity.”<sup>10</sup> The case threatened the social cohesion of the community and reminds us that the boundaries between the public and the private, especially in closely knit communities, could be porous indeed. The charges were highly salacious by any standard. Sarah de Isaac Pardo was pregnant, but the paternity of her unborn child was the subject of much speculation in the Portuguese Jewish community, among its slaves and servants, and the rest of the island. In more than ten years of marriage, Sarah Pardo had never before been known to be pregnant.<sup>11</sup> Her much older husband and uncle, Selomoh

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Thomas Crane, “Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces in Early Modern England,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9 (2009), 1:4–22, here 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Some of the discussion of the adultery case is drawn from, Aviva Ben-Ur, Jessica Vance Roitman, “Adultery Here and There: Crossing Sexual Boundaries in the Dutch Jewish Atlantic,” in Gert Oostindie, Jessica Vance Roitman (eds.), *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden, 2014), 185–223, particularly 208–216. See also Jessica Vance Roitman, “The Repercussions of Rumor: An Adultery Case from 18th Century Curaçao,” in Michael Studemund-Halévy (ed.), *A Sefardic Pepper-Pot in the Caribbean: History, Language, Literature, and Art* (Barcelona, 2016), 124–135.

<sup>10</sup> National Archives of the Netherlands, The Hague [henceforth: NL-HaNA], Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:1, 3. Population estimates are drawn from Wim Klooster, “Jews in Suriname and Curaçao,” in Paolo Bernardini, Norman Fiering (eds.), *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West, 1450–1800* (New York, 2001), 350–368, see 353, 355. Klooster believes that by the middle of the eighteenth century, the number of Jewish families in Willemstad was nearly half that of white non-Jews.

<sup>11</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223. Selomoh Vaz Farro was the brother of Sarah's mother. Marriage between uncles and nieces

Vaz Farro, was now gravely ill and had been for some time—so ill that the couple had twice been granted a conditional divorce in the preceding year by Haham da Fonseca in expectation of Selomoh Vaz Farro's imminent demise.<sup>12</sup> How was it, then, that an elderly man on his deathbed—whom two doctors had declared impotent—could impregnate his wife?<sup>13</sup>

Selomoh Vaz Farro claimed in a sworn statement that, one evening several months earlier, he had “found the strength” to have relations with his wife.<sup>14</sup> But this seemed unlikely to many within and outside the Portuguese Jewish community. Instead, suspicion immediately fell on Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. The suspect, da Costa, Jr., and his father were prominent within the community and da Costa, Sr. had even been treasurer of the synagogue between 1771 and 1772.<sup>15</sup> Abraham was himself childless but there seemed to be no doubt in anyone's mind that despite his lack of children with his wife, Gracia de Jeudah Leao, he could be the father of Sarah Pardo's unborn baby. Indeed, the charges seemed so credible that the *parnassim* excommunicated Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. and Sarah Pardo soon after Yom Kippur in October of 1775.<sup>16</sup>

was not uncommon within the Portuguese Jewish community. It still seems to have been practiced among some Jews of Moroccan descent living in Israel until relatively recently. See, e.g., K. Fried, A. M. Davies, “Some Effects on the Offspring of Uncle–Niece Marriage in the Moroccan Jewish Community in Jerusalem,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 26 (1978), 1:65–72.

<sup>12</sup> This divorce would have freed Sarah Pardo of the obligation to contract a levirate marriage to her brother-in-law. Apparently, Selomoh Vaz Farro had recovered sufficiently enough for Fonseca to revoke the first conditional divorce decree. When Selomoh Vaz Farro's condition worsened again, Fonseca issued a second divorce decree. Conditional divorce decrees in the Portuguese Jewish communities of both Curaçao and Suriname had mandatory expiration dates; hence the necessity for two decrees in Selomoh Vaz Farro's case.

<sup>13</sup> The physicians Joseph Capriles and Isaac Cardozo, Selomoh Vaz Farro's doctor, declared that Farro was not able to father a child. A Catholic surgeon, Manuel de Estrada, differed and cited the case of the sister of Spain's King Ferdinand VI. Isaac Samuel Emmanuel, Suzanne A. Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles* (Cincinnati, 1970), 1:271.

<sup>14</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:1, 10, 30v; 26:1. There is some evidence that this statement was coerced by Sarah Pardo and her mother.

<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel, Emmanuel, *History of the Jews*, vol. 1, 271.

<sup>16</sup> Most people tend to think of excommunication within Judaism as being as severe as the total ban on all communication with the person, such as Spinoza's famous sentence by the Amsterdam Portuguese Jewish community. In fact, excommunication or “banning” is a broad term that traditionally incorporated three levels of severity. There could be a variety of sentences such as banning someone from attending synagogue for a certain period of time, refraining from shaving his beard, sitting in a certain place in the synagogue, or paying a fine. See “Excommunication,” in Raphael Judah Zwi Werblowsky, Geoffrey Wigoder (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (Oxford, 1997), 242.

Abraham was fined 50 pesos and denied admittance to the synagogue. Sarah was fined 200 pesos, required to fast six times and forbidden contact with her husband.<sup>17</sup> The reasons for this harsher treatment are mysterious. It could possibly be rooted in the family history. Isaac Pardo, Sarah Pardo's father, had been one of the first community members excommunicated by Haham de Sola in the community-wide conflict that rocked the island two decades earlier. This dispute was, in many ways, a continuation of other, long-running, conflicts within the Curaçaoan community. Like so many of the quarrels that plagued eighteenth-century Portuguese Jews on Curaçao, the case twenty years before centered on delineating the powers of the Haham and *parnassim*. Disagreement arose when there was talk of building a new synagogue that would compete with the pioneering Mikve Israel. Two "opposition" leaders, Moses Penso and David Aboab, and those who supported them, including Isaac Pardo, were excommunicated.<sup>18</sup> Yet this is a somewhat unsatisfactory explanation. Sarah Pardo's father, Isaac Pardo, was one of the six richest Jewish people on the island, or at least he had been ten years before the events leading up to his daughter's excommunication.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it seems that he was not without influence or status.

Whatever the politics around Sarah Pardo's severer sentence may have been, Farro came to his wife's defense and called her accusers "rogues and thieves." Before he died a few months later, on 7 December 1775, Farro swore to Haham da Fonseca in front of witnesses Moses Naar and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Sr. that he was the father of Sarah Pardo's unborn child.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the *parnassim* let the excommunication stand. This may have had to do with a desire to uphold community norms because the case was so well-known. There was no way it could be swept under the proverbial rug any longer. The whole island knew or would soon know

<sup>17</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.01, inv. no. 223:1, 1–25.

<sup>18</sup> For discussion of the case, see: NL-HaNA, Old Archive of Curaçao, 1.05.12.01, inv. nos. 825, 863/139; 1528; 818/47; 863/423; 867/79; 211; 180/132; 183/27; 821; NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. nos. 243/53–61; 70–83; 135–136; 180–182; 316; 596/1261; 597/584; 765a–68; 596/1261; 403; 357/15; Jessica Vance Roitman, "A flock of wolves instead of sheep": The Dutch West India Company, Conflict Resolution, and the Jewish Community of Curaçao in the Eighteenth Century," in Jane S. Gerber (ed.), *The Jews in the Caribbean* (Oxford, 2013), 85–105; and Emmanuel, Emmanuel, *History of the Jews*, vol. 1, 183–212.

<sup>19</sup> NL-HaNA, Old Archive of Curaçao, 1.05.12.01, inv. no. 916/201.

<sup>20</sup> Isaac Samuel Emmanuel, *Precious Stones of the Jews of Curaçao: Curaçaoan Jewry 1656–1957* (New York, 1957), 95–96.

of the alleged adultery, putting the reputation of the Jewish community at risk. Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. went to the synagogue, despite the ban, and was thrown out on the streets—literally—by Aron, one of Sarah Pardo's brothers.<sup>21</sup> Abraham had to resort to protection provided by the Governor of the island to walk the crowded streets of Willemstad.

And it was to the Governor and the civil authorities that both Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. turned to appeal their excommunication. The porous lines between communal autonomy and the jurisdiction of the colonial authorities were often utilized to litigants' advantage in Curaçao but also by Jewish communities in non-colonial spaces, as well.<sup>22</sup> On 3 July 1776, a little less than a year since the events unfolded, the Governor and the Island Council acquitted Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. and Sarah Pardo and ordered the *parnassim* to remove the excommunications, annul the fines, and have Sarah's son circumcised without the so-called discriminations that had been threatened. In the case of the sons of fathers who were thought to be immoral or unethical, certain words were omitted during the brit or ritual of circumcision.<sup>23</sup> However, this would not be the end of the case. In fact, it dragged on for almost two decades longer as Abraham da Costa Andrade, Sr. and Jr. litigated against the *parnassim* and the Chief of Police, Hubertus Coerman, who

<sup>21</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.01, inv. no. 223:23, 1–2.

<sup>22</sup> There is a vast literature on “forum shopping” by Jewish communities. A small selection is as follows: Roitman, “A flock of wolves instead of sheep”; Jessica Vance Roitman, Cátia Antunes, “A War of Words: Sephardi Merchants, (Inter)national Incidents, and Litigation in the Dutch Republic, 1580–1640,” *Jewish Culture and History* 16 (2015), 1:24–44; Ben-Ur, Roitman, “Adultery Here and There”; Aviva Ben-Ur, *Jewish Autonomy in a Slave Society: Suriname in the Atlantic World, 1651–1825* (Philadelphia, 2021); Evelyne Oliel-Grausz, “A Tale of Caribbean Deviance: David Aboab and Community Conflicts in Curaçao,” in Yosef Kaplan, Dan Michman (eds.), *The Religious Cultures of Dutch Jewry* (Leiden, 2017), 159–182; and ead., “Résolution des litiges commerciaux et circulations transnationales au début du XVIIIe siècle: l'affaire Pimenta-Nunes Pereira,” *Archives Juives* 47 (2014), 77–90. For a broader discussion, see the excellent work by Lauren Benton, Richard J. Ross (eds.), *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500–1850* (New York, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> See R. Selomoh Levy Maduro, *Brit Yitshak* (Amsterdam, 1768), 14b for these discriminations. The *Brit Yitshak* is a compendium of texts to be read the night before a circumcision and serves as a guide to the order of the ceremony. It is an interesting text for looking at the view of Caribbean Jewry toward enslaved people. Levy Maduro's text contained blessings for circumcising a slave but made it obsolete in the phrasing and language he employed, implying that slave ownership was something from the time the Temple was in existence and no longer relevant. Levy Maduro's was related to the slave owning family on Curaçao so could not have been unaware that the ownership of enslaved people was not just something from the past. For a discussion of this text and its implications, see Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2004), 225–226.

had refused to accept the Governor's verdict in the case. This ongoing litigation occasioned a conflict within the synagogue between the *parnassim* and *adjuntos* [management board], and was still unresolved as of 1794, by which time Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. had left the island and settled in Jamaica.<sup>24</sup> Fascinating as this legal back and forth is, for the purposes of this discussion, I will focus not on all the legal maneuvering surrounding the case, but, rather, on what Sarah and Abraham's suspected adultery can tell us about privacy. It would seem that real privacy, following the OED's definition as being "freedom from interference or intrusion" especially for illicit activities, was most often readily attainable only outdoors.

### The source of the affair: Letters, evidence, and language

How do we know about what Sarah and Abraham were up to in their (not so) private lives? We know because of the aforementioned legal wrangling and the traces it left in the archives of the colonial government on Curaçao where we find mention of it in letters sent to and from the Governor from the Second Dutch West India Company in the Netherlands and meetings of the Island Council.<sup>25</sup> The decisions reached on the case are found in the archives of the States General.<sup>26</sup> The discussions Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr.'s purported adultery occasioned are also found in the archives of the Portuguese Jewish Community in Amsterdam.<sup>27</sup> But what really sets this case apart and allows a glimpse of the "unpermitted familiarity" that these two people engaged in was their letters to each other.<sup>28</sup>

Sarah and Abraham wrote erotic epistles and, unfortunately for the adulterous lovers, these letters were intercepted by Isaac Pardo, Sarah's father. The news about, and contents of, the letters spread like wildfire on

<sup>24</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.01, inv. no. 223.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.* and NL-HaNA, Old Archive of Curaçao, 1.05.12.01, inv. nos. 918/206, 208–210; 218; 920/315–316, 471; 921/150–151, 164, 226; 923/838–839; 931/277; 954/4, 36–41, 44–48, 202; 958/130, 179–180, 214, 261; 959/315; 965/33, 124; 981/85–87.

<sup>26</sup> NL-HaNA, 1.01.02 Inventaris van het archief van de Staten-Generaal, (1431) 1576–1796.

<sup>27</sup> Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 1156 Archief van de Portugees-Israëlietische Gemeente Curaçao, 1737–1899, 44 Stukken betreffende de zaak tegen Abraham da Costa d'Andrade, 1775–1791.

<sup>28</sup> For more information about so-called egodocuments and the Jewish community, see Michaël Green, "Public and Private in Jewish Egodocuments of Amsterdam (ca. 1680–1830)," in Green, Nørgaard, Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy*, 213–242.



the island. When Isaac Pardo was asked how this embarrassing news about his daughter could have become such public knowledge, he responded, "I've only let four of my friends see them."<sup>29</sup> This should remind us that gossip did not appear to be a particularly female activity, despite the stereotypes that permeate thinking on the topic, as will be discussed below. It is also clear that the private very soon became public in such a small and closely-knit community. This damning correspondence would become the centerpiece in the case against Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. According to Isaac Pardo, these letters "came into my hands . . . from a black girl I came across."<sup>30</sup> In fact, this black girl was Antonia, employed by Isaac Pardo himself to serve his daughter, and she was likely forced into handing over her mistress' private correspondence. These incriminating love letters were written in the island's Creole language, commonly known today as Papiamentu, but in the colonial government's sources referred to as *neger spraak* (Negro speech). They were especially damning because they provided actual evidence of an extramarital affair and compelled the *parnassim* of the synagogue to act, in part because the contents of the letters had become so widely known to both Jews and non-Jews in the city. These letters formed the lynchpin of the various accusations against the couple, including an attempted abortion.

As Portuguese Jews from families that had been on the island of Curaçao for generations, Sarah and Abraham might have been expected to communicate with each other in Portuguese, the language of most of the synagogue's records and of their ethno-religious community. Or one might have thought that they would write to one another in Dutch, the language of colonial authority. Instead, they wrote and apparently spoke to each other in Papiamentu, a Caribbean Creole that emerged from Iberian and African languages. The love letters of Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. are the oldest known documents written in Papiamentu, though the language was probably fairly well-established by the mid-eighteenth century and spoken much earlier.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.022, inv. no. 223:3, 6–7.

<sup>30</sup> The chain of transmission is related in *ibid.*, inv. no. 223:2, 7–10.

<sup>31</sup> Linda M. Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens, 2012), 214. Chapter 6 discusses aspects of creolization and Papiamentu. Jesuit Father Alexius Schabel noted that the blacks on the island spoke in their own language as early as 1704. Alexius Schabel, "Dagboek – Fragment van Pater Michael Alexius Schabel Societatis Jesu Missionaris op he eiland Curaçao loopend van 21 October 1707 tot 4 Februari 1708," NL-HaNA, and W. M. J. Brada, *Pater Schabel S.J. 1704–1713* (Willemstad, 1965?).



At least six of the witnesses in the scandal, including Jews, gave their testimony in what was termed *neegers Spraake*, a spelling variation on the *neger spraak* mentioned above. Sometimes, the testimony was transcribed in *creoles taal* (Creole language), presumably a synonym.<sup>32</sup> This does not mean that Portuguese was not used among Portuguese Jews on Curaçao. Most of the existing records of the case come from the Dutch colonial administration not from the Portuguese community records, which were ordered to be sealed and were, likely and lamentably, destroyed. These would almost certainly have been in Portuguese. It would have been logical for the witnesses to give their testimony in Dutch instead of Portuguese if they were fluent in the language. But this still raises the question of the testimony in Papiamentu. The fact that Portuguese Jews—many or most of them well-to-do merchants—and their spouses felt more comfortable in giving their testimony in Papiamentu than in either Portuguese or Dutch demonstrates how the language had begun to cross socio-economic, racial, religious, and ethnic lines. The prominent role that Papiamentu played in the unfolding events of the adultery case between Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. vividly substantiates Linda Rupert's assertion of a widespread creolization of the island by the latter part of the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Many of the witnesses who gave their testimonies in Dutch revealed their knowledge of Papiamentu by repeating the conversations between blacks they heard on the streets.<sup>34</sup> Hearing news "on the streets," in whatever language, is illustrative of the very public nature of this ostensibly private affair.

What does it mean in terms of privacy that these letters were written in the "Creole language"? Does that indicate a higher level of intimacy? It is hard to say for sure. The fact that, as was described above, Papiamentu was so widely spoken (if not written) would seem to indicate that this was no "secret language" used by lovers hoping to obscure their affair. Instead, they chose to write in what was actually the dominant language on the island. This may indicate that they had no fear of their letters being made

<sup>32</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223: 3 (testimony of Jacob Aboab Cardoso and Benjamin Aboab Cardoso); 4 (testimony of Jacob Henriques Fereira); 5 (testimony of Aron Machora and Jacob Henriques Fereira); 6 (testimony of Debora and Abraham Keyser); 29 (testimony of Samuel d'Costa Andrade); 30 (testimony of Jeosuah Belmonte and Jacob Athias d'Neira).

<sup>33</sup> Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband*, 214.

<sup>34</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:15, 5-6; 29, 1-2; 30, 1-2.

public. Or it may also show that they assumed that the enslaved and free people of color who transported their epistles to each other could not read them. While they were not mistaken in this assumption, the fact that Papiamentu was the lingua franca of the island meant that when the letters did become public, everyone who could read them could also understand them worked against them. Ironically, it might have been better for the erstwhile lovers had they written in Dutch or Portuguese.

### In full view

Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. were regularly spotted strolling together outside the city gates. Willemstad was a small walled city barely containing the 12,000 or so inhabitants, who by the mid-eighteenth century had begun to spill beyond its gates and into neighborhoods such as Otrabanda or, “other side.” The name refers to the fact that it is on the other side of the Saint Anna Bay from Punda (or “the point”) which was the first main neighborhood of Willemstad. Perhaps they chose to meet outside the gates because of how crowded the streets were with sellers of fruit, vegetables, and meat. Or how dirty it was. Garbage was thrown in the Saint Anna Bay, over the walls of the city into the Waaigat, or just dumped outside the walls. Even by the standards of the time, the smell was considered bad and enslaved people were provided to clean up the garbage on the streets because, “the stench of the garbage can cause contagious sicknesses.”<sup>35</sup> Chamber pots were dumped willy nilly in the streets causing distress to passersby.<sup>36</sup> And the stench of sea turtles who were slaughtered and eaten as a staple dish by much of the population permeated the quayside of the city, so much so that one of the island’s governors forbade it because, “[it] has caused in the streets of this city such as on the quayside a vehement stink that is unbearable in the Summer.”<sup>37</sup>

Yet despite these unsanitary conditions, it is more likely that Sarah and Abraham chose to meet outside the city gates because they thought it might accord them a bit more privacy for their rendezvous than meeting in the city itself. Most urban dwellers spent some part of the day moving out

<sup>35</sup> J. A. Schiltkamp, J. Th. de Smidt, *West Indisch plakaatboek* (Amsterdam, 1973), 2:101, no. 66.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 103, no. 67.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 167, no. 119.

of doors in streams of people.<sup>38</sup> This was certainly the case in Willemstad. Sarah, Abraham, and many of their acquaintances seem to have spent a fair amount of time outside, where they frequently ran into people they knew. As Abraham described in one of his letters to Sarah, “At seven o’clock I wandered to Pietermaai [one of the newer districts in Willemstad], until the wall [city walls] until you were going to arrive. There I met Uncle Lou with Sara Merna.”<sup>39</sup> Sarah wrote back to him expressing her relief that she had been late to their meeting and that they had not been seen by Lou and Sara. She then mentioned that Abraham had “passed [me] without coming to [me]” on the street the day before.<sup>40</sup> Though they were part of this mass of people on the streets, they were cautious not to “come to each other”; i.e., be seen talking to each other too openly, in the city itself.

They were clearly not cautious enough in their behavior. Sarah Pardo’s father was paid a visit by the unnamed widow of Mr. Johannes Clements. Mrs. Clements came to his house to tell him that she

was on the corner of [her] balcony sitting and was looking toward the house of the widow of Abraham Visser when [she] saw Sarah [Pardo] on the balcony holding a banana . . . making several gestures with it toward [Abraham] da Costa [Andrade, Jr.] who was sitting across from her [Sarah Pardo]. He answered her with a rosebud, and he moved toward her, and they both moved a bit inside, embracing each other.<sup>41</sup>

This visit and other similar embarrassing social calls brings to the fore an intimacy between the Jewish and Protestant members of Curaçaoan society.

Despite the name of streets like De Joode Kerkstraat (Jewish Church Street), there was no “Jewish Quarter” in the town. As one travel account had it, “The number of Jews is very evident. They live all over the city and enjoy all possible freedom to move about.”<sup>42</sup> Jews, Protestants, and Catholics all lived cheek to jowl with each other.<sup>43</sup> In this way, Curaçao was similar to other Dutch Antillean territories.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> David Vincent, *Privacy: A Short History* (Cambridge, 2016), 10.

<sup>39</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:1, 26. All quotes from the archival sources have been translated by the author of the article, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. no. 223:2, 24.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. no. 223:2, 14–16.

<sup>42</sup> Paddenburgh, *Beschrijving*, 18–19.

<sup>43</sup> Buddingh’, *Van Punt en Snoa*, 139–147. There were very few white Catholics. Most Catholics were enslaved or free people of color.

<sup>44</sup> Suriname’s “Jodensavanne,” a Jewish agricultural settlement deep in the interior of the colony, was an exception. Paramaribo, the capital and only town of any real size, does not seem to have had a Jewish Quarter either.

Though we cannot be sure where the Pardos or the Andrades lived, most Jews lived in Punda, the oldest part of Willemstad. This was closest to the commercial center and most Jews, such as the Pardos, were engaged in trade. As the eighteenth century progressed, a growing number of Protestants moved to the new residential areas of Otrabanda, Pietermaai, and Scharloo. In 1707, the Protestants had outnumbered the Jews in seven of the eight main streets, even in the Joodestraat (Jews Street). By 1789, 860 Jews and 658 Protestants were living in the old part of Willemstad. Almost seven of every eight urban Jews (84%) then resided in Punda (see Table 1).<sup>45</sup> This physical proximity between Jews, Christians, enslaved, and free people of color not only led to a certain degree of intimacy, but also highlights that, as historian David Flaherty showed for another colonial space—New England—during the same chronology.”<sup>46</sup>

Table 1. Urban distribution of social groups, Curaçao, 1789 (percentage)

	Protestants	Jews	Servants	Free non-whites	Enslaved people
Old Town “Punda”	32.9	84.1	46.1	17.3	51.2
Otrabanda	29.6	7.8	27.8	53.7	29.5
Pietermaai and Scharloo	37.5	8.1	26.1	29	19.3
Total	100.00	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Adapted from the “General survey of Curaçao and dependent islands, Appendix no. 16: Report of private houses,” NL-HaNA, 1.05.02 Inventaris van het archief van de Directie ad Interim, [1791–1792]; Raad der Koloniën, [1792–1795], (1773) 1791–1795 (1796), 120. Cited in Klooster, “Jews in Suriname and Curaçao,” 355.

Sarah and Abraham were aware of this surveillance which is no doubt why they tried to evade it by meeting in the evening. According to a few testimonies, they had even arranged rendezvous during the small hours of the morning. A witness testified that two or three times a week Sarah sent a black boy, named Domingo, to get Abraham in the evenings around ten o’clock and bring him to her. The witness swore that Abraham came disguised, though apparently not disguised well enough. In fact, as various

<sup>45</sup> Buddingh’, *Van Punt en Snoa*, 78. See also Klooster, “Jews in Suriname and Curaçao,” 354.

<sup>46</sup> David Harris Flaherty, “Privacy in Colonial New England, 1630–1776” (unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1967), 148.

people would later assert, they recognized him as he was led by Domingo to where Sarah Pardo waited for him. Nor was the lovers' ploy of having Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. return to his home before first light effective. Many people apparently saw him creep through the town at four in the morning.<sup>47</sup>

That Sarah and Abraham ought they would not be observed would seem to show an almost willful ignorance of where they lived. Most houses had a balcony, where, as one eighteenth-century visitor to Willemstad noted, "people sit and sleep to escape the heat. There are no glass windows but shutters so that the air might flow through and cool the houses."<sup>48</sup> It could hardly be surprising, then, that in a tropical climate, where many people slept on their balconies or with shutters thrown open, in a town where the residences were built right next to each other, Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. would be seen scurrying through the streets on his way home. Sarah Pardo certainly did not help matters when she declared to a mulatto woman (as free people of color were often referred to as) whom she met on the streets, "Everyone says I'm pregnant . . . I'm going to walk the streets now to show them that I'm not!"<sup>49</sup> Considering how crowded the streets were, Sarah Pardo's remark was certain to be overheard. And it was. In short, gossip about their relationship was rife and there was plenty of material to work with.

### **"There are no secrets here"**

Sexual conduct was perhaps the single most important piece of information about a third party, as one deponent testified. As he told it, "There are no secrets here."<sup>50</sup> Gossip related to intimate behavior, he asserted, had always circulated on Curaçao, whether among men or women, or between Jews, Protestants, enslaved people, or free people of color.<sup>51</sup> In the Sarah

<sup>47</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:7, 2.

<sup>48</sup> J. H. Hering, *Beschrijving van het eiland Curaçao en de daar onder hoorende eilanden, Bon-Aire, Oroba en Klein Curaçao; benevens een kort bericht, wegens het gesprongen schip* (Amsterdam, 1779), 48. This is a different context for balconies than, for instance, in early modern Europe, where a balcony could often be a place to be part of, but apart from, the crowds below and was often a sign of elite status. See Valeria Viola, "Secret Routes and Blurring Borders: The New Apartment of Giuseppe Papè di Valdina (Palermo, 1714–1742)," in Green, Nørgaard, Bruun (eds.), *Early Modern Privacy*, 401–422.

<sup>49</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:4, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. no. 223:2, 32 (testimony of Isaac da Silva Curiel).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. no. 223:2, 32.

Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. scandal, people of African descent, whether enslaved or free, played a central role in information transmission or, what might be less positively termed, gossip. Even those unrelated to the families in question enjoyed a detailed familiarity with the case.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Samuel da Costa Andrade learned of his brother's suspected adultery when he overheard two black women gossiping in a narrow Willemstad passageway.<sup>53</sup> Other deponents admitted that they had listened in on conversations about the scandal from blacks circulating in the marketplace and on the streets.<sup>54</sup> All of which brings to the fore one of the main features of this case: the entanglement of enslaved and manumitted peoples in the daily life of the Portuguese Jews.

Curaçao was a society based on the plantation economy, though it was not itself a plantation society, in contrast to much of the rest of the Caribbean. Curaçao is dry and arid and is unsuited to the cultivation of more than the most basic foodstuffs. Little wonder, then, that the Spaniards originally dubbed Curaçao and its neighboring islands of Bonaire and Aruba *Islas Inútiles*, or "useless islands." The semi-arid climate meant that Curaçao developed an economy with far fewer plantations than other Caribbean islands, and those that existed there were not profitable. In fact, plantations on Curaçao, known as country houses (or *landhuizen* in Dutch), were generally maintained to provide status rather than income.<sup>55</sup> The economy was based on trade and transshipment due to the excellent harbor. For instance, most enslaved people brought to Curaçao were intended to be sold on other islands in the Caribbean or on the South American mainland. Thus, there was a niche for Jewish merchants, most of whom traded with the nearby English and French colonies, but particularly with the Venezuelan and Colombian coasts.

The Jewish presence on the island was long-standing and stable, and Jewish participation in the slave economy included not just trade but also slaveholding and slave concubinage. In this, Jews on Curaçao were little different than their non-Jewish colonial counterparts. On Curaçao, the enforced intimacy between the enslaved and their owners was particularly

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., inv. no. 223:2: 29; 2, 4–8; 10; 4, 1; 5, 102; 15, 3; 29, 1–2; 30, 1–2.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., inv. no. 223:29, 1–2.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., inv. no. 223:15, 4–5; 30, 1–2.

<sup>55</sup> Alejandro Felipe Paula, *From Objective to Subjective Social Barriers: A Historico-Philosophical Analysis of Certain Negative Attitudes among the Negroid Population of Curaçao* (Curaçao, 1972); Dolf Huijgers, Lucky Ezechiëls, *Landhuizen van Curaçao en Bonaire* (Amsterdam, 1992); F. J. van Wel, "Oude landhuizen op Curaçao," *Schakels* 54 (1968), 12–19.

high due to how crowded Willemstad was. The owners of enslaved people and the enslaved people themselves were in constant contact.<sup>56</sup> As historian Jonathan Schorsch notes, “Physically, commercially, sexually, and socially, slaves and owners shared, however unequally, the same world, expressing differing kinds of loyalty and enmity toward one another.”<sup>57</sup>

Thus, whether enslaved or free, these people who worked and lived with the families had many opportunities for surveillance, and it was assumed that they would acquire intimate knowledge of what happened in the household. For example, when a servant in his early twenties appeared in a New England court in 1657 to testify concerning his master’s estate, he prefaced his testimony with the explanation that “I beinge his servant I am privie to some things.”<sup>58</sup> Servants or, as was often the case in Curaçao, enslaved people knew what took place in their households and some were not reluctant to gossip. In the testimony, people of color emerge as major actors and information transmitters. Informally, they absorbed and spread gossip across communal boundaries. They were called upon to transmit messages, as Antonia did with the ill-fated letters. As we saw, Domingo was dispatched to bring Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. to Sarah Pardo in the evenings. Isaac Pardo learned that his daughter had been seen by enslaved people having sexual intercourse on a chair in his house. Sarah Pardo also sent gifts such as porcelain cups to Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. by means of the people they enslaved.<sup>59</sup>

On other occasions, enslaved and free people of color played advisory roles to the parties involved, showing that little could be kept from those living in such close proximity to one another. As tensions mounted in the Pardo household where it seems Sarah and her husband were living at the time, both friends and the family’s domestic slaves attempted to broker a peaceful solution to this untenable situation. Isaac’s good friend, Dr. Joseph Capriles, seconded by Isaacs “house slaves,” persuaded him to allow his daughter to move to another house he owned, conveniently outside the city gates, and presumably rather less in the public eye and marginally more private.<sup>60</sup> The house slaves, although nameless, are listed

<sup>56</sup> Jessica Vance Roitman, “‘A Mass of Mestiezen, Castiezen, and Mulatten’: Contending with Color in the Netherlands Antilles, 1750–1850,” *Atlantic Studies* 14 (2017), 3:399–417.

<sup>57</sup> Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 261.

<sup>58</sup> Flaherty, “Privacy in Colonial New England,” 119, n. 47.

<sup>59</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:22, 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. no. 223:19, 3.



alongside Capriles—Isaac’s long-time family friend, business partner, and prominent fellow Portuguese Jew—as key participants in persuading Isaac to allow his daughter to change her domicile.<sup>61</sup>

Free people of color also appear in positions of intimacy or even friendship with Sarah and Abraham, and other Portuguese Jews. Sarah was well enough acquainted with the unidentified mulatto woman she encountered on the streets of Willemstad to declare vehemently that she was not pregnant, as was described above. She also discussed with this woman her feelings for her ailing husband. She had “been hoping for two or three years for her husband to die... or for lightening to strike him.”<sup>62</sup> That these statements were made to a mulatto woman and that no one in the ensuing civil or religious litigation seemed surprised is again indicative of a level of familiarity between the free colored and Portuguese Jewish populations that has not heretofore been explored for Curaçao’s Jewish community.<sup>63</sup> In general, it is not surprising that there was little to be kept private from enslaved people and house servants. This had been the case throughout times and places. The material and social interdependency of households demanded a level of shared knowledge about their circumstances.

Yet it was not just enslaved or free people of color employed in the Pardo or Andrade households who shared this knowledge. Members of the Portuguese Jewish community were certainly privy to information about the affair, as were other members of Curaçaoan society, as we saw with the Protestant Mrs. Clements’ visit to Isaac Pardo to reveal and, perhaps, revel in retelling the obscene gestures she had observed Pardo’s daughter making on the shadowy balcony. Acquaintanceship of everyone with everybody else, the dominance of personal relations, and the subjection of the individual to continuous observation by the community were all hallmarks of

<sup>61</sup> Dr. Joseph Capriles was a prominent member of the Portuguese Jewish community on Curaçao. He was listed as one of the wealthiest members of the community in 1769. See Emmanuel, Emmanuel, *History of the Jews*, vol. 1, 255; NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:4, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> There is obviously secondary literature that discusses sexual liaisons between white Portuguese Jewish fathers and non-Jewish women of color, but these sources highlight the sexual and financial utility of such relations and do not consider friendship or trust. See, e.g., Eva Abraham-Van der Mark, “Marriage and Concubinage among the Sephardic Merchant Elite of Curaçao,” in Janet Henshall Momsen (ed.), *Women and Change in the Caribbean: A Pan-Caribbean Perspective* (London, 1993), 38–49. Schorsch’s *Jews and Blacks* does look at these relationships with more nuance.

early modern colonial societies.<sup>64</sup> Isaac drew upon these personal relations in a vain attempt at social control for his wayward daughter. He had his sons Aron Pardo or Mordechai Pardo stand outside her house in the late afternoon or evening around sunset to prevent any meetings. But it was not just immediate family who were involved in surveilling Sarah. Isaac Pardo asked Debora or Rachel Keijser (sometimes rendered as Keyser) to “keep her company”; i.e., observe her and prevent her meeting with Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr.<sup>65</sup>

The custom of Curaçaoans to walk about, either to escape the heat or to meet neighbors, meant that little in this crowded town could escape observation. It was normal for people to pay visits on one another. Visiting was a continuous pastime in colonial society and dairies were filled with notes of the exchange of visits.<sup>66</sup> It seems that while calling upon their friends and acquaintances, much was overheard in the Pardo household by would-be visitors who lurked outside the door listening to what transpired within. Sarah Pardo and her father were overheard more than once arguing loudly by people who had come by, supposedly to pay a visit.<sup>67</sup> Debora de Semolah Levy Maduro and Abraham Keijser declared that on Wednesday of 18 October 1775 they were outside the door of the house belonging to Isaac Pardo and Abigael Pardo when Sarah Pardo and her husband Selomoh Vaz Farro were inside. Even with the door closed they heard Sarah say, “Monchie, Monchie [a nickname or term of endearment], I beg you for my honor.” And they heard him answer, “Yes, but if your father wants it [a declaration as to the legitimacy of the unborn child], how shall I do it because I cannot swear it?”<sup>68</sup> If neighbors could not be seen, then, the sense of hearing was called into play. This was especially true in the centers of towns like Willemstad where the houses were close together. The quarrels of husbands and wives and, by extension, other family members were fair game for public consumption and discussion.<sup>69</sup>

As Ferdinand Schoeman writes, “Gossip as a social is private communication in the sense that it is not addressed to an unrestricted audience.

<sup>64</sup> Flaherty, “Privacy in Colonial New England,” 17.

<sup>65</sup> It is not clear what their relationship to each other is, though the context implies they are mother and daughter. Keyser is a Sephardic name on Curaçao, despite sounding Ashkenazi. See Emmanuel, Emmanuel, *History of the Jews*, vol. 2, 921–922.

<sup>66</sup> Flaherty, “Privacy in Colonial New England,” 56.

<sup>67</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:3, 45.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Flaherty, “Privacy in Colonial New England,” 151.

To this extent, privacy and gossip converge in strictures on disclosure.<sup>70</sup> The communal nature of many colonial activities, the dependence upon oral communications, and the relative absence of formal methods of dispensing news gave spice and urgency to gossip.<sup>71</sup> This reinforces what Frederick G. Bailey has described as the “quality of intimacy” in small communities and what Max Gluckman famously argued when he asserted that gossip helps to maintain the unity and the morality of the groups involved in it.<sup>72</sup> In the Jewish community of Curaçao, just as in other societies with few other means of exchanging information, gossip functioned as a crucial means of transmitting vital data about others.<sup>73</sup> If it involved sexual conduct, as it very clearly did between Sarah and Abraham, it could also prove titillating and diversionary.

What makes the case of Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. particularly interesting is that it shows how little privacy there was in a household. The members of the household included extended kin as well as enslaved and free people of color. Everyone seems to have known what was being said and done within the walls of the household. It is difficult to determine if families such as the Pardos thought that information spreading was inevitable so they did not even try to conceal potentially destructive information from those who served them and shared their space with them. Or if, as the case also seems to point to, that they were on terms of intimacy with these enslaved and free people. The idea of using insider knowledge to gain favors or exert leverage on the families they served may have occurred to people such as Antonia or Domingo but the available sources are silent as to whether or not this happened. What is clear is that it was difficult to keep anything private, even if one should have wanted to.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Vincent, *Privacy*, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Flaherty, “Privacy in Colonial New England,” 166.

<sup>72</sup> See Frederick G. Bailey, “Gifts and Poison,” in Frederick G. Bailey (ed.), *Gifts and Poison: The Politics of Reputation* (Oxford, 1971), and Max Gluckman, “Gossip and Scandal,” *Current Anthropology* 4 (1963), 3:307–316.

<sup>73</sup> For oral forms of spreading information, particularly through gossip, see: Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (Chicago, 1985); Jörg R. Bergmann, *Discreet Indiscretions: The Social Organization of Gossip* (New York, 1993); Melanie Tebbutt, “Women’s Talk? Gossip and Women’s Words in Working-Class Communities, 1880–1939,” in Andrew Davies, Steven Fielding (eds.), *Workers’ Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford 1880–1939* (Manchester, 1992), 49–73.

## Inside out

That gossip was rife about Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. is clear. The lovers gave friends, acquaintances, family, slaves, servants, and seemingly anyone walking through the streets of Willemstad more than enough to work with. All of which begs the question: why were they conducting their affair out in the open? Why not quietly behind closed doors? This question is central and brings us to the core of the argument. Counterintuitive as it may seem to people living in the twenty-first century, in an early modern (colonial) household, there was no privacy inside, meaning that, in turn, there was marginally more privacy outside. As David Flaherty's study of colonial New England reminds us, adultery was most often committed in the fields.<sup>74</sup>

Mary Thomas Crane's examination of early modern England shows that sources from the period (including poems, plays, diaries, memoirs, and public records) suggest that privacy for illicit activities (such as sex, gossip, and political plotting) was most often found outdoors, as we have clearly seen in the Pardo–Andrade affair.<sup>75</sup> Crane's findings are confirmed by the extensive research of Julie Hardwick for early modern France where "The city's public spaces, exterior and interior, were opportunities for . . . particular patterns of youth heterosociability and heterosexuality for both couples and for communities."<sup>76</sup> The lack of truly private space in homes of the relatively wealthy (where servants or enslaved people were ubiquitous, and often slept in the same bedchamber as family members) and in poorer households (often one large open space shared by the whole family and sometimes animals) left the outdoors as the only place where real privacy, as we understand it, was possible. Few houses were large enough for the emotional and physical lives of the inhabitants to be shielded from those who shared the accommodation.<sup>77</sup>

This was certainly the case in the small houses of even the wealthiest of merchants in Willemstad—and the Pardo family was wealthy. A travel account written at almost exactly the same time as the scandal was taking places describes a house much like the one the Pardos would have lived in:

<sup>74</sup> Flaherty, "Privacy in Colonial New England," 152.

<sup>75</sup> Crane, "Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces."

<sup>76</sup> Julie Hardwick, "Peril Stories: Licit Intimacy, Space, and Community Safeguarding," in ead., *Sex in an Old Regime City: Young Workers and Intimacy in France, 1660–1789* (New York, 2020), Chapter 2.

<sup>77</sup> Vincent, *Privacy*, 14.

One cannot say that the City [Willemstad] is built with the order that our Dutch cities are laid out in; nevertheless, they do catch the eye. They are mostly built of stone and covered in plaster, one or two stories high, depending on the means of the owner; on the ground floor is a storehouse that is usually quite simple.<sup>78</sup>

A house of the time would likely have had two separate spaces on both the ground and the first floor. Many would have had a second floor with a fireplace or stove where there likely would have been a combination eating and sleeping space as well as the ubiquitous balcony.<sup>79</sup>

We can confirm this general layout of the house from the sources of the Pardo and Andrade case. The bottom floor seems to have been reserved for business or receiving visitors, or both. Isaac detailed how he first knew that something was amiss and that his daughter and Abraham were involved in an illicit relationship. Abraham da Costa Andrade, Sr. and Jr. came to the Pardo house to go over Isaac Pardo's business accounts, because Isaac had employed them as some sort of bookkeepers or accountants. Sarah was there with her husband, Selomoh Vaz Farro. When Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. came in, however, she very overtly got up from where she was sitting and sat next to him.<sup>80</sup>

As opposed to this public meeting space, the upstairs was less public. In one deposition, Sarah Pardo described how her "sister-in-law went to sleep upstairs" in their house.<sup>81</sup> That the upstairs was a private or at least marginally less public space in the house is confirmed by another description of events occurring in the Pardo household when Sarah's husband, Selomoh Vaz Faro, left the main room and asked Isaac to come upstairs to his room to talk about his wife's distressing behavior.<sup>82</sup>

That the upstairs was not a place to receive visitors is clear. But that does not mean it was in any way private. Isaac Pardo either eavesdropped or could not help overhearing a black woman talking with his daughter in an upstairs room. He heard them talking about Sarah Pardo having sex with Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. on a chair on the balcony of the house. This, she said, was when she became pregnant. He walked in the room where they were talking and closed the door, but tellingly remarked,

<sup>78</sup> Hering, *Beschryving*, 48.

<sup>79</sup> Buddingh', *Van Punt en Snoa*, 139.

<sup>80</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:3, 45.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. no. 223:8, 32.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. no. 223:3, 43.

“Even now we cannot be sure we are alone.”<sup>83</sup> As we have discussed, the presence of servants and enslaved people meant that even a closet could provide only minimal privacy. As Joachim Eibach notes for early modern European households,

The willingness to accept other actors into one’s domestic realm, either quasi-permanently, as with servants or close relatives who lived with the family, or temporarily, as relatives, friends and guests, is striking . . . A high degree of accessibility and visibility of the domestic was . . . a relevant feature of the early modern open house.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, the houses contained multiple family members. In the Pardo household, Sarah and her husband lived with her parents, and it is likely that at least one of her brothers and, possibly, his wife and children, as well.<sup>85</sup> These were not large houses and it would have been impossible to keep much quiet. As David Flaherty summed it up for colonial New England, “In the area of architecture and town planning, the chief colonial privacy problems existed on the inside rather than the outside of homes.”<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

Sarah and Abraham’s privacy problem was, indeed, inside the house. For an inhabitant like Sarah Pardo of this crowded, multifunctional household, the simplest means of conducting a conversation out of the sight and hearing of others was just to step outside. Outdoor spaces provided privacy for conversations that participants did not wish to be overheard. As historian Lena Cowen Orlin notes, “Many extramarital liaisons were

<sup>83</sup> It is likely that this woman was Xica. Sarah Pardo wrote that she had sent her slave, a woman called Xica, to a Spanish doctor named Manuel de Estrada to procure an abortifacient. NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.01, inv. no. 223:11, 1–2; 13, 1. Estrada later declared under oath that he was surprised that Sarah Pardo “trusted a black woman in business of such importance.” Ibid., inv. no. 223:11, 1–2. When Estrada refused Xica, Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. paid him a visit himself and was given certain herbs to end the pregnancy. NL-HaNA, *ibid.*, inv. no. 223:11, 1–2; 12, 1. Abraham da Costa Andrade Jr.’s attempt to procure abortifacients for his lover was a common response to an unplanned and possibly incriminating pregnancy.

<sup>84</sup> Joachim Eibach, “From Open House to Privacy? Domestic Life from the Perspective of Diaries,” in Joachim Eibach, Margareth Lanzinger (eds.), *The Routledge History of the Domestic Sphere in Europe, 16th to 19th Century* (London, 2020), 347–363, here 359.

<sup>85</sup> NL-HaNA, Tweede West-Indische Compagnie (NWIC), 1.05.01.02, inv. no. 223:8, 6.

<sup>86</sup> Flaherty, “Privacy in Colonial New England,” 85.

conducted in the house's most liminal spaces or, indeed, outside it."<sup>87</sup> In the packed urban milieu of Willemstad, life was as much led on the street as in the house, yet, ironically, it seems that seclusion, too, was most easily located out of doors. When solitude or anonymity were sought, Sarah and Abraham did not retire to their homes where such states could not be easily achieved. They obtained some privacy, particularly during evenings and around the Jewish holidays, by retreating into the streets or disappearing outside the walls of the city. When architecture could not satisfy certain privacy needs within a home, alternative solutions existed, namely meeting outside.

Early modern subjects such as Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. sought the conditions of being alone or free from public attention, as the OED defined privacy, for a range of reasons, including desire to elude discovery, desire to keep something secret, desire to avoid embarrassment, or all of these. Memoirs and other texts from the period associate gardens and the outdoors with private courtship.<sup>88</sup> Illicit sexual activity, excretory functions, treasonous plotting, and gossip are commonly and casually associated with outdoor spaces in early modern texts of all kinds, as Mary Crane's work demonstrates.<sup>89</sup> Focusing on indoor privacy, which accords most closely with our own conception of the private, may cause us to miss the very different spatiality and relation to the natural world that shaped early modern representations of privacy, as we have seen in the case of Sarah Pardo and Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. As Flaherty noted for colonial New England, "When all else failed, a person sought privacy in the open spaces."<sup>90</sup> Yet, as we have seen in the case just described, the out of doors was only marginally less public than the indoors. The lovers were frequently seen in each other's company, and these sightings fueled feverish speculation. Sarah Pardo's declarations on the streets about her actions and her feelings toward her husband were overheard and transmitted to others.

This underlines another remarkable feature of the case: the porous nature of what was considered public and private business or put another way, gossip. As Gluckman argued,<sup>91</sup> gossip can be a positive force in communities. While it can damage social unity, it can help reinforce bonds of

<sup>87</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford, 2007), 155.

<sup>88</sup> Crane, "Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces."

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Flaherty, "Privacy in Colonial New England," 143.

<sup>91</sup> Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal."



belonging and identity. It can also act as a mechanism for social control and buttress community norms. Gossip could be seen as a necessary process of embodying collective values and disciplining unacceptable behavior.<sup>92</sup>

This was certainly true of the Pardo and Andrade affair. Private information transmission—gossip—about the case both highlighted tensions in social relationships but also reinforced the norms of the Jewish community and eighteenth-century Curaçao society. Interestingly, as was shown by the fact that Isaac Pardo's (male) friends seem to have been the ones who spread the contents of the erotic epistles around the island, men were garrulous. This is not surprising given the vital role rumors played in the realm of business and government. Historian Han Jordaan details how rumors of involvement in illicit trade led to a major problem on the island of Curaçao between Governor Faesch and colonial official Johannes Heijliger.<sup>93</sup> If men were at least as eager to spread rumors and speculate upon people's behavior, it is possible that reputed sexual conduct was intertwined with commerce and politics, and that these spheres were not as separate as historians have heretofore thought.

Centuries later, the guilt of Abraham da Costa Andrade, Jr. and Sarah Pardo hardly matters. What makes it interesting today is the vivid light it throws on the dynamics between people. The Dutch colonial authorities' involvement in the case magnified long-standing tensions between Jewish communal autonomy and colonial hegemony. It also illustrates a gap in our understanding of what and how privacy operated in early modern (colonial) spaces. Privacy out of doors has yet to receive any systematic historical treatment.<sup>94</sup> Historians have paid less attention to the fact that real privacy, especially for illicit activities, was, until well into the eighteenth century, most often represented as readily attainable only outdoors.

<sup>92</sup> Vincent, *Privacy*, xxv.

<sup>93</sup> Han Jordaan, "Samuel Fahlberg (1758–1834): de biografische contouren van een veelzijdig man," in Maritza Coomans-Eustatia et al. (eds.), *De horen en zijn echo: verzameling essays opgedragen aan Dr. Henny E. Coomans ter gelegenheid van zijn afscheid van de Universiteit van Amsterdam op 9 September 1994* (Bloemendaal, 1994), 231–235.

<sup>94</sup> Vincent, *Privacy*, vi.

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