Social mobility and integration of Amsterdam Jews: the ethnic niche of the diamond industry, 1850-1940

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Summary

This dissertation explores the social mobility and integration patterns of Amsterdam Jews from the middle of the nineteenth century up to the eve of World War II. It puts the lives and careers of diamond workers, those who made a living in Amsterdam Jews' premier occupational niche, at the centre of this discussion. The dissertation analyses the information in the membership administration of the diamond workers' union and supplements this with reconstructed life courses of selected diamond workers, thus combining workers' private lives and career histories. It employs a comparative approach by contrasting the experiences of Jewish diamond workers with the trajectories of Gentile diamond workers and those of Jews and Gentiles in other occupational groups. In this way, the dissertation highlights the remarkable life courses of Amsterdam Jews and, in particular, those of Jewish diamond workers.

The first three chapters set the stage. Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical framework, historiography, and data used. It defines key concepts, operationalises the attribute 'Jewish,' and discusses how social mobility and integration are measured. Chapter 2 expands on the social, economic, and demographic developments in Amsterdam since the beginning of the nineteenth century before discussing Jews' changing position in the Dutch capital. Chapter 3 details the diamond industry, the focal point of the dissertation. It describes the origins of the Jewish ethnic niche, the formation of the diamond workers' union, highlights the union's significance for the uplifting of Jewish workers, and characterises the social dynamics and hierarchy among the industry's workers.

The next four chapters present comparative analyses of social mobility by ethno-religious background, sex, birth cohort, and social class across the life domains of work, marriage, residence, and education. Chapter 4 examines patterns of intergenerational mobility. In the nineteenth century, diamond workers stood out for their prevalent occupational following. By the end of the century, however, the industry had reached full capacity. Consequently, fewer sons of diamond workers followed in their fathers' footsteps. While Jewish diamond workers' sons commonly ended up in a higher social class than their parents, Gentile sons of diamond workers were characterised by greater class stability. In fact, Jewish sons of all class origins saw more upward mobility than their Gentile peers from the same walks of life. The same pattern is observed for parents—both fathers and mothers—and their offspring—sons and daughters—where both generations worked in the diamond industry. Here, the chapter also expands on the strikingly high rates of upward mobility among women in the diamond industry. Specialised in top positions located in small *ateliers* rather

than hazardous factories, Jewish and Gentile women born to diamond workers almost always worked in higher positions in the industry. Thus, the diamond industry was a driver of generational improvements in status for both Jews and women.

Marriages were another avenue for social mobility. Chapter 5 examines two key aspects of partner choice: the social class and ethno-religious background of one's spouse. The chapter shows that Amsterdam's Jews were more likely than Gentiles to marry partners from similar class backgrounds. The Jewish community was thus characterised by less social fluidity than members of the dominant non-Jewish society. Meanwhile, Jews increasingly married Gentile partners—a pattern that accelerated after 1890 due to the rise of the Social Democracy and the active role of Jews in it. Jewish diamond workers lagged in this regard. This finding is linked to differential exposure to non-Jews by occupational groups: Jewish diamond workers primarily interacted with other Jewish diamond workers. However, although intermarriage is a common proxy for integration, it did not always imply equality between partners. On average, intermarrying Jews came from significantly higher social status backgrounds than their Gentile spouses. This pattern is indicative of discrimination on the marriage market, although it declined from the late nineteenth century onward. Finally, the chapter reveals high degrees of occupational clustering in Jews' immediate social circles. Jewish grooms working as commercial proprietors, diamond workers, and in various unskilled occupations were especially likely to have fathers *and* fathers-in-law employed in the same fields. These concentrations could be beneficial for career progression but hampered occupational diversification among Jews, thus complicating familial support in times of need.

Chapter 6 demonstrates that many Jewish diamond workers managed to transition into new careers, nonetheless. This chapter compares life course career trajectories. Although diamond workers commonly worked for various employers over the span of their careers, they rarely changed job titles. Each specialisation demanded considerable skills and, thus, lengthy apprenticeships. They also faced significant hurdles on their paths to becoming entrepreneurs or employers; rough diamonds were expensive and competition among traders and factory owners fierce. Nevertheless, the instability of employment in this luxury industry made career changes commonplace. Roughly half therefore transitioned to new careers permanently, especially following long crises in the beginning of the twentieth century. Jews and Gentiles shifted to common occupations in their respective subgroups; trade and white-collar careers for Jews and other (semi-)skilled manual labour for Gentiles. Diamond workers hoping to remain employed in their field tried their luck in Antwerp, a strategy more common among Jews due to their greater cultural attachment to industry. Moreover, the chapter shows that careers directly affected integration: for Jews, lengthier careers in the diamond

industry lowered the likelihood of intermarriage and religious disaffiliation.

Upward mobility of Jews was not only visible in the occupations they held, but also through their choice of residence. Chapter 7 follows the residential histories of Jewish diamond workers. Until the nineteenth century, Jews clustered in the *Jewish Quarter*, a mostly impoverished area to the southeast of Amsterdam's city centre. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Jews increasingly left this quarter. Jewish diamond workers pioneered these relocations, purchasing homes in the newly constructed *Pijp* area or moving to the *Jewish Quarter*-adjacent *Plantage* and *Weesper* districts. Rising population densities necessitated further expansions of the city and Jews and Gentiles, facing similar housing pressures, concurrently moved to new areas in Amsterdam East. Consequently, growing segments of Jews lived in 'Mixed' neighbourhoods where both Jews and Gentiles were strongly represented. For the first time since their initial arrival in the seventeenth century, Jews, on average, no longer lived in districts where they comprised over half of the residents. As Amsterdam continued to expand, affluent Jews and Gentiles progressively moved to areas more aligned with their social standing. Thus, segregation increasingly occurred along class lines and was decreasingly based on ethno-religious background. Nonetheless, after new middle-class districts were built in other parts of the city, Gentile residents of mixed neighbourhoods started moving out, creating stronger Jewish concentrations in these areas. The chapter thus highlights the impressive spatial integration of Jews while emphasising the role of both Jews and Gentiles in sustaining segregation.

Chapter 8 extends the analyses to the next generation, examining educational attainment of the sons of the Jews and Gentiles studied throughout this dissertation. Unequivocally, Jewish sons were more likely to complete secondary and tertiary education than Gentiles. Gentile sons, in contrast, more often obtained vocational education, although such schooling was notably underreported for Jews. Jewish diamond workers especially invested more into their sons' education. Their union strongly promoted (self-)education, demonstrated by a library subject to nationwide envy. However, although Jewish sons enjoyed more education than their Gentile peers on average, they started their careers at the same levels, a pattern especially notable among office clerks. While this may be indicative of discrimination on the labour market, it could also reflect the nature of the labour market for young men and the limited networks of Jews in the office sphere.

The results from this dissertation apply to a number of disciplines in history and sociology. Importantly, it demonstrates that national and local social mobility rates can hide large subgroup differences which ought to be assessed in greater detail. For Jewish history, it underlines the value of comparative and quantitative approaches, contrasting the experiences of Jews and Gentiles, and men and women, within and across occupational groups and social classes. This approach has led to

a number of important new insights. First, Jews experienced rapid upward mobility since 1870. Initially, this socio-economic ascent was driven by the expanding diamond industry. In subsequent decades, Jews maintained this growth by investing in education, through the widening class of Jewish employers, and resulting from strides in societal integration. This connects to the second point: social mobility and integration were not inherently related. Not only could social mobility occur independently from integration, in the case of the diamond workers upward mobility hampered integration in several life domains—Jewish diamond workers had by far the lowest intermarriage rates of all Jewish occupational groups and rarely disaffiliated despite growing secularisation. In other words, integration was not always a precondition or outcome of socioeconomic improvements of Jews, although it could reduce labour market discrimination and diversify the occupational distribution of their social networks. Third, political emancipation and integration through the diamond workers' union and Social Democratic politics were crucial in forming the mindset of growth among the Jewish working-class. They encouraged Jewish workers to invest in their own human capital and the educational attainment of their next of kin with intergenerational benefits. Natural avenues for further research are to assess Jews' experiences in schooling and the role of Jewish employers and entrepreneurs in establishing labour markets that protected Jews from discrimination.