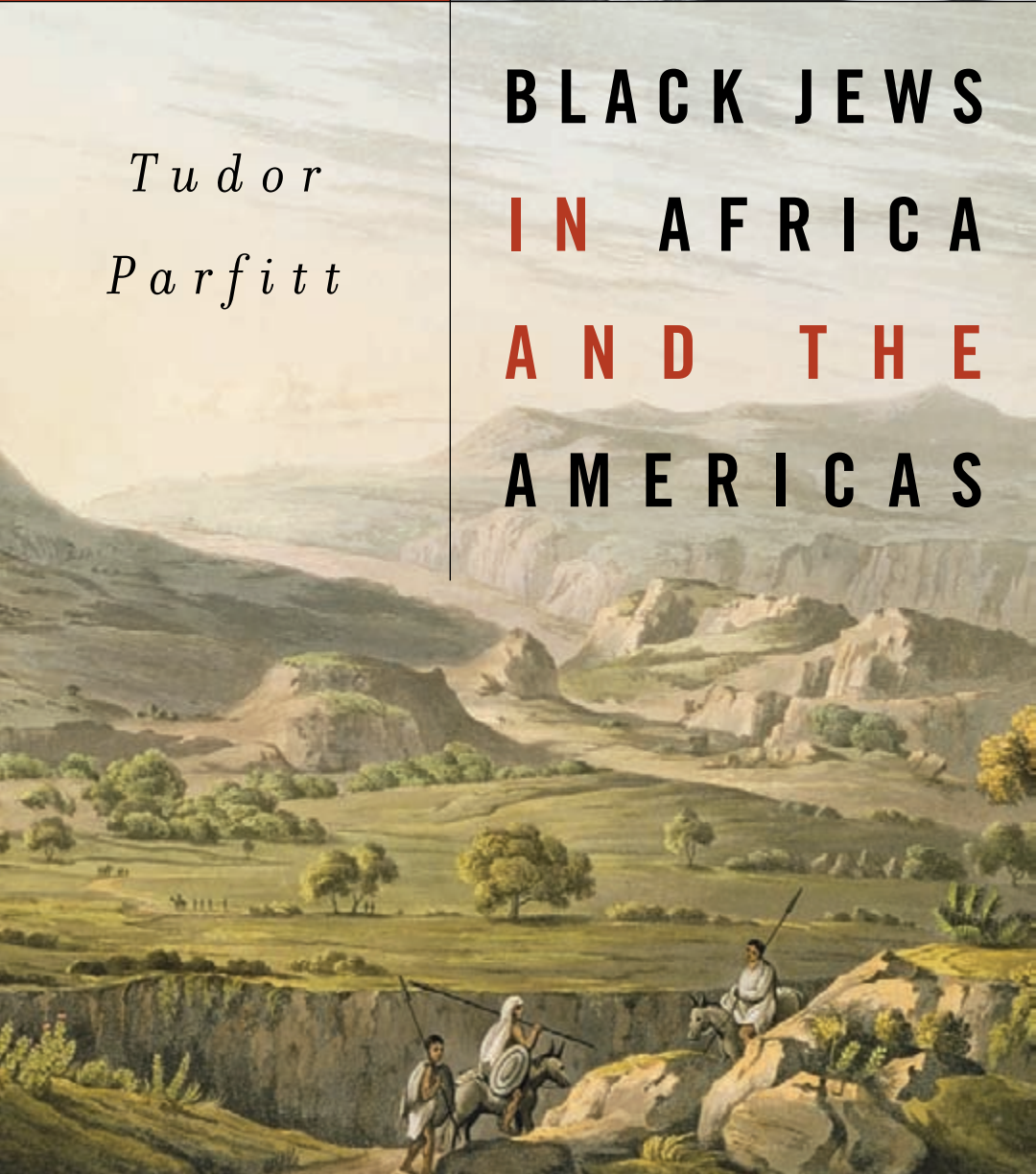




*Tudor
Parfitt*

**BLACK JEWS
IN AFRICA
AND THE
AMERICAS**



Black Jews in Africa and the Americas

THE NATHAN I. HUGGINS LECTURES

BLACK JEWS IN AFRICA AND THE AMERICAS

Tudor Parfitt

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, Massachusetts / London, England / 2013

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Parfitt, Tudor.

Black Jews in Africa and the Americas / Tudor Parfitt.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-674-06698-4 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Jews—Africa—History. 2. African Americans—Relations with Jews.
3. African American Jews—History. 4. Africa—History. 5. Africa—
Colonial influence—History. 6. Africa—Ethnic relations. 7. United
States—Ethnic relations. I. Title.

DS135.A25P368 2013

305.892'406—dc23

2012018667

FOR OLIVIA AND SEBASTIAN

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Preface

I first encountered black Jews¹ in any form, as far as I am aware, on November 22, 1984, when I found myself on the Sudanese border with Ethiopia. I was then lecturer in Modern Hebrew at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and this encounter changed the direction my future interests would take. I had been sent to the Sudan by the London-based Minority Rights Group, at the particular instigation of David Kessler, to look into accusations that the Ethiopian Jews (Falashas) or Beta Israel were being poisoned in the refugee camps along the border, which were full of mainly Christian Ethiopians fleeing the terrible famine of that year. On this day I witnessed the arrival of a group of emaciated, ragged Beta Israel at the refugee camp known as Um Raquba, and saw their bitter disappointment when it was explained to them that this poor makeshift camp was not, as they imagined, Jerusalem. These, then, were the first black Jews

I had come across, although their status as Jews was still being hotly contested in Israel and elsewhere. Later in the day I glimpsed the first stages of the Israeli attempt to save thousands of these impoverished and desperate people from famine and persecution.²

A few months later, having just written a book on this event—*Operation Moses*³—I was invited to the University of the Witwatersrand to give a paper on the Ethiopian Jews. During my talk, which was attended mainly by members of the white Jewish community, I noticed that at the back of the hall there were some shabbily dressed black men wearing yarmulkes. When I spoke with them afterward, they explained that they belonged to the Lemba tribe and that they were blood relatives, they thought, of the Ethiopian Falashas whose recent departure for Israel had been the subject of a great deal of media scrutiny in South Africa as elsewhere; and because of this kinship, they explained, they could unquestionably claim to be genuine Jews, which hitherto had been difficult to claim, as they had little proof outside their oral traditions. I was intrigued to see that the emaciated and desperate people I had seen in the Sudan the previous year were now acting as a legitimating model—as a “proof community” for others. But the idea that these men from Soweto had anything at all to do with the distant Beta Israel—except perhaps in some metaphorical sense—seemed historically impossible or near impossible, and my incredulity no doubt was apparent. To persuade me of their story the men asked me to go with them up to their villages in the Soutpansberg mountains and to see for myself that their links with the Beta Israel of the Ethiopian mountains and with other Jews in the world were not just figments of their historical imagination. Out of curiosity I accompanied them to some of the Venda villages where there were small concentrations of Lemba and after a few days was fairly sure that, even if in fact the supposed link with the Beta Israel was ahistorical, their customs and traditions had quite possibly something to do with the Semitic world: if their distant

links had been with Jews rather than Muslims it would have been surprising, because as far as I knew there was no record of Jews ever having settled in southeastern or central Africa until very recent times.

The following year I started writing a book based in large part on the Lemba's oral traditions. The Lemba claimed to be Jewish and to have come long before from a distant city called Sena, which they said was somewhere across the sea, somewhere in the north. They had come from Sena; they had crossed something or somewhere they called Pusela, and arrived in Africa where they had built a new city of Sena, perhaps more than once, and moved in to the areas around the famous Great Zimbabwe ruins in central Zimbabwe, before being scattered, as they put it, "among the nations."

My research took the form of a journey, some of it on foot, which followed the path taken by the Lemba, according to their traditions, across Africa. By the end of the book, which I called *Journey to the Vanished City*, I had been able to show that the tribe had come from the East African coast at some time in the past and that their traditions, songs, and prayers, their strange customs seemed indeed to be Semitic in some way. One of their traditions was that they had brought from Sena a drum with a carrying ring on each corner, which was carried by four priests, using two poles, as they marched across Africa. But the drum, which was also a lethal weapon, according to them—a weapon of mass destruction—associated with smoke, death, noise, and flame, as well as being an awesome musical instrument, exploded, and the priests were obliged to build a new one on the ruins of the old. Some old Lemba traditions had placed this incident at around 1600. This tradition, like many of their stories, seemed to resemble certain biblical narratives. Where did it come from? How had it inserted itself into the tribal narrative? I did not know.

My journey finally would take me no farther than the east coast of Africa. The sparse evidence in support of the Lemba oral traditions stopped at the coast. I had listened to endless recitations of tribal lore

and read what was to be read in the dried scattered bones of Arabic and Portuguese texts, but there was little meat on these bones—not enough, anyway, to give any real sense of the tribe’s ancient history. I finished my book without finding Sena—the “vanished city” of the title—and moved on. However, a year or two later, in the Yemen, where I was writing a history of the Jews of the Yemen called *Road to Redemption*,⁴ I unearthed a couple of interesting and quite unexpected clues that seemed to connect the Lemba to the Hadhramaut and which took me back to the question of their origins. And it was at this point and rather out of frustration that I turned to genetics—which *démarche* will be treated toward the end of this book.

The story of the Lemba’s genetic tests and their “scientific identification” as Jews was carried on the front page of the *New York Times*, as well as in countless other newspapers throughout the world, and was the subject of a number of television documentaries, including a Channel Four film in the UK, *The Children of Abraham*, and a NOVA film in the United States, *The Lost Tribes of Israel*,⁵ while the topic was featured by the *60 Minutes* program on CBS.

Since then, interest in the Lemba has not flagged, and there have been many more documentary films, books, newspaper articles, and so on. Similarly the exodus of the Ethiopian Jews to Israel several years before had been attended by massive worldwide publicity, and the study of the community had generated an impressive bibliography.⁶ Both issues were considered to be incredibly, *intensely* newsworthy. Why did these stories generate such media interest? Was it because the stories were about Jews? Or because they were about blacks? Or both? Was it because, at some deep level in Western consciousness, Jews are actually assumed to *be* black and that therefore these stories about black Jews could be taken as a final vindication of an age-old presumption? Or was it that people believe that Jews are *not* black at all and *cannot* be black and therefore that the idea of black Jews appeared more than usually quixotic—and therefore good

copy? Whatever the reason, this topic achieved worldwide coverage, and articles on the Lemba and Beta Israel have appeared in the world's major newspapers with some regularity. The topic touched a nerve in a way that none of the work with which I had hitherto been engaged had done. Somewhere at the nexus of these issues of history, prejudice, and convention there seemed to me to nestle aspects of Jewish and black history that had not been fully studied before.

The Jewish sigh and tear are close to me. I understand . . . them . . .
feel that these people are closer to the traditions of my race.

—Paul Robeson

1 / The Color of Jews

Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), who was burned at the stake in Rome in part for being one of the first to comprehend the infinite nature of the universe, and who was not, therefore, the least observant of men, suggested in 1591 that no one could possibly imagine that Jews and blacks have the same ancestry.¹ According to him Jews could not be black, blacks could not be Jews. They came from different worlds.² Bruno, who was from Nola, near Naples, knew something of Jews (although the last Jews were forced to leave Naples in 1541, and the city remained closed to Jews for almost two hundred years) and was famously critical of them.³ He must also have had familiarity with blacks, as in the late fifteenth century 83 percent of the large slave population in Naples were Africans.⁴ On the basis of what body of knowledge and interpretation did he assert

that the differences between Jews and blacks were so significant that these two peoples could not derive from the same stock?⁵

Traditional Christian teaching had maintained that all of mankind derived ultimately from monogenesis—from the union of Adam and Eve. Although subjects like anthropology are not usually considered to have been organized as academic subjects before the nineteenth century, the notions upon which these disciplines eventually drew developed during the late Renaissance and the early years of the scientific revolution and were certainly known to Bruno. Some of the foundations were laid in his own time during the sixteenth century, following the contacts that had been made with unfamiliar peoples in Africa and the New World from the fifteenth century on, and through efforts to understand the differences between Europeans and other peoples.⁶ Indeed, Bruno contributed to this body of anthropological knowledge. In an attempt to articulate the various divisions of mankind, Bruno devised a universal human taxonomy based uniquely on color. Jews were not black, therefore for Bruno they could have nothing to do with blacks. Following the Swiss medical writer Paracelsus (1493–1541), he turned his back on the Christian idea of monogenesis and came to the heretical conclusion that either God created more than one Adam, or that alternatively Africans were the descendants of some pre-Adamite race. Thus his effort at a classification, which made a distinction between Jew and black, based on color, forced him toward the theory of polygenesis and was one of the first statements of racial theory, which came to dominate the world in the period after the Enlightenment, when the Bible finally began to lose its stranglehold on Western understanding of the world.⁷

Had Bruno known a little more about Judaism, he might have realized that any black could in theory convert to Judaism, thus making a color classification between Jew and black a nonsense. It is true that according to the *Libro de las Leyes*, later called the *Siete Partidas*

of Alfonso X of Castile (1252–1284), Jews were forbidden to convert slaves to Judaism, even if the slave in question was a Moor. However, the fact that under this legislation any slave, having been so converted, would be freed would have acted as a powerful incentive for any slave to adopt the religion of his or her Jewish master if he or she were given half a chance.⁸ Bruno also might possibly have known that from the Jewish side, Jewish law—*halakhah*—specifically enjoins Jews to convert their slaves, black or white, to Judaism. And had he been better informed yet, he might have known that a contemporary of his, an Egyptian rabbi usually known by the acronym Radbaz—Rabbi David ben Solomon ibn Abi Zimra (1479–1573)—had declared that a black, Agau-speaking tribe, from the mountains of Ethiopia, known as the Beta Israel or Falasha, were indeed Jews. Black Jews.⁹

In the thinking of the time, the perceived typologies of Jews and blacks were not dissimilar. Blacks and Jews were fundamental “others” for Christian Europeans, were often mentioned in the same breath for that reason, and were regularly imagined to have shared ancestry. Linkages of different sorts between blacks and Jews in medieval Europe were common. Indeed, there was a general tendency on the part of medieval Christians to confuse or link Jews with all sorts of minorities, “with other Others,” as J. Schorsch puts it.¹⁰ The linkage of Jew, and Moor or Turk or blackamoor, as “others” is to be found throughout the texts, songs, and prayers of Christendom. The third Collect for Good Friday in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, which is typical,¹¹ discusses the categories of those who are heading for everlasting destruction: “O Merciful God who has made all men and hatest nothing that thou hast made . . . have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels and Hereticks and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart and contempt for thy word.” In this carefully argued prayer we see two religious “others” in the foreground—Jews and Turks—behind whom are lined up an indistinct mass of other

unnamed heretics and infidels. In 1606 the Spanish Benedictine monk and historian Fray Prudencio de Sandoval (1553–1620), then bishop of Pamplona in northern Spain, made a connection between Jews and blacks through the indelible nature of their respective, essential characteristics. He wrote that “in the descendants of Jews remain and continue the bad inclinations of their ancient ingratitude and failed beliefs, as in blacks the inseparable accident of their negritude. . . . For if one thousand times they are with white women their children are born with the dark skin of their parents.”¹² Writing polemically against the new Jewish converts to Christianity in about 1541, Francisco Machado linked Jews and blacks through their innate undesirability. He tried to imagine “Portugal . . . cleansed of heresies and of Jewish ceremonies, and of Moors and blacks.”¹³ Such linkages and connections fed into a discourse, which also proclaimed that a color distinction should be drawn between “white” Europeans and “dark” Jews.

A long European tradition maintained that the Jews, in general, were certainly “black” metaphorically, in the sense that they were diabolical and evil, as well as black literally. One Christian critic of the supposedly “Jewish” pope Anacletus II, elected in 1130, hinted that Jews were generally regarded as dark when he noted that the pope was “dark and pale, more like a Jew or an Arab than a Christian.” Sir William Brereton (1604–1661), the English parliamentarian, soldier, and writer, happened to visit a Sephardi synagogue in Amsterdam, where he commented that the Jews were very dark-skinned and lascivious—“they were most black . . . and insatiably given unto women.”¹⁴ In his *New Voyage to Italy* (1714), François Maximilian Misson (c. 1650–1722), the French writer and traveler, confirms that the general supposition was that Jews were black when he noted that all Jews were black, although only Portuguese Jews started off black: “Tis also a vulgar error,” he wrote, “that the Jews are *all* black; for this is only true of the Portuguese, who, marrying always among one

another, beget Children like themselves, and consequently the Swar-thiness of their complexion is entail'd upon their whole Race, even in the Northern Regions.”¹⁵

Jews had absorbed something of these attitudes and perceived themselves as being significantly darker than their neighbors and accepted the argument that, as part of the divine plan, and as a kind of retribution for their sins, they had been gradually darkened, by the intervention of the Almighty, until they were almost black.¹⁶ This was the position of Isaac ben Judah Abrabanel (1437–1508), the Portuguese Jewish statesman, exegete, and financier, who observed that once long ago the Jews had been light skinned, as the Mishnah maintains, but that they had grown dark as part of the punishment of exile.¹⁷ The thirteenth-century polemical text of R. Yosef ben Nathan Ofitsial sought to rebut Christian charges that Jews were dark and unattractive. “Why,” the text reads, “are the majority of gentiles white and attractive, while the majority of Jews are black and ugly?” The writer explained this through an analogy of ripening fruit. Plums and sloes, he argued, are white at the start and become dark when they are ripe, whereas fruits like apples or apricots, which are red to start with, finish up white and shriveled. This is seen as meaning that Jews who have no contact with the red of menstrual blood at the moment of their conception, as Jews refrain from sexual intercourse during the menstrual period, will finish up black, whereas Christians, who do not avoid the red of menstrual blood during sexual intercourse, will finish up white, like apples. The same thought is expressed in the contemporary *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekanneh*, which boasts that “we Jews are from a clean and white seed, therefore our faces are black, but you from the red seed of menstruation, therefore your visages are pale and reddened.”¹⁸

The idea that the Jews were black persisted into the nineteenth century. Robert Knox (1791–1862), the controversial surgeon and anatomist and conservator of the College Museum, Edinburgh, in

the mid-nineteenth century, commented on “the African character of the Jew, his muzzle-shaped mouth and face removing him from other races.”¹⁹ The general “look” of the Jew was considered to be like that of the black: “The contour is convex; the eyes long and fine, the outer angles running towards the temples; the brow and nose apt to form a single convex line . . . and the whole physiognomy, when swarthy, as it often is, has an African look.”²⁰ Nineteenth-century physical anthropologists in general assumed that Jews had a close racial—that is “blood”—connection with blacks. The “general consensus of the ethnological literature of the late nineteenth century was that the Jews were ‘black’ or, at least, ‘swarthy.’” One such explained the “predominant mouth of some Jews being the result of the presence of black blood” and that “brown skin, thick lips and prognathism” were typical of Jews.²¹ One of the key physical indicators of race was the nose: for the Encyclopedists, all “deviant noses” were put together—“the blacks, the Hottentots and various peoples of Asia, such as the Jews.”²² In a sense the appearance of Jews and blacks was constructed in a similar way simply because both Jews and blacks were pariahs and outsiders, and in the racialized mind of Europe this shared status implied that Jews and blacks had a shared “look” and a shared black color.²³ In some cases Jews were considered black because they were of mixed African-Judaic race. On occasion the blackness or darkness of the skin of the African, like the Jew, was perceived as being not only due to inheritance but also to the effect of diseases such as syphilis.²⁴ The “negritude” or darkness of the Jew was thus not only a mark of racial inferiority, or of shared blood with Africans, but also a clear indicator of the unhealthy nature of the Jew. The Bavarian writer Johann Pezzl (1756–1823),²⁵ who visited Vienna in the 1780s, described the Jewishness of the Viennese Jew as a particularly nasty physical affliction:

There are about five hundred Jews in Vienna. Their sole and only occupation is to counterfeit, salvage trade in coins, and cheat

Christians, Turks, heathens, indeed themselves. . . . This is the beggarly filth of Canaan which can only be exceeded in filth, uncleanness, stench, disgust, poverty, dishonesty, pushiness and other things by the trash of the twelve tribes from Galicia. Excluding the Indian fakirs, there is no category of supposed human beings which come closer to the Orang-Utang than does a Polish Jew. . . . Covered from foot to head in filth, dirt and rags, covered in a type of black sack . . . their necks exposed the color of a black, their faces covered up to the eyes with a beard, which would have given the High Priest in the Temple chills, the hair turned and knotted as if they all suffered from the *plica polonica*.

The Viennese Jew's disease was stamped on his skin. The Jewish physician of the Enlightenment Elcan Isaac Wolf²⁶ also saw this "black-yellow" skin color as a pathological mark of the sickly Jew.²⁷ In 1808, the English physician and ethnographer James Cowles Pritchard (1786–1848) made a connection between the national character and psychology of Jews and their color: he wrote about "the choleric and melancholic constitution of the Jews, such that they usually have a skin color somewhat darker than the English people." Some of the theories advanced to explain the color of Jews, going back to the time of Bruno, were similar to those advanced in the United States to explain the color of blacks. One explanation was that blackness or darkness of the skin, as in the case of Jews, was a sickness. Benjamin Rush (1746–1813), one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, claimed in a paper before the American Philosophical Society that Africans' black skin had been caused by a disease something like leprosy that had become hereditary but which could be "cured," and he suggested some ways in which this could be done.²⁸

All races, according to the ethnology of the period, were described as "ugly" or "beautiful." In Europe, for hundreds of years, being black, Jewish, sickly, and ugly became almost coterminous. Black Africans, and particularly the Hottentots (as the famous and appalling case of

Sarah Baartman, the so-called Hottentot Venus, shows), became the paradigm of the extreme “other” and the “ugly race”—a sort of missing link between true humanity and the orangutan. It is certainly not without significance that from the eighteenth century on Hottentots were also regarded by some as having Jewish roots—to be biological descendants of Jews.²⁹

Such notions about Jews were supported by the racial ideas of Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), according to whom the Jews were a mongrel race that had hybridized with surrounding peoples in very ancient times but who had later interbred with black Africans in Egypt. “The first point is thus settled,” wrote Chamberlain:

The Israelite people is descended from the crossing of different human types. . . . Now these figures give the following results with regard to the Jews of former times, and today, in east and west; 50 per cent. show clear evidence of belonging to the type *homo syriacus* (short heads, characteristic so-called “Jewish” noses, inclination to stoutness, &c.); only 5 per cent. have the features and anatomical structure of the genuine Semite (the Bedouin of the desert); in the case of 10 per cent we find a color of skin and hair, often too of complexion, which point to the Amorite of Indo-European descent; 35 per cent. represents indefinable mixed forms. . . . The chief result of this anatomical survey is that the Jewish race is in truth a permanent but at the same time a mongrel race which always retains this mongrel character.

Its African aspect was developed somewhat later with the “admixture of negro blood with Jewish in the Diaspora of Alexandria—of which many a man of Jewish persuasion at this day offers living proof.”³⁰

In an increasingly color-conscious Europe, Jews were anxious to be seen as white. It has been argued that in order to avoid the racial color stigma arising from the coupling of Jews and blacks and in the accusations that they were “black and ugly,” Jews employed the stratagem of

loudly proclaiming their own whiteness in order to “include themselves in the dominant culture . . . in a way they could not as non-Christians.” From the beginning of the modern period, racial distinctions based on color became increasingly important in Europe and the Americas. Such considerations led the Jews of Amsterdam, for instance, increasingly and deliberately to distance themselves from their black servants. Similarly, black Jews (possibly converted slaves) were no longer permitted to read from the Torah in synagogue or to be buried in Jewish cemeteries.³¹ In Amsterdam many Jews maintained African slaves, and in some cases followed the prescriptions of *halakhah* that call on Jewish owners of slaves to urge them to convert to Judaism. Such conversion accounted for a significant population of black Jews in colonial contexts as well as in Amsterdam until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Thereafter, black Jews were increasingly marginalized, deprived of privileges such as the right to be buried in the communal cemetery, and the conversion of black slaves was no longer encouraged, despite *halakhah*.

According to a report of 1788 there were 1,311 white Jews and 650 mulatto and black Jews in Suriname. Previously there had been a good deal of mingling of black and white within the Jewish community, so much so that there were Jews of mixed blood involved in the governance of synagogues. However, with the new sensitivity about skin color, special ordinances were passed in which it was decided not to admit “Mulattos” as full members. Moreover, in view of the fact that some “Mulattos” had been involved in the governance of the community, it was decreed that henceforth they would not be allowed this honor. They would be demoted to simple *Congreganten*. Thus Jews of mixed race, whether halakhically Jewish or not, were severely restricted in their membership to synagogues.³²

In the New York *Jewish Record* of January 23, 1863, an article concerned with the issue of the abolition of slavery suggested that Jews were anxious to avoid any such linkage between themselves and blacks:

We know not how to speak in the same breath of the Negro and the Israelite. The very names have startlingly opposite sounds, one representing all that is debased and inferior in the hopeless barbarity and heathenism of six thousand years, the other, the days when Jehovah conferred on our fathers the glorious equality which led the Eternal to converse with them, and allow them to enjoy the communion of angels. Thus the abandoned fanatics insult the choice of God himself, in endeavoring to reverse the inferiority, which he stamped on the African, to make him the compeer, even in bondage, of His chosen people. There is no parallel between such races. Humanity from pole to pole would scout such a comparison. The Hebrew was originally free and the charter of his liberty was inspired by his Creator. The Negro was never free and his bondage in Africa was simply duplicated in a milder form when he was imported here. . . . The judicious in all the earth agree that to proclaim the African equal to the surrounding races, would be a farce which would lead the civilized conservatism of the world to denounce the outrage.³³

This vehement protest against linkage between blacks and Jews availed little. The discourse suggesting that Jews were black continued and, if anything, gained momentum. In the United States and also in South Africa in the first decades of the twentieth century, immigrant Jews were confronted with the question: whether the Jews, long depicted as dark or black, were racially to do with Africa or Europe, and this inevitably caused consternation.³⁴ Both in the United States and South Africa, Jews were certainly not perceived as white until around the time of the Second World War.

That such discourses are still alive can be seen from the views of one Kenni from Brooklyn, New York, who in March 2010 opined on the Internet: “Jews evolved from blacks. That’s why they have big noses and tightly coiled hair. It’s not just a stereotype. Stereotypes

come from a thread of truth, not just out of thin air. Like most blacks have kinky hair and puffy lips. Jews are just ashamed at the fact that they are part black. Nobody likes black. God, should a Jew be black, right? People are so rascist [*sic*]. Accept it! Black stereotypes are suspiciously similar to Jewish stereotypes i.e. greedy, backstabbing, big noses, kinky hair, flat feet, long limbs, olive colored skin, etc. Should I go on?"³⁵

In these fragmentary glimpses drawn from a variety of sources, we can see that Jews were considered to be black, to have a number of African physical qualities, and ultimately to have a good deal of African blood.³⁶ Similarly, black Africans in the nineteenth century and before, in a vast and extraordinary number of cases were thought to be Jews, and indeed to have both Jewish characteristics and to be descended from ancient Israelite stock.³⁷ From medieval times to the present, Jews have been thought to have "black blood" in their veins and to have a number of African physical and other characteristics, including an African nose, African proportions, and African skin color. Similarly, over the same time span, in a long-running discourse, many black Africans were assumed to have "Jewish blood," Jewish characteristics, Jewish looks, Jewish abilities, and Jewish habits. The supposedly Jewish origins of some black African communities were taken to explain a wide variety of hard-to-understand African customs and beliefs, which were assumed to be predicated upon Jewish customs and beliefs. Often colonial officials and missionaries imagined that various African languages were connected with Hebrew, Aramaic, and other Semitic tongues, and frequently they would maintain that they derived directly from Hebrew.³⁸ Such identifications were made out of a genuine desire to comprehend the seemingly impenetrable customs, religions, and languages encountered on the colonial frontier. Ethnographers, missionaries, colonial

civil servants, and travelers time and time again maintained that African tribes, including the Xhosa, Masai, Yoruba, Shona, Igbo, Zulus, Hottentots, Tutsis, Ashanti, and many more, practiced Jewish customs, spoke partially Jewish languages, and were of Jewish biological origin—of the seed of Abraham. This was one of the developments that has fed into the creation of the worldwide phenomenon of black Judaism. Today there are millions of black Jews, Israelites, or Hebrews, most of them at least partially Christian, in Africa, Europe, and the Americas, who practice some aspects of Judaism or have some kind of Israelite/Jewish/Hebrew identity and who in most cases believe they are descended from the ancient Hebrews. Whereas there were many reasons for this, the deeply held conviction that Jews were black or dark and that Jews and blacks had the same blood no doubt played a predominant role.

2 / Lost Tribes of Israel in Africa

In medieval times and earlier there was the widespread notion that somewhere in Africa, as well as elsewhere in the world, Jewish kingdoms and mountaintop cities, peopled by certain of the Lost Tribes of Israel, were to be found somewhere beyond the fabulous River Sambatyon.¹ The Sambatyon spewed stones rather than water and did not flow on the Sabbath day. No one could cross the Sambatyon during the week because of the stones—and on the Sabbath the pious Lost Tribes would not traverse it because of the prohibition of traveling on the Sabbath. The myths and legends associating Sambatyon and the Lost Tribes with the African interior were responsible to some degree for the development of imagined communities of black Jews throughout Africa.² For Jews and Christians the continued existence of the Lost Tribes of Israel was axiomatic. The Lost Tribes were viewed as the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob (Reuben,

Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, and Joseph). However, the tribe of Levi was scattered among the other tribes, where its members served as a hereditary priesthood.³ The remaining eleven tribes were restructured into twelve secular groups—the number twelve having sacred properties, perhaps corresponding to the twelve months of the year. To achieve this, the tribe of Joseph was subdivided into two tribes: Ephraim and Menasseh. The unity of the twelve tribes was short-lived, and soon they were split into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom or the Kingdom of Israel, which consisted of ten of the tribes; and one Southern Kingdom, Judah, which included Judah, Simeon, and most of Benjamin. As a result of the invasion of the Assyrian kings, Tiglath-Pileser III (732 BCE) and Sargon (721 BCE), the Kingdom of Israel was defeated, and the northern tribes were exiled in two stages, chiefly to Assyria, Media, and the lands neighboring Aram-Naharaim.⁴ The elements of the Ten Tribes exiled to Assyria may be presumed to have been absorbed into the Assyrian population, as had many others who fell prey to the Assyrian policy of forced Assyrianization and ethnic cleansing. There is some Assyriological evidence that individuals with Hebrew names were still to be found in Assyrian army units in the seventh century BCE, but there is no other clear evidence of the continued existence of the exiles.⁵ This is the point at which the history of the Lost Tribes of Israel stops and the history of the myth of the Lost Tribes starts.⁶ This is the moment the Ten Tribes disappeared from normal history and became an imagined, mythical community. The Ten Tribes as an imagined community assumed great importance in the prophecies—for instance in Ezekiel 37:16—where the final redemption of Israel was linked to the reunion of the Lost Tribes with the descendants of the Southern Kingdom, and this explains why it is that fundamentalist Christians have such a keen interest in groups throughout the world who claim to be descended from the Lost Tribes. The Apocrypha carried on the story of the Lost Tribes, revealing that

subsequent to their deportation the tribes “formed this plan for themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the nations and go to a more distant region where mankind had never lived, that there at least they might keep their statutes which they had not kept in their own land.” It is from texts such as these that the whole edifice of later Lost Tribes mythology was constructed. One of the features that becomes axiomatic in the myth of the Lost Tribes, as we have seen, is their presence beyond a river that by the time of Josephus was called the Sabbatical River and in later texts the Sambatyon—or some similar version of the name implying a relationship with the word “Sabbath.” In each case this river observes the rules ordained for the Sabbath, which is to say that on the Sabbath it stops flowing.⁷

Certainty about the existence of the Lost Tribes passed effortlessly into the Christian canon. In the book of Revelation we read: “and there were sealed one hundred and forty four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand, of the Tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand,” and so on. For Christians there were two broad categories of Jews, who played an important role in the Christian imagination. From the first Christian centuries the view was expressed that somewhere in the world there were warriors descended from the Lost Tribes, who were biding their time but who would rally to Christ upon his return and help him rout the forces of evil.⁸ The Jews were less obsessed by imagining Jews than were Christians, but there was some debate among Jews too as to where the Lost Tribes were and if they really existed. There is, for instance, a passage in the Jerusalem Talmud that put some long-enduring flesh on the bones of the myth. We hear that the Ten Tribes were carried away to three distinct places: to the other side of the Sambatyon River; to Daphne; and to a place where they were “covered by the cloud which descended upon them,” from where

they will eventually be redeemed.⁹ According to other versions, the tribes in this third locus were supposed to have been covered not by a cloud but exiled “inside the dark mountains.” This is the sense in the second-century rabbinic historical work *Seder Olam Rabbah*. These dark mountains were taken to represent Africa, which, according to the Talmud, Alexander the Great had to traverse to get to Carthage.¹⁰

Another of the starting points for the “Jews in Africa” myths was the ninth-century *Sepher Eldad* written by one Eldad ha-Dani—Eldad the Danite. Eldad is known to have visited Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Yemen, and, most famously, the important community of Kairouan in present-day Tunisia. Here he made some noteworthy claims: that he was a Hebrew-speaking member of the tribe of Dan, which he said was still flourishing in Havilah, in Cush, taken to be Ethiopia, along with Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. The four tribes fought continuous wars against “seven kingdoms with seven languages.” In addition he gave information about the “children of Moses” who were incarcerated beyond the River Sambatyon.¹¹ The four tribes on the far side of the Sambatyon could not speak to the tribes on the near side, as the river was too wide, and the noise it made too great. They communicated by carrier pigeon. Eldad painted a utopian picture of the life of the Lost Tribes. Children in that distant land never died in the lifetime of their parents. The Talmud there was written in the purest Hebrew. They were warlike, spartan in their daily habits, and exceedingly prosperous.¹² We may be quite sure that Eldad of the tribe of Dan was not, as claimed, a member of the tribe of Dan, and we may be fairly sure that his name was not Eldad. If we take the corpus of texts associated with him more or less at face value, it may be possible to deduce—and a number of modern scholars have done so—that Eldad was a Jew from either the eastern Islamic world or very much less plausibly from Ethiopia.¹³ What we know about him is that he had a series of adventures, which included being captured by cannibals; he

knew something about Jewish law and literature; and he arrived in Kairouan in about 883 before continuing on to Spain, at which point he disappeared from view.¹⁴ Some scholars in the twentieth century have seen in *Sepher Eldad* the first reference to the Falashas or Beta Israel of Ethiopia, but Steven Kaplan casts grave doubt on it.¹⁵ Ullendorff and Beckingham have suggested that there may be an Arabic substratum to his Hebrew, suggesting some sort of an Arabian origin.¹⁶

What we do know is that Eldad existed and made the claims outlined above. It could well be that his purpose, if he had a greater purpose (but storytellers often do not), was to “raise the spirits of the Jews by giving them news of tribes of Israel who lived in freedom . . . the reports of the existence of such Jewish kingdoms undoubtedly encouraged and comforted Eldad’s hearers by contradicting the Christian contention that Jewish independence had ceased for ever with the destruction of the Second Temple.”¹⁷ One way or another Eldad’s work was to have an enduring influence on the Jewish and European *imaginaire*. According to some scholars, Eldad’s tale gave rise to the legend of Prester John (although there is always the possibility that while the Prester John letters are almost three centuries later than Eldad, some of the literary material associated with Eldad is much later than has been thought and that it reflects the Prester John material, not the reverse).¹⁸ Even if this is true, it does look as if elements of Eldad’s story may have been woven into the various versions, Latin, Hebrew, and Provençal, of the Prester John letters. In time, Eldad’s Hebrew account, *Sepher Eldad*, which was first printed in Mantua in 1480 and was to be translated into a number of languages, including German, Latin, and Arabic, had a considerable impact upon the way Africa was viewed in Europe and made a great contribution to the notion that Jews inhabited the African interior.

Such a notion was not necessarily viewed with favor by Jews. A polemical work written by the prolific Miguel de Barrios (1625–1701)

on the history of the Sephardic community of Amsterdam went to some pains to dissociate the history of the Jews from the history of black Africans. The background to this is the profusion of texts that suggested that certain Africans had Jewish ancestry. De Barrios contradicted, for instance, the Jesuit Antonio Possevino (c. 1533–1611), who had cited Prester John as the source for the fact that Ethiopians were descended from King Solomon, and their aristocracy descended from Abraham. This information was available anyway since the Spanish translation of parts of the Ethiopian Royal Chronicles, the *Kebra Nagast*, which appeared in *Historia de las cosas de Etiópia* (Antwerp, 1557), with a French translation the following year, had traced back the royal line to the union of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and their son, Ethiopia's first emperor, Menelik I.¹⁹ Bernardo José Aldrete (1565–1645), a cleric in Córdoba, had also argued that the Ethiopians were of Jewish blood, as Jews had long before been exiled to Ethiopia. It could be that some of these ideas about African and Jewish others could be traced back to ancient writers such as Sulpicius Severus (c. 360–c. 425), who maintained that all sorts of peoples, from the Ethiopians to the Indians, in fact descended from the Jews.²⁰

Perhaps the most important medieval work for the study of the European perception of the other in the late medieval period and for several hundred years was the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. Between 1350 and 1600 his work was the most widely read book of travel.²¹ There are more than 250 surviving manuscripts in German, Dutch, French, English, Latin, Old Irish, Danish, Czech, Spanish, Italian, and other languages. Over three times as many manuscripts of Mandeville exist as of Odoric or of Marco Polo.²² As far as the Lost Tribes were concerned, Mandeville claimed they were to be found in mountain valleys in a distant land beyond Cathay. “The Jews of ten lineages be enclosed, that men clepe Goth and Magoth and they may not go out on no side.” There were enclosed “toward the high Ind and

toward Bacharia, men pass by a kingdom that men clepe Caldilhe, that is a full fair country.” Here were

twenty-two kings with their people, that dwelled between the mountains of Scythia. There King Alexander chased them between those mountains and there he thought for to enclose them through work of his men. But when he saw that he might not do it . . . he prayed to God of nature that he would perform that that he had begun . . . yet God of his grace closed the mountains together, so that they dwell there all fast locked and enclosed with high mountains all about, save only on one side, and on that side is the sea of Caspian. . . . And also ye shall understand that the Jews have no proper land of their own for to dwell in, in all the world, but only that land between the mountains. And yet they yield tribute for that land to the Queen of Amazonia. . . . And though it happen that some of them by fortune to go out, they can no manner of language but Hebrew, so they cannot speak with the people. . . . And yet nathles, men say they shall go out in the time of anti-Christ and that they shall make great slaughter of Christian men. And therefore all the Jews that dwell in all lands learn always to speak Hebrew, in hope, that when the other Jews shall go out, they may understand their speech, and to lead them into Christendom for to destroy the Christian people. For the Jews say that they know well by their prophecies . . . and that the Christian men shall be under their subjection, as long as they have been in subjection of them.

The mouth of the valley system was guarded by the Queen of Amazonia, and “if it happen that any of them pass out, they can speak no language but Hebrew, ne they not speak with other men when they come among them.” With the coming of the Antichrist these Jews could be expected to join forces with other Hebrew-speaking Jews in

other parts of the world and would then overcome the Christian nations, turning them into vassal states.²³ The equation of the Lost Tribes with the elementally inimical forces of Gog and Magog and groups associated with them added something to the fear and hatred with which the Jews were viewed.²⁴ *Travels* includes both Christian and Jewish myths and legends. The common ground between them is best exemplified in the sections of Prester John materials. In the twelfth century, Ethiopia, or part of it, was thought to be in the East, somewhere in the vicinity of the Caucasus or toward India. Gradually the idea took hold that a Christian kingdom existed, stretching from East Africa to the Indus and across Africa as far as the Atlantic Ocean, and was ruled over by the priest king Prester John. In 1170, Pope Alexander III had referred to his “beloved son John the Illustrious and glorious king of India,” and for centuries this figure of a saintly and almost supernatural Christian leader foreshadowing the returned Christ at the End of Days dominated the Western imagination. In the twelfth century a Latin version of a letter written to Manuel, ruler of the Romans, by Prester John started circulating in Western Europe. According to this letter, he ruled over the three Indies from the burial place of Saint Thomas in the South to the Tower of Babel in the desert of Babylon. Seventy-two kings were subject to him. Among his subjects lived the Lost Ten Tribes, the Amazons, and the Pygmies, who were incarcerated behind the Sambatyon. Through his kingdom flowed one of the rivers of Paradise—carrying with it precious stones and gold—and the animals of the realm included elephants, camels, gryphons, and the phoenix. His subjects were free of every vice, they refrained from adultery and theft, they never lied, the animals did not harm human beings, and no one was poor.²⁵

The Hebrew version of the letter notes that close to the land of Prester John is a

high mountain called Olympus and underneath the mountain is a spring, more important than anywhere in the world, and it is

said that it is near to Paradise, a distance of seven days, and in it there are many precious stones, close to Paradise, and they are called diamonds. . . . And also in my country, at its edge, there is a great miracle, a sea of stones which makes waves as the ordinary seas do; and there is a big wind and it causes a great calamity; and no man is able to pass through this sea. . . . And you may know that from that sea of stones there issues a river which comes from Paradise and flows between us and between the great country of the great king Daniel, king of the Jews; and this river flows all the days of the week, but on the Sabbath it does not move from its place, until on the Sunday it returns to its strength. And when this river is full beyond its banks it carries very many precious stones and in this river there is no water. . . . And no-one can cross it except on the Sabbath. But we are placing guards at the passages, for if the Jews were able to cross they would cause great damage in the whole world against Christians as well as Ishmaelites and against every nation and tongue under the heavens, for there is no nation or tongue which can stand up to them. . . . There are under the rule of King Daniel 300 kings, all Jews, and all of them possess countries under the power of King Daniel. And also under his governance are 3000 dukes and counts and great men and we know that his country is unfathomable . . . and furthermore I inform you that in his country they have many beautiful women and they are ardent by nature.²⁶

Middle Eastern productions also contributed to European knowledge about Africa. Until the sixteenth century, Arab writers such as Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Ali al-Mas'udi (896–956), Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni (973–1048), and Muhammad al-Idrisi (1099–1165 or 1166) knew more about Africa than any European geographer, and there are occasional hints suggesting the presence of Jews in Africa in their works, and echoes of this reached Europe. For Renaissance Europe, the best known of

these Arab historians and geographers was Leo Africanus (c. 1492–c. 1550), who was born of Arab Muslim parents in Granada and who traveled widely in Africa, visiting Timbuktu and the sub-Saharan empires of Bornu and Mali.²⁷ His most important work was the *Description of Africa*,²⁸ which was written around 1528–1529 and for many years was the essential source on sub-Saharan Africa. In *Description* there are frequent mentions of Jews in Africa: he notes significantly that there were warrior tribes in the Atlas claiming descent from King David, that Jewish law had once been widely observed there, that the Canaanites traveled to Africa, followed later by the Sabeans, and that the ruler of Timbuktu disliked the Jews who attended his court.²⁹ It is noteworthy that echoes of the ideas about Jews in *Description* suggesting that the dynastic line of some African royal houses goes back to King David, or that African legal systems are based on Israelite models, still today form an important part of the discourse of origin of a number of African societies.

As the major modern source on Africa, *Description* carried great authority, and in England, along with a translation of Antonio Pigafetta's (c. 1491–c. 1534) account of the Congo, was one of the few texts to deal with Africa.³⁰ In the prologue to his English translation of *Description*, John Pory noted, "About the fountains of the Nilus some say that there are . . . the people called Cafri or Cafates, being as black as pitch, and of a mighty stature, and (as some thinke) descended of the Jewes; but now they are idolators, and most deadly enemies to the Christians, for they make continual assaults upon the Abasins, despoiling them both of life and goods: but all the day-time they lie lurking in mountains, woods, and deep valleies." These mighty blacks, perhaps descended from Jews and implacable foes of Christians, were to feed into the way Europeans viewed Africa and its inhabitants for several hundred years to come. But in his post-script, Pory identified some more specifically Jewish African groups: "At this day also the Abassins affirm that upon the Nilus towards the

west there inhabiteth a most populous nation of the Jewish stock under a mightie king. And some of our modern cosmographers set down a province in those quarters which they call the land of the Hebrews, placed, as it were, under the equinoctial, in certain unknown mountains, between the confines of Abassin and Congo.”³¹ At the time virtually nothing was known of Africa, and books like *Description* filled the void. It is therefore not surprising that the colonists and missionaries who first encountered the African interior from the seventeenth century onward drew upon this medieval *imaginaire* as they tried to make sense of the overwhelming richness, complexity, variety, and sheer strangeness of African societies.

3 / Ham's Children

The association of Ham with Africa has had a convoluted history and is derived from the account in Genesis in which Noah cursed Ham's son Canaan, and his descendants, when he discovered that Ham had looked at him as he slept, hot, naked, and drunk, in his tent.¹ The sixth-century Babylonian Talmud construed from the biblical account that the descendants of Canaan were cursed precisely by being made black and degenerate, thus making a connection with Africans. The notion that Canaan's progeny would be black and have "Negro" phenotypical features persisted in some medieval rabbinical writing. The reasons for this were that in the same way as the lips of Canaan had jested at the sight of Noah, so the lips of his children would swell; and just as he left him naked and uncovered, the children of Canaan would go around naked with their sexual organs "shamefully elongated."² Benjamin of Tudela (1130–1173), the

great Jewish traveler, wrote of southern Egypt: “There is a people there . . . who, like animals, eat of the herbs that grow on the banks of the Nile and in their fields. They go about naked and have not the intelligence of ordinary men. They cohabit with their sisters and anyone they can find . . . they are taken as slaves and sold in Egypt and neighboring countries. These sons of Ham are black slaves.”³

In medieval times the association of Ham with Africa and Africans was not consistent. Even early modern sources were just as likely to associate Ham with races of giants, pagan gods such as Pan, or with kings’ genealogies, as with Africa. The descendants of Ham were invoked, for instance, to explain social and class discrimination in Europe, where Ham was identified as the ancestor of the European serfs. But broadly speaking, Ham was gradually identified for many people as the ancestor of Africans, as he was, for instance, in the influential writing of Leo Africanus. The belief was that the three divisions of the world were populated by descendants of Noah’s sons—Japhet in Europe, Shem in Asia, and Ham in Africa. At some of the first encounters between Europeans and Africans, the idea of Ham was immediately invoked. Thus Willem Ten Rhyne of Deventer, who arrived at the Cape in 1686, wondered about the origins of the Khoisan people who were living there: “Did these people spring originally from Ham, the son of Noah or some Arabs of the stock of Shem who entered Africa later on?”⁴

It soon became expedient for the object of Noah’s curse, Canaan, to be forgotten and for the curse to fall squarely on Africa, identified as the place of the descendants of Ham, as a means of justifying the trade in black slaves. Western intervention in Africa from the sixteenth century onward was accompanied by two broad assumptions. The first of these was that black people were too degenerate to create their own history. The second, which was more egregious, was that black people were so degenerate that they were incapable of even having a history. In 1784, in a fierce attack on racist assumptions of

this sort, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) snapped that a black man had as much right to think of whites as degenerate “as we have to deem him the emblem of evil, and a descendant of Ham, branded by his father’s curse,” which demonstrates what the common thinking of the time was.

British attitudes toward black Africans in the nineteenth century were, in part, formed in reaction to accounts of French travelers and Egyptologists, who had flocked to Egypt after Napoleon’s expedition of 1799, some of whom had credited the glories of ancient Egypt to “Negroes.” Dominique Vivant, Baron de Denon (1747–1825), the French artist, diplomat, author, archaeologist, and one of the original members of the expedition, described the ancient builders of Egypt in “negroid” terms as having “a broad and flat nose, very short, a large flattened mouth . . . thick lips.”⁵ Similarly, the French traveler Constantin François de Chassebœuf, Count Volney (1757–1820), observed, “How are we astonished . . . when we reflect that to the race of Negroes, at present our slaves, and the objects of our contempt, we owe our arts, sciences, and . . . when we recollect that, in the midst of these nations, who call themselves the friends of liberty and humanity, the most barbarous of slaveries is justified; and that it is even a problem whether the understandings of negroes be of the same species with that of white men!”⁶

The gap between Volney’s formulation and the general European idea (supported, as it was thought, by the Bible) of the inferiority of black people was too wide to bridge as things stood. Egypt apparently held the key to the conundrum, and a growing interest in the identity of the ancient Egyptians resulted in the publication of a number of books in Great Britain and the United States. Many of these sought primarily to demonstrate that the builders of the ancient monuments could not possibly have been Negroes. One of the arguments insisted that as Coptic was related to Semitic languages, the original speakers of the language must have been from outside Africa.

William George Browne (1768–1813), the English traveler, convinced that the Egyptians were white, even intimated that the mummies were created in part to demonstrate this eternal truth and wrote of the

persons of the ancient Egyptians, preserved as it were entire by the prescience of that people concerning errors into which posterity might fall, exhibits irrefragable proof of their features and of the colour of their skin, which is now by the quantities of mummies that have been imported into Europe, subject to the inspection of the curious almost throughout that quarter of the globe. This resurrection of witnesses also evinces that the Copts are their genuine descendants and preserve the family likeness in their complexion of dusky brown, dark hair and eyes, lips sometimes thick, but the nose as often aquiline, and other marks of a total dissimilitude between them and the negro race.⁷

The testimony of “this resurrection of witnesses” had enthusiastic endorsement from the clergy. Clearly, if the African Negro was descended from Ham, and if Ham was cursed, how could his descendants have been permitted by the Almighty to create a great civilization? The descendants of Ham could clearly have nothing in common with the Egyptians of old.

The concept of the Negro being the descendant of Ham and carrying in his flesh the stigma of Noah’s curse permitted the enslavement of blacks following the biblical injunction that “a servant of servants shall he be.” But it also meant that the standard Christian monogenesis view of creation was unaffected, as the Negro as a descendant of Ham was obviously part of the regular family of mankind. As far as the ancient Egyptians were concerned, a solution was found in the biblical passage that explained that they were in fact descended from Mizraim, another son of Ham. As Rev. M. Russell of St. John’s College, Oxford, observed: “In the sacred writings of the Hebrews it [Egypt]

is called Mizraim . . . the name which is applied to Egypt by the Arabs of the present day.”⁸

As this discourse developed, it became axiomatic that the color black was an outward symbol of worthlessness and degradation. In 1857 James A. Sloan, an American Presbyterian minister, noted: “All Ham’s posterity are either black or dark colored, and thus bear upon their countenance the mark of inferiority which God put upon their progenitor. . . . Black, restrained, despised, bowed down are the words used to express the condition and place of Ham’s children. Bearing the mask of degradation on their skin.”⁹ Bishop Thomas Newton (1704–1782), dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral and chaplain to George II, drew upon an entry in the Bible dictionary of the French biblical scholar Augustin Calmet (1672–1757), based in part on a work by the Persian historian Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (838–923), which explained that the effect of Noah’s having cursed Ham and Canaan “was that not only their posterity became subject to their brethren and was born, as we may say, in slavery, but likewise that the color of their skin suddenly became black, for they—the Arabs—maintain that all the blacks descend from Ham and Canaan.” The idea that blackness was an immediate consequence of the curse, that all blacks were born into slavery, and that all blacks descended from Ham was a useful pro-slavery argument. In this way, to use Whitford’s term, a pro-slavery “Frankenstein creation” was brought into being. The peak in the international trafficking of slaves was reached at the end of the eighteenth century. This coincided with a growing prevalence of the use of the “curse of Ham” as a biblical justification for the permanent enslavement of black people.¹⁰

In the United States, where slavery was profitable and permitted, an American school of anthropology rose to defend its moral and ethical basis. To this end it was necessary to refute the idea that Negroes had had anything to do with the glories of ancient Egypt or with any other expression of civilization or high culture. Samuel

George Morton (1799–1851), the American anatomist, one of the founders of scientific racism and of the American school of ethnography, maintained that the distinctions between human beings was a question of separate species rather than varieties within the human race. Morton was a firm believer in polygenesis and thought he could prove the separate evolution of the world's population by skull capacity. His studies claimed to demonstrate that white Europeans had the largest skull capacity, and Negroes the smallest. On the basis of his studies of Egyptian skulls he concluded that ancient Egyptians were Caucasian, and this seemingly objective, scientific methodology won wide acceptance both in the United States and Europe, confirming as it did the innate superiority of Caucasians as compared to black Africans, their natural slaves. The heretical argument of polygenesis became rather fashionable by the mid-nineteenth century. In 1848 Charles Hamilton Smith (1776–1859) published his *Natural History of the Human Species*, which argued that Mongolians, Caucasians, and Negroes were the three distinct human types and had had totally separate creations. Subsequently, the supporters of the Confederacy during the American Civil War (1861–1865) made constant reference to the polygenesis argument, which also attracted Sir Richard Burton (1821–1890), the explorer and Orientalist. Indeed, polygenesis became the thinking man's creed, as a derisive passage from the biography of the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox (1791–1862) suggests:

Looking upon the human family at large, it might well be asked:—Were the Southern Islanders luxuriating upon their enemies' warm vitals or an occasional relish of 'cold Missionary'—the Esquimaux peering out from beneath his bearskin coverings like a timid hedgehog, yet feeding with a forty-parson stomachic power, on whale blubber—the black-ebony African in his nude, chewing the sugar-cane—the countless families of deep olive, sooty, and ochre-red, grandly feathered

and tattooed, some with noses rung like a Durham ox, others with lower lips fashioned like egg-cups, or seeking beauty in paint, mutilation, and deformity, fetish worshippers and other animalized anthropoids:—were all these sprung from the loves of Adam and Eve, and were they to be held of the same stock as Socrates, Galileo, and Newton?¹¹

The slavery, domination, and abuse of blacks could be justified even more easily if they were seen to be descended from a founder event that was utterly remote from the springs of Western civilization and outside the realms of Western sacred history.¹²

Subsequently the general Hamitic thesis was bolstered by the work done on the Hamitic language family, and finally a complex, interlocking system that underpinned colonial policy was created from political expediency, race theory, and scientific and linguistic findings.¹³

From the end of the eighteenth century, biblical history and what was becoming known of the history of Egypt were conscripted in such a way as to make white Europeans the legitimate heirs of these histories, neatly excluding black “negro” Africans from this Eurocentric framework, while preparing the ground for the conferral of a ready-made history on certain other groups of favored Africans.¹⁴ As the exploration and subjugation of western Africa continued and as European commercial and imperial interests changed and developed, and as attitudes toward slavery softened and changed, so an explanation for the history, or non-history, origins and relative status of different African peoples became more urgently required. The Hamitic theory was there to help out. Ethnographers and theologians now started to argue that the biblical Ham and his progeny—the Egyptians and others—were in fact white, thus claiming the wonders of ancient Egypt for Europe’s racial ancestors. A discourse now developed in which only Ham’s youngest son, Canaan, was black at

all; it was only his offspring that populated sub-Saharan Africa and who were cursed. “Hamites” now began to refer to a variety of light-skinned peoples who included the ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, Canaanites, Ethiopians, and Israelites.

The Hamitic hypothesis became a vital tool in the task of differentiating between African societies and in the critical colonial task of rewriting African history.

At the first encounter, Western travelers were of the view that the people they encountered were undifferentiated. However, it soon became clear that there were after all some aspects of African culture and society that stuck out as being different and relatively sophisticated. Explorers and missionaries found a wide variety of physical types in their travels and through an ethnocentric process placed particular value upon those that looked most like them. These were declared to be of Hamitic descent, and believed to be capable of superior achievements. Whatever real civilizing progress Africans had made, it was argued, was due to these foreign, invading Hamites. Thus in a distortion that had some obvious value for invading Western colonists, the high points of African history were presented as belonging exclusively to its historical invaders. A paradigm was established justifying Western colonial intervention in the continent and establishing the majority of Africans (the non-Hamites) as inferior, debased, and worthy of subjugation. The idea that the “Negro,” either in the past or present, possessed any artistic or intellectual achievement was rejected. The Hamitic theory denied him for ever the possibility of being in control of his own destiny. The paradigm was designed, in Homi Bhabha’s phrase, “to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.”¹⁵

The “Hamitic” race was now constructed as a subgroup of the Caucasian race and included populations in north, east, and west Africa,

the Horn of Africa, and southern Arabia. The hypothesis suggested that those Africans whose roots could be shown to be outside Africa or on the northern or eastern periphery of Africa and thus with close links to lands beyond Africa and who most resembled Europeans had once been advanced peoples, even if with the passage of time and their intermingling with “negroid” stock they had degenerated. A good deal of Western investigation of the racial nature of “Hamitic” tribes was thus associated with establishing “sameness” between them and Europeans and difference between Europeans and “negroes.” This was also a way of proposing that these superior Africans had some kind of a link, no matter how tenuous, with their colonial European masters and their sacred history, and indeed with the rest of mankind, while “negroid” Africans had no such links. J. C. Prichard (1786–1848), the polymathic British ethnologist, summed it up thus: “Tribes having what is termed the Negro character in the most striking degree are the least civilized. The Pepels, Bisagos, Ibos, who are in the greatest degree remarkable for deformed countenances, projecting jaws, flat foreheads and for other Negro peculiarities, are the most savage and morally degraded of the natives hitherto described. The converse of this remark is applicable to all the most civilized races. The Fulahs, Mandingos, and some of the Dahomeys and Inta (i.e. Akan) nations have, as far as form is concerned, nearly European countenances and a corresponding configuration of the head.”¹⁶

From about 1850 on the term “race,” which had not been much used before, was increasingly employed in discussions of Africa and Africans, viewed through the Hamitic hypothesis. Whereas the economic dictates of slavery had once required social theories based on the biblical account of Ham, now the panacea of race was used to underpin white domination in Africa, and also to help account for its history and peoples. The Hamitic hypothesis developed into an all-embracing concept that was able to account for a remarkable

range of cultural and technical phenomena on the African continent. At the same time, the hypothesis provided the underpinnings for a belief in the technological superiority of white people over black people and whites' success in conquering and settling almost every part of the world. Robert Knox noted: "Look all over the globe, it is always the same; the dark races stand still, the fair progress."¹⁷ Although there were opponents of the hypothesis, including some black ones, by and large it dominated Western thinking. One of the most forceful proponents of the Hamitic hypothesis, as it developed, was the British ethnologist Charles Seligman (1873–1940), whose influential *Races of Africa* (London, 1930) insisted that advanced features of African civilization, from irrigation to metalworking to advanced social structures, were the work of Hamites to whom he refers significantly as "Europeans." "Apart from relatively late Semitic influence," he wrote, "the civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hamites, its history is the record of these peoples and of their interaction with the two other African stocks, the Negro and the Bushmen, whether this influence was exerted by highly civilized Egyptians or by such wider pastoralists as are represented at the present day by the Beja and Somali. . . . The incoming Hamites were pastoral 'Europeans'—arriving wave after wave—better armed as well as quicker witted than the dark agricultural Negroes."¹⁸

The Hamitic hypothesis was a useful tool for explaining away any signs of African social progress, technical ability, or intellectual prowess as residual racial competencies, which originated in the Caucasian world and which thus bolstered the idea of the innate superiority of white Europeans. At the same time, it was a way of rewarding some tribes and punishing others. The labels that were handed out by paternalistic European colonists stuck. So successful was the strategy of assuming that "negroes" were innately inferior to whites and Hamites that within a very short period black "negroid" Africans themselves would see the usefulness of the Hamitic hypothesis as a

means of elevating and promoting the importance, splendor, and purity of their own tribes while rejecting and denigrating the claims of others. In this way the idea developed that light-skinned peoples of Egyptian or Indo-European origin had in times past spread across Africa, where they still formed an elite in many societies. As they had gradually interbred with subject peoples, they themselves degenerated. This was the explanation put forward for the apparent decline of a number of African societies, from Yorubaland to Benin, or the areas included in the Great Zimbabwe civilization, where once more-advanced societies had apparently flourished. Remnants of the peoples who had participated in the great triumphs of the past were still to be found, albeit in a debased form. Part of this discourse had it that advanced groups had come not only from the Horn of Africa, Egypt, or the Indo-European world but also from the Semitic world beyond and were connected with Canaanites, Assyrians, or Israelites.

The attribution under the aegis of the Hamitic hypothesis of any particular extraneous identity to a group was not entirely random and was certainly not objective. The mantle of specific ancient societies was carefully and systematically placed on the shoulders of the more “advanced,” amenable, and cooperative groups. The construction of their usually remote origins served the purpose of conferring nobility and prestige upon them and often created a powerful bond between them and the missionaries and colonial agents. In this process nomadic peoples were often singled out for praise as opposed to sedentary groups, as often happened elsewhere in the colonial world. Similarly, tribes that had moved into an area as conquerors, displacing or subjugating other tribes, were often favored and rewarded with an illustrious pedigree, which could help explain their military, organizational, and other successes. This process formed a probably unthinking part of the widespread colonial tactic of divide and rule. The favored groups were positioned in an intermediary role between whites and other black Africans and were given an intermediate color

coding. As it happens, this color coding corresponded broadly to that given to Jews in medieval European discourse and since, as well as in the United States, South Africa, Australia, and elsewhere, which placed them too in an intermediate position between black and white.¹⁹

Subtler distinctions were also created within the Hamitic hypothesis based upon biblical ideas, and upon comparisons with the ethnologies of the Bible. The religious and social systems of favored groups were frequently compared to features of the religions mentioned in the Bible, and the assumption was often made that such and such religion or cultural trait was derived directly from an Israelite model, from the worship of Baal, mentioned in the Bible, or from biblical descriptions of the Moabites, Canaanites, or Egyptians, or from some other individual or people referred to in the scriptures. In other cases, myths were invoked based upon classical models, from lost Roman legions making their way south from Egypt, or upon the imagined wanderings of Alexander the Great and his armies in the African interior.²⁰ It was in this way that a paradigm was created that would be used time and again in the invention and construction of Jewish and Israelite identities throughout the African continent.

The racial construction of Jews and Israelites throughout Africa overlaps with racial constructions of Hamitic pedigrees inherent in the Hamitic hypothesis. But Jews and Israelites had been constructed in Africa long before the introduction of scientific racism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, from the first moments of colonial intervention in the continent in the seventeenth century, and long before in a range of medieval discourses. This act of racial construction was linked rather with the construction of Jews and Israelites out of local populations as an act of symbolic othering, which exported known minorities and the frontiers they represented throughout the colonized world from the Pacific islands to the Americas.

4 / Judaic Practices and Superior Stock

During the long process of European exploration and colonization of the world, the essentially binary European / south Mediterranean paradigm was the template for perceiving the relationship between European Christians and their neighbors. After 1492 this broad paradigm was obliged to incorporate first a “new world” in the Americas, and subsequently other vast areas in Africa and the Pacific. The attempt to absorb and understand the radically new “others” so discovered often fell back on the tried and tested typologies that had served Europe for so long. The archetypal south and east Mediterranean “others” of Europe, the essential religious and “racial” others—the Moors and the Jews—whose relationship with Christian Europe had been forged from long centuries of religious dispute and military conflict, were time and again pressed into service in radically different circumstances. The immediate

boundary between European Christians, and Jews or Moors, was endlessly duplicated throughout the world as Israelite and Moorish identities—dressed up now as Hamites—were fabricated or hinted at on the colonial frontier.

With the nineteenth-century obsession with race and color, these groups formed part of a global complex of newly constructed racial taxonomies, which grew out of a desire to control and to understand. The identities thus formed in many cases became meaningful to the peoples so reconstructed and useful to the colonial powers. A. J. Christopher has observed that “missionaries, possibly more than members of other branches of the colonial establishment, aimed at the radical transformation of indigenous society. . . . They therefore sought, whether consciously or unconsciously, the destruction of pre-colonial societies and their replacement by new Christian societies in the image of Europe.”¹ Often enough the “image of Europe” also included the image of Europe’s minorities and the construction of Israelite, Jewish, or other Middle Eastern identities as well as the construction of imagined religious cultures to replace those that actually existed and imagined languages to replace those that actually existed. It could well be argued, as Nietzsche would have argued and I would agree, that the constructed identities have been “life-enhancing myths”; but some have perceived a profoundly sinister project, in which the act of construction and failure to recognize the integrity of linguistic and cultural communities perpetrated a fundamental injury.²

In west Africa there was a long European discourse that assumed that somewhere in the western interior there were Jews or Israelites who had settled in the continent centuries before and influenced the surrounding peoples, and supposed traces of such people were discovered with great regularity. The main motor for such discoveries and conclusions was the notion embedded in the Hamitic hypothesis that some African peoples had originated in the distant Middle

East, bringing Semitic ideas with them, or that Semitic ideas had been brought from the Middle East, Egypt, or the Horn of Africa by some other agents in ancient times.

With respect to the Yoruba people, the British explorer Captain Hugh Clapperton (1788–1827) cited a work by Sultan Bello of Sokoto, perhaps influenced by Leo Africanus, which maintained that the Yoruba people were thought to be of Canaanite extraction.³ Richard Burton, the English explorer, also cited Sultan Bello's ideas and commented on Bello's explanation of the word "Yoruba," which he connected with the name "Yarab, son of Kahtan, called Joktan by the Hebrew annalist, and enumerated by Moslem genealogists amongst the Arab el Ariba, or pure Arabs." The origins of the Yoruba could thus be traced back to southern Arabia. Nonetheless Burton had some difficulty accounting for the origin of the sophisticated religious system of the Yoruba. He concluded that it had to be sought through some later outside influence, emanating from perhaps the Romans or Portuguese or from the "powerful kingdom" of the Jews in Ethiopia.

Burton had of course read the great Scottish traveler James Bruce (1730–1794), of whom, unlike most, he approved.⁴ Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* had been the first book to bring the existence of the Beta Israel (or Falashas) of Ethiopia to the general notice of the West.⁵ Burton may have had the Beta Israel in mind when he wrote of the "powerful kingdom" of the Jews who may have influenced the Yoruba.⁶ It is more likely, however, that he was thinking, perhaps subconsciously, of the various references to Jewish kingdoms in Africa, which filled early modern and medieval travel literature and of which he was certainly aware. Burton was not handing out much in the way of a compliment when he suggested Jewish influence in Yoruba religious practice. Burton was an out-and-out racist as far as Africans were concerned, and therefore he could not allow that Yoruba had sophisticated religious ideas and had to sug-

gest that they came from perhaps the Jews of Ethiopia.⁷ But at the same time he was a notorious anti-Semite as far as Jews were concerned, as his infamous book *The Jew, the Gipsy and El-Islam*, accusing eastern Jews of murdering Christian children at Passover, shows.⁸ What quite he had in mind with respect to the possibility of Jewish influence here is unclear, although elsewhere his descriptions of Yoruba traditions and customs are peppered with biblical ethnographic allusions. In general, Western travelers and missionaries persisted in seeing signs that the Yoruba were descended from the ancient Hebrews. Dr. Stephen Septimus Farrow, for one, a Scottish missionary who worked among the Yoruba in the 1890s and wrote a doctoral dissertation in part about them, was convinced of their racial affinities with the Jewish people, and outside attempts to prove their connections to Jews or to the Lost Tribes of Israel have continued until the present time and have been accepted by some Yoruba.⁹

Attempts to connect the Yoruba with Israelites or other Middle Eastern peoples were replicated with respect to the neighboring Igbo (or Ibo). In the late eighteenth century, Olaudah Equiano's celebrated biography—*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African* (1789)—described analogies between Jewish customs, law, and belief and those of the Igbo. Equiano's elegantly couched account of west Africa was the first description published in the West supposedly by a native of west Africa. Equiano observed (the consequences of the observation were to be significant):

Such is the imperfect sketch my memory has furnished me with of the manners and customs of the people among whom I first drew my breath. And here I cannot forbear suggesting what has long struck me very forcibly, namely, the strong analogy which even by this sketch, imperfect as it is, appears to prevail in the manners and customs of my countrymen, and those of the Jews,

before they reached the Land of Promise . . . for we had our circumcision (a rule I believe peculiar to that people); we had also our sacrifices and burnt offerings, our washings and purifications, on the same occasions as they had. As to the difference of colour between the Eboan [Igbo] Africans and the modern Jews, I shall not presume to account for it.¹⁰

Equiano's book fully merited its sensational reception and went into a number of editions. His text, however, is famously problematic. There is ample reason to be cautious about those parts of the book that purport to be a firsthand account of his early life in an Igbo village, given the grave doubts recent scholarship has cast upon both the date and place of his birth.¹¹ Nonetheless, there is general agreement that some of what he wrote about the ethnography of the Igbo appears authentic. Clearly the main point in this passage is the comparison between Igbo manners and customs and those of the Jews. The comparison itself obviously does not come from his childhood memory, nor does he say it does. The passage conveys the kind of general impressions Equiano might easily have gleaned throughout his life from Igbo he met in America, or more probably from the general presumptions embedded in Western attitudes and texts, such as John Ogilby's, that there were indeed Jews and Jewish or Israelite customs in west Africa. Equiano has no immediate way of explaining the difference in color between Western Jews and the Igbo, and he just lets the subject hang—but the reader is surely left with the impression that the Igbo may well be of the same origin as the Jews. At first sight, the perspective of an Igbo from west Africa would not seem to form part of a chapter devoted to colonial discourse. But in a sense Equiano's observations form part of colonial discourse. Given the widespread nature of the colonial theories maintaining that there were Israelite Lost Tribes in every spot on the globe, from the Americas to the islands of the Pacific, the London-based

Equiano would have been hard-pressed not to be aware of them.¹² It is possible that he made this comparison with Jews in order to give added credibility to his work by invoking this, the conventional wisdom of his time, namely that there were Jews in west Africa, and to give the impression that black Africans were civilized and humane and had a culture that, like British culture and European culture in general, had been influenced by Judaic ideals. His book was designed more than anything as a polemic against the iniquities of the enslavement of black people, and it was no doubt desirable to portray Africans as undeserving of this fate, and in as civilized a light as possible, which meant as close to the British as possible.¹³

After 1786, Equiano spent much of his time in England, where at the time there was a sense that the Jews were at the very least honorary Britons. Moreover, the national character of Jews and the English, including their religious character, was taken to be somewhat similar.¹⁴ According to some famous contemporaries of Equiano, British Protestants themselves were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel. One of the most important proponents of this new racialized religious ideology was Richard Brothers (1757–1824).¹⁵ Brothers had had a vision in which it was revealed that he was none other than the Prince of the Hebrews, and as such “the nephew of the Almighty.” Arrested for treasonable practices in 1795 (he had proclaimed that “the Government of the Jewish Nation will, under the Lord God, be committed to me”),¹⁶ Brothers was brought before the Privy Council and in March of that year thrown into an asylum for the insane, in which he was incarcerated for more than a decade. Brothers was convinced initially that the Second Coming would be in 1795, when he would be revealed as Prince of the Hebrews and would lead the Jews back to Palestine along with the “invisible Hebrews,” the descendants of the Lost Tribes, many of whom lived in England and other (Protestant) parts of northern Europe. Over the following century Anglo-Israelism would grow into a major factor in the creation of

racialized religions on both sides of the Atlantic. At the end of the eighteenth century, however, Anglo-Israelism was in its infancy. Nonetheless, connections between the British and the Lost Tribes of Israel formed part of the currency of the day. Thus by invoking a blood connection between the Igbos and the Jews, Equiano was also quite probably postulating a blood connection between the Igbos and the British, which was likely to help in his battle against slavery.¹⁷

Within a few decades this idea was fully internalized by at least one Igbo, and within little more than half a century the conviction that Jews or Jewish customs were to be found in the Igbo areas of west Africa was widespread outside Africa, even though before the 1840s no European had set foot on Igbo-speaking territory. A striking illustration of this came in 1841–1842, when there was an official British expedition up the Niger, the aim of which was to spread Christianity, establish commerce, and conclude antislavery treaties with the chiefs along its banks. William Simpson, who was part of the expedition, explained that he had been asked to take with him two letters, written by London rabbis, both of them in bilingual Hebrew and English format, which he was to hand to the spiritual leaders of any Jewish communities the expedition might encounter along the banks of the Niger. That two busy rabbis should take the time to compose letters to lost Jewish groups in the African interior is proof enough that the discourse surrounding Jews in Africa was taken very seriously, even by experts on Jews. The “Portuguese rabbi at London”—probably David Aaron de Sola (1796–1860)—wrote to his putative African coreligionists: “Peace to our Brethren the children of Israel in all place of their habitations. I the servant of the Lord named David the small is he who writes this in order to inquire after your welfare and the number of the souls, and wishes also to know your occupation and what books are to be found amongst you after the conclusion of the Talmud, and to what customs you are adhered. All this let me know well and clear explained through this man who goes towards you to explore and search the places of your habitations.”¹⁸

Other members of the expedition included James Frederick Schön, who was much taken by the Supreme Being in the apparently monotheistic religious system of the Yoruba, and Samuel Ajayi Crowther (c. 1809–1891), a former slave freed by the British, who went on to be the first African Anglican bishop and would eventually translate the Bible into Yoruba.¹⁹ Other members of the expedition also made reference to seemingly Jewish customs—circumcision was one—that were found among the peoples of the Niger.²⁰ The expedition up the Niger was a failure: it did not succeed in its primary tasks, and most of its members died of fever. The expedition also failed to discover any hitherto unknown Jewish communities, although Jewish influences were found aplenty.

The “Jewishness” of the Igbo received further significant support with the publication in 1921 of a book by the Welsh ethnographer and Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary Dr. George T. Basden, who first arrived in Igbo territory in 1900. After the ill-fated Niger expedition, little further information had been gleaned before Basden’s arrival. Basden undertook a serious study of the Igbo and was generally recognized as the leading expert on the subject. *Among the Ibos of Nigeria: An Account of the Curious & Interesting Habits, Customs, & Beliefs of a Little Known African People, by One Who Has for Many Years Lived amongst Them on Close & Intimate Terms* claimed that Igbo customs bore the direct imprint of ancient Israelite law, while the Igbo language had elements in common with Hebrew. “There are,” he noted with a casualness and lack of precision that speak volumes, as if nothing that followed was in any way controversial, or needed to be proved, “certain customs, which rather point to Levitic influence at a more or less remote period. This is suggested in the underlying ideas concerning sacrifice and in the practice of circumcision. The language also bears several interesting parallels with Hebrew idioms.”²¹

From Equiano’s time to our own day, the discourse placing Jews in west Africa or constructing west Africans as an Israelite racial

entity has continued to develop and expand with some remarkable consequences. Throughout the nineteenth century, Jewish or Israelite traits and languages were imagined into existence with great regularity, and the biological origins and racial stereotypes of many west African peoples were stated to be Jewish or Israelite. Sometimes indigenous origin myths were also invoked to assert Semitic origins. These may have contained some element of historical memory of actual Jewish presence in west Africa or more likely may have come about as a result of Muslim influence.²² Thus, the Soninke people who are scattered throughout and beyond the area of the ancient Ghana empire allegedly had traditions that claimed an extraneous origin for themselves, which invoked the memory of Dinga, their ancestor, who was believed to be of Middle Eastern extraction, and to have come from Jerusalem or perhaps from the Yemen. Dinga's own direct ancestors were variously believed to be the biblical Job, King Solomon, or King David. One French colonial official, Maurice Delafosse, basing his views in part upon these tribal traditions, concluded that the Ghana empire had been founded by a nomadic group from northern Africa of Middle Eastern origin, and constructed a theory around a "Judeo-Syrian" racial origin of the Soninke.²³

In the case of the scattered Fula people of west and central Africa, who were particularly liked by westerners, and who were considered to be "false Negroes" and "semi-Hamites" and "of superior stock to authentic blacks,"²⁴ all sorts of theories were advanced by early observers to elevate them from the common herd: were they a Lost Tribe of Israel—or were they rather descended from the Egyptians? Or had a Roman legion gone astray in the Sahara?²⁵ Edmund Dene Morel (1873–1924), the British journalist, socialist, and author, wrote ecstatically of the remarkable knowledge the Fula had of the Hebrew legends and of their even more wonderful racial characteristics:

The straight-nosed, straight-haired, relatively thin-lipped, wiry, copper or bronze complexioned ('pale gold' as one writer puts it)

Fulani male, with his well developed cranium, and refined extremities; and the Fulani woman, with her clear skin, her rounded breasts [‘Negro’ women were thought to have long, drooping breasts], large eyes, antimony dyed eyebrows, gracefulness of movement, beauty of form—are Asiatics. They are the lineal descendants of the Hyksos, having migrated westwards with the overthrow of the Shepherd conquerors. Their customs bear record to their progenitors having been influenced both by the cult of ancient Egypt and by the Israelites, whose presence in the Nile Delta was contemporaneous with Hyksos rule. . . . I am not aware that the Eastern theory of Fulani origin has been hitherto worked out with any attempt at consecutiveness, or an endeavor made to amalgamate and give in connected form—however imperfectly—the chief factors for further study which may be usefully followed up by someone more competent than the author. And what is to be the policy of Great Britain, of France and of Germany towards this wonderful race? Surely it should be dictated in the first place by a desire to preserve. With their faults—and what race is devoid of faults?—the Fulani have admirable qualities which can fit them to be worthy and reliable co-builders and assistants in the task which the Powers have undertaken in Western Africa. Their virility has hitherto been equal to all the calls upon it. They retain “the strong pride of race.” They possess in the highest degree the attributes of rulers.²⁶

French colonial officials argued that the ruling dynasty in Ghana was also of Jewish origin, and that the burial mounds found in the Niger delta were built by Jews. In 1939, a French official observed that there was an ethnic group, also in the Niger delta, which was rather light-skinned and which ruled over black people with the assistance of You Houzou—the name of a supernatural creature of phenomenal strength, which he construed to mean “Jew.” This construction is of particular interest in view of the contemporary constructions

in Germany and elsewhere of Jews as an omnipotent and baleful organism feeding off the heart of Europe.²⁷ Slightly to the east of Ghana, in Dahomey, Pierre Bertrand Bouche, a nineteenth-century French Catholic missionary, also observed customs such as circumcision rituals and female menstrual seclusion, which he viewed as being of Jewish origin and termed “Judaic practices.”²⁸

Another such group was the Ashanti, an Akan people who live principally in Ghana and the Ivory Coast. In 1817, the resourceful and scholarly British traveler, Thomas Edward Bowdich (1791–1824) was sent by the African Company of Merchants on a mission to the royal Ashanti court, at Kumasi, where he succeeded in securing British control over Ashanti coastal regions. He and his companions were the first Europeans to traverse the rain forests into the Ashanti interior, and his adventures were described in *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*, which was first published in 1819. For Bowdich the task of trying to construct a racial category into which to place the Ashanti was one based on looking for similarities between Europeans and the Ashanti. The construction depended more on sameness than difference. He was looking for similarities between the Ashanti and people like himself and found them. He commented, for instance, on the Grecian features and brilliant eyes of Ashanti women “set rather obliquely in the head.”²⁹ In his influential *Essay on the Superstitions, Customs and Acts Common to the Ancient Egyptians, Abyssinians and Ashantees* (Paris, 1821), he described the cultural and linguistic connections and commonalities between the Ashanti and the Phoenicians, ancient Egyptians, and Ethiopians and argued that the Ashanti people derived ultimately from “the civilised Ethiopians of Herodotus.” Similarly, noting that they were thought to be “the most civil and well-bred people . . . in Africa,” Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), the geographer and ethnographer (and the man who coined the term *Lebensraum* in the National Socialist sense), admiringly wrote of the Ashanti that they were a dominant race of conquerors and empire

builders who had come from elsewhere and with their superior culture taken the land from lesser peoples. His *Lebensraum* ideas fitted the Ashanti case well because he theorized that “superior cultures” destroy “inferior cultures” in battles for living space.”³⁰ Of the Ashanti he wrote: “they are among the best breeds of Guinea—intelligent, industrious and courageous.”³¹ They were thought generally to be from elsewhere and probably to be a Lost Tribe of Israel, even though the Ashanti themselves made every effort to “record their origin as being from Ashanti proper.” The explorer Sir Henry Stanley (1841–1904), while working for the *New York Herald*, observed a striking similarity between an Ashanti stool and the depiction of one he had seen in Thebes in Egypt. Impressed by the workmanship of the stool, he went on to enthuse about the excellence of Ashanti sandals: “Sandals! At the very repetition of the word one’s thoughts revert to the inhabitants of Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor.”³² Anything fine in African culture regularly elicited the reaction that it must be from somewhere else—and the usual locus was Palestine or the Middle East. The brass plaques known as the Benin bronzes, which were seized by a British force in 1897 in Benin City, challenged Western assumptions about Africa in general and Benin—perceived as the home of human sacrifice and “fetish”—in particular. Various explanations were sought to counter the epistemological embarrassment. If the Ashanti were not perhaps racially European, they were not too far removed. Thus the “bronzes” were regularly attributed to lost tribes of Israelites, Egyptians, or the men of Atlantis, while other African artistic traditions were explained away as deriving from the art of ancient Egypt.³³

A detailed and specifically Israelite theory with respect to the racial construction of the Ashanti emerged in a major study published in 1930 (in many ways the *annus mirabilis* of the Israelites in Africa theory) by Joseph J. Williams, a Jesuit ethnographer and fellow of the American Geographical Society who worked for the *Catholic*

Review and was professor of cultural anthropology at the Boston College graduate school. He never worked in west Africa but did undertake some research trips to Jamaica and other Caribbean islands in search of traces of west African culture. He claimed (and no one particularly disputed his claims) to have found many traces of Hebrew in the Ashanti language and of Israelite customs in the culture of the Ashanti.³⁴ He took the name “Ashanti” to mean the “sons of Ashan”—“ti” meaning “sons of”—and connected “Ashan” with a city that was one of the cities of the tribe of Judah. He found countless parallels between the religious culture of the Ashanti and the Hebrew Bible, including the use of spirit mediums, the name for which in Ashanti recalled the Hebrew term *oboth*. He perceived Hebraic vestiges in Ashanti religious dances, their use of the Hebrew word “Amen” at the end of prayers, in their names, and marriage customs. There were even specific Ashanti ritual items that reflected, he thought, the accoutrements of the high priest at the Temple in Jerusalem, including the *mitznefet* or miter, and the breastplate, complete with the insignia of the Lost Twelve Tribes of Israel.³⁵ Williams reached the final conclusion that “the Supreme Being not only of the Ashanti and allied tribes, but most probably of the whole of Negro Land as well, is not the God of the Christians which, at a comparatively recent date, was superimposed on the various tribal beliefs by ministers of the Gospel, but the Yahweh of the Hebrews, and that too of the Hebrews of pre-exilic times.”³⁶ The reviewer of Williams’s work in the respected *Journal of the Royal African Society* was hesitant about the purported connection between Ashanti and Hebrew as in the pairs “*nyame* and *yaweh*, *ntoro* and *torah*” but was not averse to the overall thesis. The reviewer recognized that the Ashanti inland tribes had “many of those Semitic traits which the Ashanti also exhibit.” But whether, in addition, their ruling class, “which probably also influenced the Akan stocks, were Jews from Palestine (pre-exilic or post-exilic)” or “Semito-negro Carthaginians . . . must perhaps . . . forever

remain unknown.” However, they were clearly something along those racial lines.³⁷ Williams’s proposals gained support from a number of subsequent writers. One such was Eva Meyerowitz, a doughty supporter of the Hamitic hypothesis. Meyerowitz started her research in 1943 when she was art supervisor at Achimota College—the elite private school in Accra, Ghana. She was asked by the *Burlington Magazine* to write a series of articles on Ashanti gold ornaments and went on to do fieldwork among Akan-speaking peoples supported by the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Colonial Research Council, and the University College of Ghana. Her research yielded four volumes: *The Sacred State of the Akan* (1951), *Akan Traditions of Origin* (1952), *The Akan of Ghana: Their Ancient Beliefs* (1958), and *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt* (1960). In her third volume she argued that the Carthaginian deities Tanit and Baal Hamman could be equated with the Akan Nyame and Nyankopon in just about every detail.³⁸ Throughout this body of work are two assumptions: that the Akan have declined over time from what they once were, and that they originated from the ancient cultures of Egypt and the Near East and particularly from the Libyo-Phoenician culture of pre-Arab northern Africa.³⁹ The same assumptions were made of a wide variety of peoples throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in most other regions of Africa and the African diaspora.

5 / Half White and Half Black

The construction of racialized identities and religions as an act of sympathetic or unsympathetic “othering” must be seen in the context of how the British or other Europeans viewed themselves. We have already speculated that the British Israel theory may have influenced Olaudah Equiano’s famous passage about Igbo beliefs. One late nineteenth-century visitor to Uganda, the journalist Henry Wood Nevinson (1856–1941), observed:

The strictly biblical education produced . . . the illusion that both the promises and the threatenings of the Jewish lawgivers and prophets were specially designed for ourselves (the British) by a foreseeing Power. We never doubted that we English Evangelicals were the Chosen People and when every Sunday evening we sang the Magnificat ‘As He promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever’ we gave no thought to the Jews; and when soon

afterwards, we sang in the *Nunc Dimittis* ‘To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of Thy people Israel’ we meant the Missionary societies would spread the light of the Gospel to Negroes . . . while God’s English people retained the glory.¹

By the second half of the nineteenth century the Anglo-Israel movement was reaching its zenith, and its claims were common currency. No doubt many missionaries, even those with no formal or even informal links with Anglo-Israelism, viewed themselves as latter-day Israelites. And thus, as happens, they constructed certain favored and more likable or manageable “racial” groups such as the Fula and many like them as “others” in their own image. Another of the mechanisms in the colonial context, which was so often productive of an imagined Israelite identity, was the selection of a particular group, like the Banyankole or Ashanti, which was supposed both to have superior qualities and to have originated outside Africa, and which could be expected to cooperate with colonial regimes—to be, as Edmund Dene Morel put it, “worthy and reliable co-builders and assistants in the task which the Powers have undertaken.”²

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, new racial and religious identities were spawned for a bewildering number of separate peoples in central, southern, and eastern Africa. One writer noted, “Northward [of Katanga] lives one of the greatest tribes of Central Africa, the Baluba, who are of undoubted Semitic origin. The name Baluba means ‘the lost tribe,’ and their language and customs have many Hebrew affinities. Their name for, and idea of, God, with their word for water, and people, and many other words and ideas, show their Semitic strain.” The Baluba here are given a racialized religious identity in which a belief in one God is associated with their biological “strain.”³

The intrepid American explorer Hermann Norden (who had walked across much of Africa and traveled in many of the more inhospitable parts of the globe, including “Siam and Malaya,” only to

stumble, hit his head and die on Charing Cross Road in London in 1931) noted that in the early 1920s in Uganda there was a tradition of ancient lineage of thirty-three kings going back to the time of King David, which echoes claims made by Leo Africanus. "It is a proud history," he wrote. "The legends tell of the Uganda people crossing the Nile centuries upon centuries ago and subduing all tribes whose country they traversed. They claim the highest native civilization in Africa." Here too the idea of a biological link with the Semites is associated both with their higher civilization and their prowess in war.⁴

Sir Harry Johnston (1858–1927), the first British administrator of the Uganda Protectorate and a prolific writer, thought that Phoenicians or Canaanites had crossed into Africa at some time, mingled with Ethiopians, and descended into East Africa, creating more-advanced societies as they progressed.⁵ In Ankole, one of the four traditional kingdoms in Uganda, located southeast of Lake Albert, the British, Cambridge-educated explorer, hunter, and traveler, T. Broadwood Johnson observed of one cattle rearing group:

The Banyankole, as the people of Ankole are called, are an exceedingly interesting race, the purest, least mixed branch of the great Baima stock, which constitutes the ruling caste in all the kingdoms around. In figure they are tall and lithe, and their long, thin faces, with a very Jewish nose and lips, forcibly suggest a Semitic origin, and strongly mark off their features from the bullet head, flat nose, and thick lips of their neighbors. Captain Speke, who was the first European to travel amongst them, reasonably assumes, from their own traditions and his own wider observations, that the whole race are closely allied to the pastoral Gallas, who came from Abyssinia. Centuries perhaps before the Christian era, some roving Asiatic race with their long-horned cattle came streaming in from Arabia on the east and Palestine

on the north, and settled themselves in the mountain fastnesses of Abyssinia. Mixing with the agricultural Hamite negroes dwelling there, they still retained their Semitic features, their pastoral habits, and their fine breed of cattle. The fact that on some of the ancient Egyptian tombs may be found sculptures of men bearing exactly similar features and with like long-horned cattle is significant. Thence, within recent centuries, a further migration was made, and the race, by their greater forcefulness and pride, subjugated the people in their path and, though aliens and few in number, became, like the Manchus in China, the ruling caste. In other countries such as Uganda, Unyoro, and Toro they have become assimilated much more closely to the indigenous races, but in Ankole they have remained very definitely distinct from the original agricultural inhabitants who rank with them as mere “Bairu” (slaves).⁶

Among the neighboring Tutsi we find one of the most dramatic examples of the phenomenon of an imagined Semitic and Israelite identity. The first explorers to reach the area of Rwanda and Burundi were immediately struck by the differences between what they saw as three groups: the Hutus, the Tutsi, and the Twa. These groups shared the same territory, spoke the same language, and sometimes intermarried. However, they had a different “racial look.” The Twa—a tiny minority—were pygmies who were hunter-gatherers in the forests or else acted as menial servants, at court and elsewhere. The Hutu, who were the majority, were farmers who tilled the soil. The Tutsis were perceived as being different: they were “tall and thin and often displayed sharp, angular facial features” and were cattle herders. The explorer John Hanning Speke (1827–1864), who had gone with Burton to search for the equatorial lakes of Africa, discovered Lake Tanganyika with Burton, and Lake Victoria independently, and was, with James Augustus Grant (1827–1892), the first European

to cross equatorial Africa, had laid some of the groundwork for an explanation of these differences. His theory was that the ruling groups in the interlacustrine kingdoms had come from a “superior” civilization in the north. In *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (London, 1863), Speke connected them essentially with what he called the Galla of southern Ethiopia. In a part of the book devoted specifically to his racial theory of the “conquest of inferior by superior races,” Speke maintained that it was not possible to think “that they can be of any other race than the semi-Shem-Hamitic of Ethiopia.” He summarized their history succinctly:

They fought in the Somali country, subjugated that land, were defeated to a certain extent by the Arabs from the opposite continent, and tried their hands south as far as the Jub river, where they also left many of their numbers behind. Again they attacked Omwita (the present Mombasa), were repulsed, were lost sight of in the interior of the continent, and, crossing the Nile close to its source, discovered the rich pasture-lands of Unyoro, and founded the great kingdom of Kittara, where they lost their religion, forgot their language, extracted their lower incisors like the natives, changed their national name to Wahuma, and no longer remembered the names of Hubshi or Galla—though even the present reigning kings retain a singular traditional account of their having once been half white and half black, with hair on the white side straight, and on the black side frizzly.⁷

Thus, as a result of their innate Caucasian racial superiority, these Hamites were perceived by Speke as early culture-bearers, the surrounding tribes as completely inferior.

The idea that the Tutsi and similar groups in the area were racially superior to others persisted. In a Belgian colonial report of 1925, the Twa were described, in terms reminiscent of Herodotus, as having “a monkey-like flat face and a huge nose, he is quite similar to the apes

whom he chases in the forest.”⁸ In another colonial report of the same year, the Hutu were similarly disparaged: “They are generally short and thick-set with a big head, a jovial expression, a wide nose and enormous lips. They are extroverts who like to laugh and lead a simple life.” But according to the same report, the Tutsi was of a superior type. He “has nothing of the Negro, apart from his colour . . . his features are very fine. . . . Gifted with a vivacious intelligence, the Tutsi displays a refinement of feeling which is rare among primitive peoples.”⁹ In 1926 Mary Hastings Bradley, the American traveler and author, spoke of the “sophisticated” Tutsi who had “a precise theology” and a number of biblical-sounding stories. These, she explains, “came down from the north with these tribes of pronounced Hamitic and Semitic origins.”¹⁰ A Belgian missionary supposed that the Tutsi’s qualities must come from elsewhere: “We can see Caucasian skulls and beautiful Greek profiles side by side with Semitic and even Jewish features, elegant golden-red beauties in the heart of Ruanda and Urundi!”¹¹ In 1902 a French Catholic missionary enthused that their “intelligent and delicate appearance, their love of money, their capacity to adapt to any situation seem to indicate a Semitic origin.”¹²

New “scientific” racial theories started to circulate suggesting that the Tutsi and also the Masai came from a “primordial red race.” Some thought they came from India. A certain Dominican, Father Etienne Brosse, suggested they originated in the Garden of Eden, while others suggested that the Tutsi were survivors of the lost civilization of Atlantis. In 1970 Paul del Perugia, onetime French ambassador to Rwanda, suggested that the Tutsi were “Magi” who had come from Tibet, some of them finishing up in Iceland. He believed the Tutsis were capable of seeing flying saucers, unlike the more primitive Hutu, and also found reason to include Nineveh, Noah, and Babylon in his egregious disquisition on Tutsi racial origins.¹³

To the east, the Masai, the famous pastoral people of Kenya and northern Tanzania, generated similar reactions, and they too were generally categorized as racially superior to other Africans and labeled

Hamites.¹⁴ The idea that the Masai were originally Jews was explored in detail by Moritz Merker, a German army officer, who in 1895 was posted to German East Africa, where he was initially given a command in the Kilimanjaro area. He stayed in East Africa most of the time until his early death in 1908. In his detailed and carefully researched work *Die Masai: Ethnographische Monographie eines ostafrikanischen Semitenvolkes* (Berlin, 1904), which was reprinted in paperback in 2010, Merker set out his belief that he had found profound and numerous parallels between the Masai's myths and customs, social structure, and religion and those of the biblical Hebrews, which included the stories of the creation of the world, the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, the serpent, the fall of man, the story of the flood, the theft of the birthright, the bronze serpent, and the Ten Commandments. Merker was fascinated by the Masai, and he devoted himself to a thorough study of their customs and particularly their religious practices, in the light of his understanding of the Old Testament. Like many others he used the Bible as a means of interpreting what he observed. For him the Israelite ethnographic model was an obvious point of comparison with the religious manifestations he came across. Toward the end of his book, Merker discussed the earliest narratives of the Israelites and the Masai, and used the similarities between Maasai and Israelite perspectives as the main proof of a close racial relationship between the two. The Bible then was largely responsible for giving the Masai a new *racial identity* that was more in keeping with their familiar-looking religious customs. He concluded that the Masai and the Hebrews once constituted a single people. The Masai in fact were Israelites.¹⁵

If we shift our gaze to the southern part of Africa, the same fantasies abound. The Dutch, who started settling the Cape at a time of great religious commitment and zeal, believed in the sharp distinction between the saved and the damned, between freeman and slave. The Dutch, as well as others, were sure that when the Bible spoke of

the children of Ham, it had the black peoples of Africa in mind, and according to them, there was scriptural authority for blacks being maintained in permanent slavery. As Thomas Herbert put it in 1627, “The natives being propagated from Ham both in their Visages and Natures seem to inherit his malediction.”

In the Cape, as elsewhere, the Bible became a road map for the understanding of African peoples. Time and again, in an exercise in comparative religion, the peculiarities of local peoples were given a biblical spin by Europeans. Features specific to them—such as scarification—were put in a biblical context; thus in 1612 Patrick Copland observed that “they cut their skinnes like Baal’s priests.”¹⁶ Georg Meister, who landed at the Cape in 1677 and noted that “bestial men or animal-like Hottentots”—the name given the Khoisan by the Dutch—used “a very sharp flint to shave the hair of their beards, as the Jews are said to do in their circumcising, with which they can smooth their chins as neatly as if they had the best razors.” Nonetheless, he added: “Jews, like the Turks, West- and East Indians, had a spark of knowledge of God and of His Will and [were] therefore as far from these savages as is the Sun from the Moon.” In 1695 Johannes Gulielmus Grevenbroek (born c. 1644) made further similarities between the Jews and the Khoisan. In a letter, he noted that it is

supposed that it is from the Jews that the inhabitants of the remoter parts have learned the practice of circumcision (although it is a more serious operation with the Africans, involving the cutting away not only of the prepuce, but of the skin right up to the base of the abdomen. From the Jews also the natives near us must have acquired the practice of removing the left testicle, if you will excuse the mention of it. Indeed who is so blind as not to see that it is from the Israelites that both divisions of Hottentots have derived all their sacerdotal and sacrificial rites, which are

redolent of the purest antiquity, although admittedly the lapse of so many centuries has obscured the connection.

Grevenbroek also noted a similarity in the naming customs of Jews and Khoisan. “Here I think I should mention that among our natives the names of brother and sister are, in the Israelitish fashion, bestowed on cousins on the father’s or the mother’s side.”

Grevenbroek, like others elsewhere in Africa, thought that Hebrew and the language of the Khoisan were connected. “I am of the opinion,” he wrote, “that the language of the natives has something in common with Hebrew, for it seems to consist of guttural labials, dentals, linguals and other sounds that fall with difficulty from the lips and are hard for us to pronounce.”¹⁷

In 1705 Peter Kolb (1675–1725), a well-educated astronomer from southern Germany, was sent to the Cape to make astronomical and meteorological observations. Kolb published a book, *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope*, that had a very considerable success and for the next fifty years was the definitive account of the religion of the Khoisan. Kolb claimed that their general customs and traditions were similar to those of the Jews. The Khoisan legend—that they had entered the country through some sort of a window—was seen by Kolb as a distorted folk-memory of Noah’s Ark and the flood. He enumerated what he saw as the similarities between their sacrificial customs, their moon festivals, circumcision rites, and so on. One of the things about the Khoisan that struck Kolb was their stubbornness and intractability. They could not easily be weaned from their various cultural practices. One such practice, according to Kolb, involved a male elder urinating on people during rites of initiation, funerals, or weddings.¹⁸ “I took Abundance of pains and spent not a little Money,” wrote Kolb, “to come at the meaning of the Pissing.” He understood the ritual as a means of conveying respect—for instance, an elder might urinate upon people at a funeral who had accompanied

the deceased as far as the grave. "Pissing," he noted, "is the Glory of all the Hottentot Ceremonies." However, Kolb disapproved of the custom and did all he could to change it. The resistance to change of the people concerned was another example of their stubbornness, and the stubbornness they exhibited was put in a biblical context. The Hottentots, who had resisted Christianity as they resisted Kolb's attempts to change their customs, were "stiff as are the Jews." For this and other reasons, he asserted, in the customary act of racial and religious construction, that the Khoisan could be counted among the children of Abraham, that they were indeed of Jewish blood.

In 1767 Gysbert Hemmy delivered a Latin speech, subsequently published, titled "De Promontorio Bonae Spei," at the Hamburg Academy, in which he noted that

Kolb is of the opinion that the Hottentots are descended from the Jews. There is no lack of evidence to add considerable weight to this conjecture. There is the widespread tradition concerning the first parents of their race who arrived in this region of the earth through a window and a door. There are their well-known sacrifices, through which they strive to correct anything that is evil. There is a great variety of practices which are known to be especially common among the Jews. They divorce their wives for the most trifling causes. In marriage they never depart from the forbidden family relationships. Firstborn sons have special privileges regarding inheritance. Women who have just given birth or who are menstruating are unclean and their husbands are not permitted to have any relations with them. They abstain from eating pork and other food Jews are forbidden to eat.

Henny did note one difference: "In squalor and uncleanness they surpass the Jews," but he added that "there is no doubt that the practice of excising the left testicle suggests imitation of the Jewish rite of

circumcision.”¹⁹ This discourse continued. In 1881, the missionary and ethnographer Theophilus Hahn, in his well-known book *Tsunigoam, The Supreme Being of the Khoi-Khoi*,²⁰ followed this line of racial construction and similarly argued that the religion of the Khoisan was a fossilized remnant of ancient Judaism, which with the passage of time and the degeneration of the Khoisan had lost many of its original characteristics.²¹

It was generally assumed that the religious structure of the Xhosa, too, had developed from some ancient Near Eastern religious system.²² In 1827 an English settler in the Eastern Cape noted that the Xhosa had religious traditions that included “some Mahometan and Jewish rites.”²³ At the conclusion of the Sixth Xhosa War (1834–1836), Sir Harry Smith, recently appointed governor of the short-lived province of Queen Adelaide, set himself the task of endeavoring to understand the defeated enemy and maintained that he had found many things that “resembled the Law of Moses.”²⁴ A similar theory was developed by Robert Godlonton, spokesman for land-hungry settlers in the Eastern Cape and editor of the *Graham’s Town Journal*, which expressed the settlers’ views. He too argued that it was possible to prove the origin of the Xhosa enemy by reference to their language, which he said clearly showed “traces of its eastern origin in the frequent occurrence of words which are plainly of Hebrew or Arabic extraction.” He similarly observed that “many persons suppose that they can discover in many of their ceremonies an affinity to those established by the ancient Jews.” Following the theories of the time, he maintained that the Xhosa had “degenerated from the manners and customs of their forefathers.”²⁵ Their ancient home was somewhere in the Middle East, and it was only because of the long journey from there to the Eastern Cape and the lapse of time that they had lost the more noble and advanced traits of their ancestors. The colonial fantasy of inserting the Xhosa into the narrative of Christian sacred history while constructing them as a race alien to

Africa served a gauntly secular aim. As their ancestors had been intruders into the area, bringing their foreign language with them, the Xhosa did not belong in South Africa. As elsewhere, it was an act of “othering,” in which the barely known Xhosa were given racial and linguistic characteristics of better-known European “others,” including the Jews.

In 1844 the British annexed Natal. The largely British settlers were acutely aware that to the north there was a powerful Zulu state, and as a result considerable interest in Zulu customs and traditions was generated. Captain Francis Gardiner (1794–1851), a commander in the Royal Navy and a devoted missionary, who was later to die of starvation along with missionary companions on a desert island in Tierra del Fuego, went on a journey traveling east from the Cape to Natal. Upon his first encounter with the Zulus, he took their customs to be “apparently of Jewish origin” and the Zulus themselves to be of Jewish extraction. The Zulu customs that led him to this conclusion included circumcision, levirate marriage, the festival of the first fruits, and a number of others.²⁶ In 1835 Gardiner was sent to negotiate a peace with the Zulu chief Dingane at his winter home, Kwa-Khangela, near present-day Eshowe. Upon his return after lengthy and detailed talks about every aspect of Zulu life, Gardiner reported that Zulu religious beliefs were quite simply “a remnant of pre-Christian Judaism.”²⁷ As British power was extended farther east, the same discourse continued. Throughout the 1850s Zulus continued to be racially constructed as Jews. Their settled, pastoral life and their religious and social customs were evidence enough of this. G. R. Peppercorne, the magistrate of Pafana Location, observed to the Native Affairs Commission that “a general type of the customs and laws of the Ama-Zulu may be found in the early history of the Hebrews.” Zulu polygamy, marriage customs, even attitudes toward work were all described in the appropriate biblical passage.²⁸ He suggested that any European who wanted to understand Zulu customs had only to read the Old Testament. Henry

Francis Fynn (1803–1861), an English traveler, trader, and an acknowledged expert on Zulu customs, left behind a diary that is one of the best sources on the history of the Zulus. The diary covers the period from 1824 to 1836, when Fynn was living much of the time with the Zulus. “I was surprised,” he wrote, “to find a considerable resemblance between many of the [Zulu] customs and those of the Jews.” These included “war offerings; sin offerings; propitiatory offerings; Festival of first fruits . . . periods of uncleanness, on the decease of relatives and touching the dead; Circumcision; Rules regarding chastity; rejection of swine’s flesh.” Fynn concluded in the usual way of the Hamitic hypothesis that in view of “the nature of semblance of many of their customs to those of the ancient Jews, as prescribed under the Levitical priesthood I am led to form the opinion that the [Zulu] tribes have been very superior to what they are at the present time.”

Much of the Western attitude toward Africans sprang from sheer curiosity and a desire to know and understand such radically different cultures. A similar interest no doubt existed among the Zulus with respect to Western traditions and customs and perhaps particularly knowing how to react to imperial, colonial, and missionary sources of power. From a Zulu standpoint, the fixing of their own identity, faced with such an array of foreigners, from the English to white and black Americans, from central European to Dutch Jews, from Indians to Malays, from traders to imperial agents, presented an overwhelming challenge. As we have seen, a number of stratagems were used by Europeans to construct and understand Zulus. One invoked the obvious historical analogy of Sparta, but generally the Zulus, like others, were connected with Israelites or some other Middle Eastern people. As we shall see, in due course, these constructions had some impact upon the way the Zulus saw themselves, as well as their colonial masters.²⁹

A similar analysis was made by John Colenso (1814–1883), the famous Cambridge-educated biblical scholar, mathematician, and

Christian socialist who was ordained bishop of Natal in 1853. He arrived in Natal the following year and quickly became fluent in Zulu (he went on to publish a grammar and dictionary of the language). In his dealings with the Zulus, and in his efforts to understand their language, culture, and religion, Colenso engaged in a very intense way with the theological issue of the racial origins of mankind. His theological work provoked the most violent protests and vilification (some 140 books were written in opposition to his views) and led to his being deposed from his bishopric. (He refused to budge, and for a while there were two parallel Anglican bishops of Natal!) He was drawn to conclude that in view of the scientific knowledge of his day, polygenesis was a more likely explanation of the differences between Zulus and other blacks and whites than was the account in Genesis, but there was nothing pejorative about his selection of polygenesis. He threw himself into contemporary anthropological debates, in which he stressed the dignity and humanity of the Zulus while rejecting the social Darwinism that sought to categorize them, like other Africans, as an inferior group lagging behind in the evolutionary race. In his attempt to socially construct the Zulus, he depended largely upon biblical ethnology, and he often gave the impression that he thought there was a connection between Zulus and Jews. One Zulu who visited him in Pietermaritzburg in the 1850s took the view that Colenso undoubtedly thought that the Zulus were directly descended from the Jews.³⁰ Colenso was convinced that the two Zulu names for God embraced perfectly the notions of the divine “contained in the Hebrew words Elohim and Jehovah.”³¹ So close indeed were the resemblances, according to Colenso, that frequently he suggested that anyone who wanted to really understand the Bible had best study Zulu customs. Zulu “habits and even the nature of their country so nearly correspond to those of the ancient Israelites, that the very scenes are brought continually, as it were, before their eyes, and vividly realised in a practical point of

view.” Practically everything about the Zulus, from their lunar calendar to the order of religious feasts, seemed to reflect an Israelite past. “The Zulu keeps his annual feasts, and observes the New Moons as the old Hebrew did. The Zulus have their festivals at the beginning of the Southern Spring and at the end of our Autumn, corresponding to the ‘feast of the first fruits’ and the ‘feast of the ingathering’ of the ancient Hebrews.” Bishop Colenso was so convinced of the authenticity of the Zulu traditions, and so convinced that they were purer traditions than those preserved elsewhere, that he went on to write important theological works based in part on Zulu oral tradition. Colenso was called “father of the people” by the Zulus and became their advocate: in most matters he took the side of the Zulus. Colenso’s espousal of Israelite influences upon the Zulus may thus be seen within a liberal tradition and his reading of their traditions a mechanism in his fight against the forces of racism and conservatism. But equally his racial construction of Zulus was yet another example of the tendency of the Hamitic hypothesis to elevate a favored group above surrounding peoples.³²

Karl Peters—the founder of German East Africa and later on hero of Adolf Hitler—writing of the Shona of eastern Zimbabwe in the 1890s, noted: “How absolutely Jewish is the type of this people!” He wrote that “they have faces cut exactly like those of ancient Jews who live around Aden. Also the way they wear their hair, the curls behind the ears, and the beard drawn out in single curls, gives them the appearance of Aden—or of Polish—Jews of the good old type.” This piece of racial construction is of some interest. There is little possibility that Peters really came across Shona in the nineteenth century wearing the side locks (*peot*) worn by Orthodox Ashkenazi or Yemenite Jews. Did he imagine it? Did the various aspects of Shona life so perfectly fit with what he knew of Jews as to project upon his memory the one most obvious point of physical difference between Jews of the time and Germans? His racial construction was to make

the Shona more or less identical to Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe, who were frequently to be seen in the fairs and markets of German towns. They were powerless, transient, and dependent on favors. These were the Jews “of the good old type.” The other Jews, the assimilated, successful, powerful Jews of Germany of his time, were another matter.³³

In conclusion it can be stated that the spread of the ideology connecting Africa and black people in general with the Jews has been spectacular. It arose in the European and Middle Eastern imagination in the early Middle Ages and may be attributed in part to the ignorance of much of the world brought about by the breakdown of communications between the Islamic Middle East and what lay beyond it and Christian Europe. It became an axiomatic feature of medieval thinking about the world. It was used, exploited, and reinvented by colonialism in many distinct places in Africa, where it served missionary and colonial interests. The construction of Jewish and Israelite racial and cultural identities was an *innate* feature of Western colonialism throughout the world. Jews were constructed everywhere—not only in Africa but also in Great Britain. The invention or discovery of Israelites reinforced the idea of Europe by providing Europe with a limitless periphery of known and understood racial others.³⁴ The re-racialization of the world using the Bible as a road map may be seen as an overreliance on the one ethnography, often the one book, that missionaries were familiar with but also as an attempt to “other” the unknown worlds of Africa and Asia with a known, trusted, and malleable Israelite “other” of Europe. This discourse is a potent and immanent aspect of the imagined past and the lived present of a surprising number of black Africans and African Americans, as well as millions of other people.

6 / The Emergence of Black Jews in the United States

When Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) set off on his 1492 voyage, he took with him as interpreter a certain Luis de Torres (d. 1493), who was a recently converted Jew and, as it turned out, the first person of Jewish origin to settle (and die) in the Americas. De Torres was something of a linguist, and apart from Spanish, Greek, German, and Portuguese, he also knew more exotic languages, including Aramaic. The idea was that his Oriental languages would enable him to speak to the natives of the lands on the other side of the Atlantic.¹ On Friday, November 2, 1492, Columbus “decided to send . . . Luis de Torres . . . who, as he says, understood Hebrew and Chaldee and even some Arabic,” with a landing party just in case they encountered any Hebrew, Aramaic, or Arabic speakers. Columbus may well have had Eastern Jewish traders in mind but, given that he had attentively read Mandeville’s *Travels*, it is more likely that he was

thinking of the Lost Tribes of Israel, who were widely thought to inhabit the eastern portions of the great Asian landmass.

For hundreds of years after the arrival of Columbus, the most frequently invoked explanation for the origin of the indigenous populations of the American continents, north and south, was that they were Lost Tribes of Israel.² The Spanish embraced this theory with enthusiasm. According to the historian and missionary Juan de Torquemada (c. 1562–1624) it was Bartolomé de Las Casas (c. 1484–1566), the so-called Apostle to the Indies, who first proposed that the South American population was descended from the Lost Tribes. According to the Irish Lost Tribes enthusiast Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough (1795–1837), “the celebrated Las Casas entertained no doubt that the continent of America had in early ages been colonized by the Jews; and he even goes so far as to say that the language of the Island of San Domingo was ‘corrupt Hebrew.’”³ In his *Historia General de las Indias* (1553), Francisco López de Gómara (1511–1564) noted of the native population in South America: “They are all very like Jews in appearance and voice, for they have large noses and speak through the throat.” The Indians, according to Torquemada, too, were literally of Israelite stock, biologically Jews, and had been persuaded by the devil to worship him in South America, in a similar manner to their worship of God in ancient Israel. Moreover, it soon became axiomatic that most if not all the local languages were dialects of Hebrew and other Jewish languages.⁴ What was true of South and Central America was also true of the north. Major General Daniel Gookin (1612–1687), a settler in Massachusetts who was appointed captain of the military company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1644, undertook a thorough study of the indigenous population. He started his great work, *Historical Collections of the Indians of New England* (1674), with a chapter on the origins of the Indians. The predominant conjecture about their origins, he pointed out, was “that this people are of the race of the

Ten Tribes of Israel. . . . as many learned men think.”⁵ Later English colonists, such as the Quaker William Penn (1644–1718), found all manner of signs of Judaism among the Indians; after his first few months Penn noted of the Native Americans:

Their eye is little and black not unlike a straight-looking Jew . . . their language is lofty, yet narrow; but like the Hebrew in signification; like short-hand in writing, one word serveth in the place of three. . . . For their origin I am ready to believe them of the Jewish race; I mean of the stock of the Ten Tribes, and that for the following reasons; first they were to go to a “land not planted or known” which, to be sure, Asia and Africa were, if not Europe; and He that intended that extraordinary judgment upon them, might make the passage not uneasy to them, as it is not impossible in itself, from the Easternmost parts of Asia, to the Westernmost of America. In the next place, I find them of like countenance, and their children of so lively a resemblance, that a man would think himself in Duke’s Place or Bury Street in London, where he seeth them. But this is not all; they agree in rites, they reckon by moons; they offer their first fruits, they have a kind of Feast of Tabernacles; they are said to lay their altar upon twelve stones; their mourning a year, customs of women, with many things that do not now occur.⁶

Very many sources from the seventeenth century through to the twentieth suggesting the Jewish origins of the North American Indians could be cited.⁷

The Israelite trope was active during the nineteenth century, first in Great Britain and parts of Europe, and then in the United States in the creation of a new racialized religious identity not only for distant “others” like indigenous Americans, but also for white Anglo-Saxons and Celts, and other Europeans. British Israelism and its

American counterpart, which became both influential and numerically important by the end of the nineteenth century, and which still have a significant following, perceived the white population of the British Isles and the United States as being quite literally and biologically descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel. In some versions of this ideology, actual Jews were regarded as impostors. This freshly minted pedigree, which was underpinned by comprehensive biblical exegesis as well as by the undeniable successes of “Anglo-Saxons” in recent history, contributed to notions of white supremacy and imperial entitlement, which legitimized the supreme role of Great Britain and later the United States in the domination of the world. Anglo-Israelite ideology was developed by John Wilson (1799–1870), who used scientific racialism and “Christian phrenology” in his quest to establish the role and mission of Great Britain in the world through the spectrum of the Lost Tribes of Israel. His successor, Edward Hine (1825–1891), perhaps the most influential proponent of Anglo-Israelism, continued the elaboration of this new racial and religious identity for the peoples of the British Isles. His convictions enabled him to contemplate the extinction of colonized people with composure. “We have literally fulfilled Israel’s mission by pushing the aborigines of our colonies to the ends of what was once their own country, as we require more room, so do we push, drive them into corners. This we have done to the Caffres, the Maoris, the Bushmen of Australia. . . . All our aborigines are positively dying out, gradually but surely, before us.”⁸ For Hine the extinction of non-Israelite lesser breeds was a proof of the destiny of Anglo-Saxons to be heirs to the promises of the Bible. Scripture was widely mobilized in the support of various theories of race and ethnic origin, and Anglo-Israelism in many ways was one of the movements that most radically pillaged the scriptures for the purpose of creating a new racial identity for its adherents. In so doing it “redrew some of the central categories of nineteenth-century racial discourse.”⁹

Thus it was that in the Americas, from the very first interaction between colonists and the native populations and throughout the long centuries of the transatlantic slave trade and right up until modern times, Lost Tribes theories regarding Native Americans or Anglo-Saxons in the United States, sundry others in Central and South America, and countless groups throughout the world, including Africa, were swirling around, generating books, articles, religions, and even government policy. As time went on, a number of groups in the United States came under the spell of the Lost Tribes. Native Americans, Anglo-Israelites, some early Pentecostals, many blacks, and Mormons all vied for this illustrious pedigree. Unlike the colonial situation in Africa, where white missionaries in most colonies were eager to nominate some Africans as Lost Tribes, American whites most emphatically did not consider promoting American blacks as Israelites. There was indeed little eagerness to promote them even as Christians. There was usually a pious desire to convert Native Americans to Christianity but distinct reluctance to convert African slaves (unless it was to introduce them to the story of Noah and Ham in order to make them more submissive). One reason for this is that the Indians were known to be descended from the Lost Tribes, and according to millenarian beliefs their conversion could usher in the Second Coming of Christ. No such cosmic event would accompany the conversion of black slaves.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Lost Tribes ideas circulated in newspapers, pamphlets, and books; were spread from the pulpits of American churches; and no doubt reached black audiences at first or second hand.¹⁰ In 1836, for instance, Joseph Wolff, a famous Jewish convert to Christianity and an ardent missionary, himself no stranger to Lost Tribes issues, went to the United States, where he preached in Philadelphia, Washington, and Baltimore. He remarked that the idea that the American Indians were of the Lost Tribes had “lately been so much mooted. . . . Worthy people

in America desired me to travel about with them in order that I might convince the Indians of their extraction from the Jews. . . . I came across the Mohican tribes near New York and asked them ‘Whose descendants are you?’ They replied ‘We are of Israel.’ I asked ‘Who told you so?’ and expected to learn much ancient tradition. To my great surprise they said: ‘Mr. and Mrs. Simons of Scotland.’”¹¹

In general, blacks, as we have seen, were situated outside the Lost Tribes discourse.¹² Blacks were ignored by American whites in their construction of Lost Tribes identities not least because the position was already filled. Some Lost Tribes ideas in an Anglo-Israelite guise, however, fed into the emergence of Pentecostalism, which would eventually have a powerful impact upon the blacks of America, particularly through the teaching of Charles Fox Parham (1873–1929), who led the great revival in Topeka, Kansas, in 1901, one of the key moments in the development of the Pentecostal movement.¹³ Parham was an Anglo-Israelite and held deeply racist views. He was particularly opposed to the “woeful intermarriage of races” begun by Cain, who he thought had bred with some dark pre-Adamic race. In this he was supported by W. F. Carrothers, a lawyer who worked alongside him in the early Pentecostal movement in Topeka. Carrothers argued that throughout the history of the world races had never mixed, and it was the fault of slavery that in the United States, blacks and whites had been forced, in recent times, into a promiscuous and unfortunate proximity. However, the Holy Spirit had come to the rescue by creating, particularly in whites, a deep sense of racial revulsion, which had the effect of keeping blacks and whites apart. Racial bigotry was not at all the work of the devil, as some claimed, but the working out of the divine will.¹⁴

In 1903 the Pentecostal Church of the Living God—of which Rabbi Wentworth Arthur Matthew (1892–1973), one of the great black rabbis of the twentieth century, was minister for a while—was founded at Steel Springs, Tennessee. The church maintained that most of the

biblical prophets and other figures, including Jesus, were members of the black race, and these ideas reached directly into black milieus.¹⁵ By the time the Church of the Living God was founded, the black counter-theology with its new racial configuration that inserted all blacks into sacred history was already internalized by many black American Christians. In 1906, with the success among blacks of the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, the Pentecostalist movement spread through the black churches in Tennessee, Georgia, and the Carolinas, and in this way some of the specific notions of Anglo-Israelism, in a black manifestation, spread throughout the black communities.¹⁶ The racialized ideas of Anglo-Israelism, and some of the early manifestations of the Pentecostal movement that rose from it, gave a religious justification, as we have seen, for the widespread notions of white Protestant supremacy. The racial-religious ideas of Anglo-Israelism were to be endlessly replicated over the next half century as analogous counter-theologies sprang up, partly influenced by them, as a kind of mirror image, among African Americans and later among Africans. For many blacks the idea of being able to shed their skin and become racially white through the adoption of a Jewish racial identity seemed attractive. Father Divine, the charismatic cult leader, famously abolished race for his followers—the concept was not allowed. There was no black or white, and words such as “Negro” or “nigger” were banned. Others tried to “pass” in white society. Various Muslim groups, such as the Moorish Science movement, similarly maintained that American blacks were Asiatics, and they refused to be categorized as blacks. To distance themselves from the hated appellation of “nigger,” they awarded each other honorific Muslim titles such as “bey.”¹⁷

The black racialized counter-theologies created new theories about the Lost Tribes and novel justifications of demonstrating how blacks descended from them. One major proof lay in the fact that there were thought to be black Jews in Africa who had arrived there from Israel in ancient times. The travel and missionary literature

that supported this idea was as available on the American side of the Atlantic as it was in Europe, and some educated whites knew about it. In addition, by the middle of the nineteenth century, black intellectuals involved in the struggle against slavery in the United States had a number of proof texts to draw on, written by black authors, to support this conviction. One was Olaudah Equiano's 1789 antislavery classic, which, as we have seen, suggested a Jewish descent for the Igbo. Another was *A Text Book of the Origin and History &c. of the Colored People* (1841), the important and scholarly book written by the former slave Charles Pennington (1807–1870),¹⁸ which mentioned in passing that there were black Jews on the coast of Africa who had originally come from Judaea. Pennington mentioned the existence of these black Jews in such a matter-of-fact way, without bothering to give any references to his assertion (which elsewhere he did throughout his book), that it can only be assumed that the presence of black Jews in Africa, presumably on the west coast, was an accepted fact in the black abolitionist milieu in which he moved.¹⁹ The same ideas were expressed even more forcibly by Africanus Horton (1835–1883), whose famous book was such a powerful rebuttal of white racism that it soon became well-known among African American intellectuals and preachers, as Horton along with Edward Wilmot Blyden, Martin Robison Delany, and Henry Sylvester Williams was soon to be recognized as one of the leading black thinkers of the time. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Israelite ideas supported by the science of the time formed part of the shared codes of knowledge of the black Atlantic world, and Lost Tribes and Jews-in-Africa ideas flowed in both directions.²⁰

No doubt the chief mechanism for African Americans' enchantment with the idea of the Lost Tribes was the Bible, to which they had been unenthusiastically introduced in the slave farms of the South. In the United States, it was the Bible as mediated initially by white slave owners and preachers that was the catalyst for the internalization of

the Israelite trope. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, very few black Africans in Africa were Christian, and the slaves who arrived in the Americas were rarely Christians, although some were Muslims. Throughout the nineteenth century the black population of the United States was exposed to a greater or lesser extent to Christianity, or at the very least to some biblical stories. This led to a new sacred, metaphorical, and later imagined world being created by blacks based on the Bible, which was to provide a haven from the racial contempt to which they were universally subjected. Black preachers, such as J. P. Campbell, saw the Bible not just as a haven but as the most powerful defense, in every way, against those who described black Africans as an inferior race fit only for eternal servitude. The Bible and its stories then were used both as a way of justifying slavery and racist attitudes, and also as a means of defending against them. Motifs of hope, revenge, and deliverance, such as the opening of the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to escape and their enemies to drown, the defeat of Goliath by David, the building of Noah's Ark as a means of avoiding destruction, the vengeance wreaked by a blinded Sampson upon his sadistic tormentors, all fed into the construction of a new metaphorical identity in which black slaves increasingly imagined themselves as Israelites, toiling in a North American Egypt, brutalized by North American pharaohs, awaiting their Moses who would take them to freedom's land. Despite the lack of literacy among most African slaves, the Old Testament stories and particularly the narrative of the suffering and subsequent deliverance of the Hebrews in Egypt, oppressed by the crushing might of Pharaoh, spread throughout the slave communities. Slaves were able to access the narratives of the Hebrew Bible through a number of means. Some came through spirituals like "When Israel Was in Egypt's Land" or "Wade in the Water,"²¹ referring to the crossing of the Red Sea and famously sung by Harriet Tubman as a warning to runaway slaves to stick to the water to put pursuing dogs off their

scent. It is easy to see how a process of identification started. Some stories passed by word of mouth, occasionally through black preachers such as George Lisle (1750–1820), and through the work of the early black churches in the South, or through more benign white slave owners, whose domestic slaves might be taught some rudiments of reading and could then read the Bible themselves if they were lucky enough to get their hands on one. Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), the black American social reformer, learned to read from white children in the neighborhood and from observing the men with whom he worked writing and reading.²² Some of these Bible stories were transmitted by Muslim slaves—who related the Quranic versions of the Hebrew narratives. In the Quran, Moses was emphasized as the supreme deliverer, and the story of the splitting of the waters of the Red Sea was described in loving detail.²³

Some of the American black Jews started life in the West Indies and got their earliest introductions to the biblical stories round about the end of the nineteenth century, through “the patriarchal plays” at Christmas time, “by which the people of [the] islands were reminded from year to year that they were the children of the house of Israel.” In Nevis and St. Kitts, “roving bands of a dozen or more actors would act out various themes to the accompaniment of . . . music.” The plays had titles such as *Children of Israel* and *Samson and Delilah*, but also *Indians and Cowboys* and *Tarzan of the Apes*. The biblical plays were adapted from an overwritten work of Hannah More—a member of the London bluestocking circle and an antislavery activist—called *Sacred Dramas*, which was first published in 1782.²⁴ The narratives thus acquired enabled blacks to perceive their traumatic dislocation in a redemptive light, through an identification with the tribulations of the Hebrews, perhaps filtered through a distant memory of African tradition. Deliverance from bondage, the bondage of Egypt, is one of the great themes in the Old Testament, and it was one that had great resonance for America’s black slave population.

Indeed the name “Moses” was regularly appropriated to propel black leaders into this metaphorical sacred history of Israel. These include Harriet Tubman (1820–1913), the Moses of the Underground Railroad, and Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), supporter of black nationalism and founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL), who was known as “the black Moses.” The African American prophet William S. Crowdy, whom we shall soon be considering, when he was a little slave boy got down on his knees and even prayed to Moses. This motif continued: in 1966 Rabbi L. A. McKethan, a student of Wentworth Arthur Matthew (1892–1973), founder of the black Jewish movement the Commandment Keepers, noted that “our leader, our emancipator, proved to be not just a man, but *the* man. Many have referred to him as being seven men in one, truly another great Moses.”²⁵ Some of the magical and so-called kabbalistic aspects of black Israelite teachings were taken from William Lauron DeLaurence’s edition of *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* (c. 1900), occasionally banned as subversive by colonial authorities in the West Indies, which was a manual of magic that claims to divulge the kabbalistic secrets of Moses and the ancient Hebrews in general.²⁶ In the paradigm of the biblical Exodus under the inspiring leadership of Moses, African Americans found the essential expression of their longing for freedom. Yvonne Chireau has written: “Projecting their own lives into Old Testament accounts, African Americans recast their destiny in terms of a consummation of a divine drama, the event of the Exodus.”²⁷

Some blacks were owned by Jews or were otherwise connected to Jews in some way. One black slave, known as “old” Billy Simmons, claimed improbably to be a Jew from Madagascar²⁸ and apparently had a knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic.²⁹ He was admitted to the Bet Elohim Synagogue in Charleston and in the antebellum South was probably unique, although a dark-skinned Jew—a “Malata Jue”—was seen on a journey between Boston and New Hampshire in 1668.³⁰ In

any event, the Jewish community of the United States was very small, and direct Jewish influence on the African American community was minimal. Charleston was the second-biggest concentration of Jews in North America at the time of the 1790 census. There were 188 Jews in Charleston and only 242 in New York, which was the biggest concentration.³¹ By the second half of the nineteenth century, the situation had changed. After the wave of Jewish immigration that followed the Russian pogroms of the 1880s and occasionally before, African Americans often found themselves in the same towns and cities, sometimes even neighborhoods, as Jews. The Jews were relatively more prosperous and may have been emulated in part for this reason.³²

In their interactions, American Jews treated blacks in a fairly sympathetic way. In the Yiddish and English-language Jewish press, African Americans were often referred to as the “Jews of America.” This identification was of course metaphorical, invoking the suffering both Jews and blacks had endured at the hands of history. But for Jews, any comparison between Jew and black that transcended this kind of metaphor was puzzling. Jews confronted with black Jews from Harlem, for instance, did not know what to make of them. The *New York Sun* of January 29, 1929, reported: “Mr. M. Shapiro, a mild mannered Jewish businessman, stopped to chat a few moments with his kosher butcher. The butcher was chuckling: ‘Funny thing,’ he explained, ‘Some colored people came in this morning and wanted some kosher meat. Real Negro people from up in Harlem. They say they are Jews!’ He laughed.”³³ On the other hand it was no doubt the proximity of Jews and blacks, particularly in New York, that underlay some of the undoubted fascination the two communities had for each other. In 1929, an African American converted to Judaism, changing his name from James Harding to Jacob Abramowitz because, as he put it, he had spent so much time with Jews that he wanted to become one.³⁴ The flow of cultural knowledge between the

two communities in American cities was considerable. The symbiosis between the two groups sometimes took the form of changing places, almost of changing skins, as one group graphically adopted the guise of the other. Exchanges included African Americans studying the Talmud, speaking Yiddish, eating typically eastern European food, and dressing in orthodox Jewish garb. One Jewish observer noted that

the negro Jews of Harlem claim to be full-blooded Jews of color. They use the Orthodox prayer book, and pray in the same sing-song voice that one is accustomed to hear in the synagogues of Eastern Europe. Even the herring, favorite food of poor Lithuanians, has found its way into the dining of these Negro Jews. There it has attained a prominence never reached among white Jews—it has become almost a part of the ritual.³⁵

There were black singers who learned to sing Yiddish and Hebrew songs, and a black actor, “Reb Tuviah,” who learned Yiddish and played in all the Yiddish theaters in New York, starring in a Yiddish play called *Yenta Telabenta*.

On the Jewish side, from early jazz to the bands of the swing era and bebop, Jews were intimately involved with jazz as impresarios, composers of jazz standards, as record producers, and so on.³⁶ Irving Berlin composed “Negro” songs, and Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor famously sang black southern songs in blackface, explicitly changing skins, and although this has been taken as demeaning to African Americans, such was probably not the intention at the time. Indeed, as Jews were widely regarded as black—or at least as not white—the adoption of blackface may be read in a number of ways. In part it was creating a bridge to whiteness by loudly proclaiming the necessity for Jews to paint their faces black in order to *be* black.³⁷ Taking the practice more literally, a reviewer for the American Yiddish

newspaper the *Daily Forwards* asked: "Is there any incongruity in this Jewish boy [Al Jolson] with his face painted like a Southern Negro singing in the Negro dialect? No, there is not. I detected again and again the minor key of Jewish music, the wail of the *Chazan*, the cry of anguish of a people who have suffered. The son of a line of rabbis well knows how to sing the songs of the most cruelly wronged people in the world's history."³⁸ Al Jolson, who was the highest-paid entertainer in the United States by the 1930s, has been credited with introducing black popular culture to white audiences and the wider world and also with paving the way for the admission of African Americans into the dominant entertainment culture of the day. Nonetheless, the juxtaposition of blacks, with their own growing identification with the Israelites or some other Middle Eastern or Ethiopian people, and the newly arrived *dépaysé* Yiddish-speaking Russian Jews suffering their own multiple dislocations was unfortunate. Jews anxious to assimilate into white America were haunted by the fear that they were not white themselves. White American Jews found it difficult to take black Jews very seriously. Being refugees from virulent anti-Semitism, as most of them were, they probably wondered why anyone not born a Jew would want to claim to be one. Despite Jewish incomprehension and resistance, there was nonetheless a good deal of black emulation of specifically eastern European Jewish religious culture. In general terms the black Judaic religions that were created in the United States did not need and ultimately did not always seek legitimation by mainstream Jewry. As Michael Satlow has put it: "Essentialist definitions of Judaism can never *explain* or account for the diversity of Jewish religious life, both today and through history." Judaism is best seen not as a monolithic system but rather as "a family of traditions," which includes a rich assortment of disparate religious cultures.³⁹

The adoption of the Israelite racial trope by blacks was part of a much wider phenomenon. By the 1860s the "racialization of the

globe,” to use Frank Dikötter’s phrase, was well under way, and racial explanations and solutions were being advanced everywhere.⁴⁰ An important factor, which we have seen above, was the development of a new racialized African identity based upon different aspects of the Hamitic myth, which were to take on an even more robust form in the United States.

Afrocentric ideas had appealed to American blacks since the first half of the nineteenth century. Books glorifying the African past and emphasizing the key role of Africans in the great civilizations of the ancient world, particularly Egypt, were produced in considerable numbers by black Africans from the 1830s on.⁴¹ One of the most remarkable and articulate of the men who argued for a new racial configuration of blacks through the paradigm of the greatness of ancient African “Hamitic” civilizations was the ex-slave James William Charles Pennington, mentioned above. In 1841 he wrote *A Text Book of the Origin and History &c. of the Colored People*, which dealt with current issues surrounding blackness and race, and very ably, systematically, and ironically refuted white claims to innate racial superiority. One of the key underpinnings of white racism, as we have seen, was the idea that Africans descended from the biblical Ham, cursed by Noah, and that they were for ever condemned to serve their white masters, and that their blackness was the visible sign of the curse. Pennington rejected the “blasphemous assertion” that color and slavery were connected with the biblical story and stressed that in any case it was Canaan, not Ham, who was cursed.⁴² Another black writer in 1859 argued that there were countless instances of white people as well as black being taken into “involuntary servitude” and that Noah was not a prophet and his curse carried little weight, not least because he was drunk when he made it.⁴³

Pennington argued that as descendants of Ham, blacks were in fact the heirs to the great cultural achievements of the “land of Ham.” Without Egyptian Hamitic civilization, modern Western civ-

ilization would not have been possible. “The first general fact,” he wrote, “is that the arts and sciences had their origin with our ancestors, and from them have flown forth to the world. They gave them to Greece, Greece to Rome, and Rome to others.”⁴⁴ Pennington and others rejected any suggestion that blacks were inferior, claimed that they were descended from this illustrious pedigree, and refused to let whites distort the Bible for their own purposes. In the same way as throughout the nineteenth century and until today whites have constructed certain African societies as Hamites, and many black Africans have embraced this proud “Hamitic” past as a means of countering white racial slurs, or promoting their own ethnic group, so did African Americans.⁴⁵ Pennington finished off his book referring, as we have seen, to the black “descendants of a colony of Jews, originally from Judea,” on the coast of Africa. He does not specify, but it is almost certain that he had west Africa in mind.⁴⁶

It was not long before the idea that there were some black Jews in Africa gave way to the less widespread idea that all, or most, blacks were in fact Jews, descended from Jews, and that the central figures in the Judeo-Christian traditions were black. The large black Pentecostal group, Church of the Living God, maintained that most of the biblical prophets and other figures, including Jesus, were members of the black race. Later, the African Orthodox Church, founded in 1921 by George Alexander McGuire under the influence of Marcus Garvey, was essentially a black racialized form of the Protestant Episcopal Church,⁴⁷ while the Shrine of the Black Madonna Church and Cultural Centers, founded by the anti-integrationist bishop Albert B. Cleage (1911–2000) in Atlanta and Detroit, and others were simply offering a plausible alternative to the white-skin-and-blue-eyed racial iconography of Western Christendom. Bishop Cleage identified the white Jews of the United States as “the descendants of white Europeans and Asiatics who were converted to Judaism about one thousand years ago.”⁴⁸

With the humiliation and debasement of slavery a recent and painful memory, and racial slurs and slights against blacks still immanent, there was a desire to reject any notion of innate white superiority and vindicate African peoples' equality and perhaps superiority, through a new racial paradigm drawn from scripture. The theological traditions of the West, for these black vindicationists, were little more than a falsification of history designed to erase blacks from their rightful place in scripture. Black theologians were convinced that the real Jesus bore little resemblance to the "pseudo-Christ" of the Western traditions of religious art. In their rejection of a white Jesus there was a redemptive element. As Henry Mcneam Turner (1834–1915), a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, put it: "Why should not the Negro believe that he resembles God as much so as other people? We do not believe there is any hope for a race of people who do not believe that they look like God."⁴⁹

Afro-Judaic versions of these radical, racialized orientations would soon burst upon the world and spread throughout the United States, Central America, and Africa itself.⁵⁰ The Church of God and Saints of Christ, founded in 1896 by W. S. Crowdy, based itself on the claim that the Ten Lost Tribes were the ancestors of black people. The rival Commandment Keepers defined black people as the true descendants of the tribe of Judah, but claimed that the Ten Lost Tribes were in fact the white race. In the 1920s, a rabbi of the Black Jews of Harlem declared that "the African Hebrew Heritage belonged to Blacks alone and included Falasha, the Queen of Sheba and tribes of West Africa."⁵¹ In other words, the real Jews were Africans and only Africans—the white Jews were fakes, or at least of secondary importance.⁵² There were two outstanding historical proofs for this contention. One was the widely reported presence of black Jews in west Africa, and the other was the even more richly attested presence of black Jews in Ethiopia in the form of the Beta Israel or Falasha.

The trope of Ethiopia in general had been important for black Americans throughout the nineteenth century and symbolized the idea that African Americans had a connection with the ancient black Christian civilization of Ethiopia, and that their history in Western Christian terms, anyway, extended beyond the Middle Passage. The magnificent Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, which was founded in 1808 and which was known to everyone living in the area, was and is one of the largest black congregations in the United States, as well as a local landmark. The church broke away from its parent Baptist church on the issue of segregated seating and allegedly owes its name to Ethiopian seamen who formed part of its original congregation (which I believe is unlikely). There are black churches with “Abyssinia” in their title in Detroit, Dallas, Cleveland, and throughout the United States. The connection with Abyssinia was to symbolically assert the dignity of black American Christians of various denominations.⁵³

The importance of Ethiopia as a symbol of black pride was emphasized in 1896 with the success of black Ethiopian troops against a European colonial power at the battle of Adwa, where the Ethiopians massacred the heavily outnumbered Italians. This was the first time that an African country had successfully resisted a serious European attempt to invade it. The Ethiopian historian Bahru Zewde noted that “few events in the modern period have brought Ethiopia to the attention of the world as has the victory at Adwa . . . the racial dimension was what lent Adwa particular significance. It was a victory of blacks over whites.”⁵⁴ The impact of the battle of Adwa “was to heighten the mysterious impression Ethiopia conveyed to Afro-Americans as well as to the outside world. And it also conjured up the symbol of Ethiopia as the Zion in Africa in the minds of vast numbers of Afro-Americans, as well as Africans living under colonial rule.”⁵⁵ Following the battle of Adwa, a number of black churches in the United States started developing the literalist notion that the Israelites of old

were black Africans who had started out in Ethiopia. One such was a church founded in Wrightsville, a small rural village south of Little Rock, Arkansas, by William Christian, who was born into slavery in Mississippi in 1856. His message was essentially that Adam, King David and King Solomon, Job, Jeremiah, Moses's wife, the Queen of Sheba, and Jesus Christ were all black. His church, the Church of the Living God, which combined elements of Holiness and Freemason belief, spread rapidly among poor southern blacks, and by 1906 there were 68 congregations in twelve states, and ten years later 192 congregations. His racialized theology "used the same exegetical mechanism" as the Anglo-Israelites—he simply "replaced whites with blacks," and his church has been termed the first "black supremacy" organization in the United States.⁵⁶ In 1914 Bishop John A. Hickerson (c. 1876–1965), who also went by the names Father Divine, Reverend Bishop Saint John the Vine, and others, founded the Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of the Truth in Harlem, identified himself completely as an Ethiopian, and taught a variation of New Thought, the spiritual movement that had started in the 1830s in England and the United States.

The importance of Ethiopia for the development of black religions claiming Israelite ancestry can hardly be overemphasized. The apocalyptic ideology of Ethiopianism nurtured at its heart a vision of a holy, redeemed Africa, freed of the colonial yoke, and Ethiopia through its long history and current unique role in Africa offered a justification for the new Afrocentric perspectives that were being developed. For many, the verse from Psalms 68:31, "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God," became a key proof text in establishing black claims to sacred history. In addition, up-to-date information from Ethiopia was brought by prominent Ethiopians such as Kantiba (Governor) Gabru Desta, who visited the Black Jews in Harlem in 1919, or Warqneh Esehtu Martin, who visited in 1927, and inevitably there was a huge

amount of information in the press about the coronation of Haile Selassie in 1930.⁵⁷

The existence of the Falasha or Beta Israel was brought to the attention of the West primarily through Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, and by the nineteenth century it was widely known that there were Jews in Ethiopia.⁵⁸ American Jews had received recent news of the Falasha in various Jewish journals from the beginning of the twentieth century and were certainly well aware of their existence. Jacques Faitlovitch (1881–1955), the champion of the Ethiopian Beta Israel among world Jewry, visited the United States several times after 1911 and stayed for several months on each occasion. His visits, intended primarily to raise financial support for the Beta Israel, were covered extensively in the Jewish and general press. Thus in New York and elsewhere the presence of flesh-and-blood black Jews in Ethiopia became known.⁵⁹ It is also worth noting that Faitlovitch conceived of the Beta Israel as part of the Jewish "race" rather than as converts to Judaism and believed that their ancestors formed part of the Jewish garrison in Elephantine, Egypt.

Other Jewish Lost Tribes enthusiasts of the time, such as Nahum Slouschz (1872–1969), argued that the Falasha were descended from Jewish captives taken to Ethiopia in the ninth century BCE.⁶⁰ The Falasha constituted one of the most powerful pieces of evidential proof that the Judaizing movements within the black population in the United States could muster. In *The Black Jews of Harlem*, Howard Brotz famously observed that the discovery of the existence of the Falasha for those African Americans who invoked a Judaic past was the "missing link" proving the legitimacy of their claims.⁶¹ If there had been any doubts about the Judaic origins of all or some American blacks, the attested nature of the published reports about the Beta Israel "settled the question of their identity in a scientific manner."⁶²

There was already some knowledge in some African American circles of black Jewish communities in west Africa, and the existence

of the Beta Israel was further grist to their mill. If there were genuine Jews in Africa, whether they were in Ethiopia or in west Africa, who were black, there could be nothing inherently aberrant in the idea of black Jews. And given that the history or traditions of the black Ethiopian Jews went back three thousand years to the time of King Solomon, who could possibly say that Jews had to be white? One recent book written by a black Jew, *The African Origins of Modern Judaism*, has argued that Abraham and all the people he converted, including all the central characters of the Hebrew tradition, went to Ethiopia, where they became known as Falasha.⁶³ The Falasha / Beta Israel thus became key players in the legitimation of the Israelites-in-Africa thesis. E. Trevisan Semi writes tellingly of black people's "interest in the possibility of sharing a myth that spoke of royal descent, lions of Judah and Abyssinian princes" as a stratagem for transcending the bitter memories of slavery and creating a noble history that could compare favorably with that of white Americans.⁶⁴

There was a strong tendency among African Americans to treat Africa as "a symbolic place—the noble home of virtuous Blacks, the potential site where a denigrated race could reclaim its dignity."⁶⁵ There was then the lofty idealized Ethiopia, which many blacks identified with metaphorically and spiritually. However, sometimes African Americans would identify with Ethiopia to the extent that they would pass themselves off literally and insistently as Ethiopian Jews. Some such were seen preaching in Chicago in 1913. One of them told the publisher of the *Weekly Defender*, a black Chicago newspaper, that he had come from Abyssinia to lead the blacks of Chicago to an understanding of their true Jewish African heritage and that he planned to rebuild Solomon's Temple. Calling themselves the International Peace and Brotherly Love Movement, these "Abyssinian Jews" offered to give lectures about their homeland and home community and hoped to convince Chicago's white Jews that the real Jews were black.⁶⁶ In 1920 a journalist from the Yiddish newspaper

Forverts (the *Daily Forwards*) was approached by a black man who was collecting money for an organization he called the Hebrew Settlement Workers, which turned out to be in Harlem.⁶⁷ The group's leaders claimed to be from Palestine and Ethiopia and had come to bring the Torah to America's black population, who were the only authentic Jews in the world. In 1927 a New York Jew was present at a black Jewish circumcision ceremony and observed that the participants called themselves "Falasha" and made no attempt to imitate normative Jewish practice in any way. "The Falasha do not claim to be Jews. They do not pretend to be the sons of any one lost tribe of Israel. They are Falasha and theirs is the Jewish faith. The faith of the white Jews, they feel, is merely a corruption of their own religion or perhaps an entirely different one."⁶⁸

The group perhaps most influenced by the Falasha / Beta Israel discourse, however, was the Commandment Keepers of the Royal Order of Aethiopian Hebrews, the congregation led by Wentworth Arthur Matthew. This "Royal Order" was put forward as a kind of lodge of the congregation of the Commandment Keepers and was given various slightly different names until the end of the 1980s: Falaysan Order of African Jews, Union of Ethiopian Hebrew Congregations and Rabbis led by C. M. Cragg, Temple Society of Ethiopian Hebrews, Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation, etc.⁶⁹ Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation, which is still active, is the oldest temple in the Chicago area serving the Israelite community and was established as the Ethiopian Hebrew Association in 1915. In 1967, a seventy-seven-year-old black man called "Father Abraham," who had always claimed to be a "Falasha" and to hail from the "Falasha community in New York," was buried in the cemetery of a Detroit synagogue.⁷⁰ These claims to be "Falasha" or to have immigrated in recent times from Ethiopia were false, and the people and institutions concerned had nothing to do with the Ethiopian Jews. The only contact with real Beta Israel came sometime between 1928

and 1931 when Taamrat Emmanuel (18??–1963), one of the Ethiopian Beta Israel whom Faitlovitch had sent to Europe to be educated, visited the United States.⁷¹ But the general appeal of the Ethiopian Jews was not the result of his visit. The Beta Israel served primarily as a legitimating mechanism in a historical sense, as it did in the twentieth century among a variety of analogous black Jewish groups in Africa. It was a proof that could be deployed with black Christians who doubted the legitimacy of black Jews' claims, and even more pertinently it could be used to counter the wounding doubts and concerns of American Jews. In more recent times and particularly in the wake of the publicity surrounding Operation Moses—the first Israeli operation to rescue the Beta Israel from the Sudan in 1985—the legitimating utility of the Beta Israel has not been lost on a number of African Jewish or Judaizing communities, which include the Lemba in South Africa, the Bakwa Dishi in the Congo, and many others.

Perhaps the oldest black Jewish organization in the United States was the Church of the Living God, the Pillar Ground of Truth for All Nations,⁷² which was founded in Chattanooga, Tennessee, around 1886 by Prophet Frank S. Cherry, a self-educated black seaman, laborer, and railroad employee from the Deep South. According to his own account, he was traveling in a distant land and had a vision in which he was shown to be a prophet whose destiny was to found a church and to explain to the world that whereas all blacks were not Jews, all true Jews were black. White Jews were impostors. Prophet Cherry preached that the original white man was the biblical Gehazi who became white as the result of a curse placed upon him (2 Kings 5:27). Cherry taught himself Hebrew and Yiddish, always kept Hebrew and Yiddish books next to him as he preached, and on Monday evenings organized Hebrew classes for the congregants. He claimed that the fundamental text of the community was the Talmud. The rituals of Cherry's group included a number of

Jewish practices: congregants faced east when they prayed; men wore skullcaps; women had blue and white capes with tassels at the ends, in imitation of *tallitot*; the Sabbath day and Passover were celebrated; the prohibition of pork was observed. Members were discouraged from making images such as photographs of human beings. There were also a number of Christian practices, including gospel singing.⁷³

Cherry's group was followed ten years later, in 1896, by the establishment in Kansas of the Church of God and Saints of Christ led by Prophet William Saunders Crowdy (1847–1908), which expanded rapidly, first into a couple of dozen centers in Texas and soon throughout the country. Crowdy was born into slavery, and his early life was harsh, yet he learned to read and was drawn to the Hebrew prophets and particularly to Moses. His message was clear: blacks were quite literally the chosen people—their role in the divine plan was not a metaphor, it was the historical truth that had been divinely ordained. His followers were thus cast as central players in a Judeo-Christian narrative.

Crowdy served in the Union army in the Civil War and eventually, having gained his freedom, became quartermaster sergeant in the Fifth Cavalry; he was discharged from the army in 1872. Twenty years later, in 1892, having worked as a cook on the Santa Fe Railway, he acquired a one-hundred-acre ranch in an all-black town in Oklahoma—said to be at that time the biggest black-owned ranch in the United States. It was during this period, the beginning of Jim Crow and a time of horrific lynchings of blacks, Indians, and white rustlers, that Crowdy had a vision and a revelation. It was a revelation that was calculated to help African Americans avoid the stigma of racial inferiority: it was the revelation that blacks were in fact descended from the Israelites. The speed and relative ease with which Crowdy managed to disseminate this message are testament to the prevalence of the redemptive notion of the Israelites in the American imagination in general. Following his vision, Crowdy started preaching a

very strict version of Old Testament Judaism—which despite the name of the organization was not, and is not, orthodoxly Christian, in that Jesus is regarded by the movement as a good historical Jew and little more, is not taken to be the savior of mankind, and there is no belief in the Trinity. It is perhaps significant that the tenets of his movement place particular emphasis on the redemptive role of Moses in the Exodus from Egypt, and their main religious feast is the Passover, which celebrates the deliverance of the Hebrews.⁷⁴ It is clear that Crowdy's movement was a crystallization of the metaphorical identification of African American slaves with the Israelites and the cherished narrative of the Exodus, which had been so important in the first half of the nineteenth century. As J. Dorman puts it:

Crowdy began to systematically adopt the rituals of the Hebrew Bible, beginning with the Seventh Day Sabbath and continuing with the Passover and the other festivals of the Hebrew calendar. Through their joint efforts, Bishops Christian and Crowdy seeded the African American religious landscape with the conviction that the ancient Israelites were Black, and created thousands of believers who had adopted some of the rites of the Hebrew Bible to go along with the conviction that the Hebrew and Christian Bibles were describing their own ancestors. In most cases, the Judaic groups that arose in Northern cities before and after the First World War were lineal descendants of Bishop Crowdy's Church of God and Saints of Christ or Bishop Christian's Church of the Living God.⁷⁵

In 1903 Crowdy sent emissaries abroad to South Africa and also to Cuba and the West Indies. His movement has continued to prosper. Today there are fifty odd tabernacles in the United States, mostly on the East Coast, seven in South Africa, and a few in the West Indies, Swaziland, Malawi, and Mozambique, and the large and quite influ-

ential black Jewish community in Rusape, Zimbabwe can be traced back directly to his movement.⁷⁶

Four years after the founding of Crowdy's movement, in 1900, Warren Roberson founded the Temple of the Gospel of the Kingdom in Virginia, whose members were required to learn Yiddish and to adopt Jewish ritual and liturgy. They moved to Harlem in 1917, where he established a sort of commune, which was called a "kingdom." Later another "kingdom" was created in Atlanta, which was accused of being a "baby farm" where women members of his congregation bore Roberson's children. The community collapsed when Roberson was indicted on a charge of transporting women over state lines for immoral purposes.⁷⁷ A similar group, the Moorish Zionist Temple, which was more exclusively Judaic in its beliefs, was founded by Rabbi Leon Richlieu of Brooklyn, New York, in 1899. Richlieu claimed to be of Ethiopian origin, to have been ordained by three rabbis, and to have studied in an Orthodox yeshiva. The group later reformed under the leadership of Mordechai Herman, who set up branches in Philadelphia and in Newark, New Jersey.⁷⁸

One of the most remarkable figures in the history of black Jewish movements in the United States was Arnold Josiah Ford. Born in Barbados and a talented musician—he played violin, piano, string bass, and banjo and performed in well-known ragtime and jazz bands—he became the musical director in Liberty Hall of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and in this capacity composed "Ethiopia, Thou Land of Our Fathers," the Garveyite national anthem, which the Yiddish newspapers of New York called "the Negro Hatikvah."

O Jehovah, Thou God of the ages!
Grant unto our sons that lead
The wisdom Thou gav'st to Thy Sages!
When Israel was sore in need.

Ford, who was fluent in Yiddish and knew Hebrew well, studied the Bible and Talmud with white Jewish teachers. In 1923 he accepted the position of rabbi at the Beth B'nai Abraham synagogue in Harlem and developed an eclectic religion, which drew liberally on magic, kabbalah, Islam, Judaism, Pentecostalism, and Freemasonry. Most of the congregation claimed to be of "Ethiopian" origin. He set up a school in which Arabic and Hebrew were taught—with the idea that these languages would be helpful in the movement for the resettlement of Africa, which became his driving ambition. He wore a *kippah* on his head—and also a turban. He was much influenced by the historical parallels between the blacks of America and the Jews and by the fact that under Christianity both Jew and black had been persecuted: "they suffered side by side," he wrote, "during the horrible years of the Christian Inquisition and the Christian slave-trade in Africa, the West Indies and South America." But his vision of black Judaism was not simply comparative and metaphorical. Many of the hymns he composed not only demonstrated a fusion and synthesis of metaphorical analogies between the Jewish and black historical experience, but also included Ethiopianism and the redemption of Africa. He was particularly inspired by the conviction that his forefathers, and therefore he himself, were Beta Israel, and it was as an Ethiopian Falasha that he dreamed of returning home.⁷⁹

In 1930 he and three members of the black Jewish congregation embarked for Ethiopia on the crest of the "Back to Africa" movement launched by Marcus Garvey, which invited American blacks to go back, as Zionists did, to the place of their origins. He participated in the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1930, created a school in Addis Ababa, and acquired eight hundred acres of not very productive land with the idea of creating a black Jewish colony that would symbolically unite the black Jews of the diaspora with their brothers already in Ethiopia. Between 1932 and 1933 he was joined by ten

more black Jews from New York. Little is known about Ford's time in Ethiopia. However, the Beta Israel in Ethiopia were not so sure about the link between them as he was. In any event, when he made them the generous gift of a Torah scroll, they spurned it on the grounds that Hebrew was not the language of their liturgy—but Ge'ez. The scroll eventually made its way back to the United States. Ford, who played at the court of Haile Selassie a few times and kept a servant, as well as allegedly four concubines, died of a heart attack, on the piece of land acquired by him, at the age of fifty-eight, during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.⁸⁰

Nathan Irvin Huggins has described Harlem at the time, with its fine buildings, wide streets, black Ethiopian churches and other institutions, and its large and growing African American population, as the capital of the black world. For many black people, Addis Ababa was the other capital—and Ford's remarkable attempt to bridge the divide between the two was inspirational. He did it largely through the trope of the Beta Israel / Falasha, which was a synthesis of several previous ideas: that blacks were the real Jews descended from Ethiopians and that blacks were descended from or related to black Jews inhabiting the coasts or interior of the African continent. Ford's message, which was projected onto a largely skeptical white world, included the key statement of proof: "The black man is really the Ethiopian Falasha and the biblical Hebrews, who were stripped of their name and religion during slavery."⁸¹

A number of other black Jewish groups emerged in different cities of the United States, including Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, as well as Harlem, in the early decades of the twentieth century. The congregations were often small and sometimes did not outlive their founders. One of the most successful of the congregations was the Commandment Keepers, founded in 1919 in Harlem by Rabbi Wentworth A. Matthew, who later was to ordain many of the black rabbis who created black Jewish congregations throughout the

United States and the Caribbean.⁸² After Ford's emigration to Ethiopia, his congregation was taken over by Matthew. Matthew, like Ford, soon established himself and the constructed ethno-religious identity of his congregation as Ethiopian Hebrew. He stressed that the hated term "Negro" should never be used to refer to themselves and proposed "Hebrews of Ethiopian descent" instead. By the time of Ford's departure to Ethiopia in 1930, Matthew announced that he and his congregation were in fact literally Falasha, not simply Ethiopian Hebrews, which seems a little vaguer, and that their identity had been lost or suppressed as a result of the long years of slavery. His personal biography was altered to reflect this new orientation, and he subsequently claimed that he had been born "in a small Falasha village" in Lagos (Nigeria), the grandson of a "very famous Falasha preacher." A newspaper article later mentioned that he had a knowledge of Hebrew, which he spoke "with an Arabic accent . . . it is Palestinian Hebrew that he speaks, pure Hebrew," which he maintained had been spoken in that distant Falasha village in Lagos. His actual biography is barely less exotic. Born in St. Kitts rather than Lagos, he may have been a sailor and may even have visited Palestine before going to New York, where he lived for a while earning his living as a boxer and wrestler. He had been a Pentecostalist minister with the Judaic Church of the Living God before he founded his own church, and it is during this period that he would have come across Lost Tribes theories. His claims to have been a Falasha have been derided, but they reflect his belief that all blacks were in fact Ethiopian Hebrews. It follows therefore that the black home where he had been born was in some sense a kind of Falasha outpost, even if it was in St. Kitts rather than Lagos. Rabbi Matthew claimed his Judaism and his racial and ethnic identity came directly from Ethiopia via Nigeria to the West Indies, thus dramatically combining the two central proof communities of the Jews in Africa theory—the Falasha and the Jews of west Africa.⁸³

We have seen previously that the colonial inventions and hypotheses and travelers' reports about Jews in Africa were known in some American black circles. The discourse was responsible for a great deal in the United States, as it was in Africa. It was a source of great and life-enhancing inspiration to some and an efficient means of control and subjugation for others.

There was also money to be made out of it. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, Bata Kindai Amgoza ibn LoBagola (1877–1947), a self-proclaimed African, made a good living out of his knowledge of this exotic discourse, which he had studied in part in London libraries, where he may have got some of the details for his tale in the writings of the Scottish explorer Mungo Park.⁸⁴ There is also common ground between his account and Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative*. Equiano maintained that he was born, the son of a chief, around 1745 in an area called "Eboe" in Guinea and at the age of eleven was seized and put on a slave ship. LoBagola claimed to be from "the village of Nodaghusa, six hundred miles north of Abomey Calavi, and about forty five days' walk north of the Gulf of Guinea, and three days' walk south of the native city of Timbuktu." His village was in the Ondo bush, "a horrible place, because of its tall grass and bushes," and he too was the son of a chief, and he too was taken off to Britain, against his will, on a British ship. LoBagola had absorbed the ancient and more recent discourse about Jews and Israelites in black Africa, and he gave the idea a new lease of life in America and elsewhere.

His Ondo bush was a place thus far undiscovered by whites, where black Jews lived a free and pious existence, without the inconvenience of clothes, celebrating their ancient traditions in an only slightly heterodox form. In 1929 he published some articles about his adventures and about African Judaism, in the illustrated *Scribners' Magazine*, and the following year Knopf published these in book form under the title *LoBagola; an African Savage's Own Story*. The book made quite a splash, and for a while it was much discussed. Knopf

gave a launch party for LoBagola, which was attended by Knopf authors like James Weldon Johnson, Carl Van Vechten, H. L. Mencken, Henry Seidel Canby, and Dashiell Hammett.⁸⁵ In a favorable review, *Time Magazine* observed: “A black man but a Jew, he is a native of the Ondo bush, hinterland of Dahomey, in western Africa. His people, according to legend, left Palestine after Roman Titus sacked Jerusalem (70 CE), whereupon they fled to Morocco, to Timbuktu, and farther. There, swallowed up by African natives, they still remained a Jewish sect, continued Jewish rites. Says LoBagola: they carry out the ceremony of circumcision to the letter, “although not in the same way as in Palestine today. Our rabbis,” he said, “permit us to use only our teeth and fingernails for the circumcision operation.” His book was full of remarkable details about his Jews of the Ondo bush and his own adventures. In Ondo the naked Jews spoke “a dialect of Arabic, mixed a great deal with Hausa, Yoruba, and Benga vernaculars.” His book explained how as a result of some extraordinary mishaps LoBagola finished up in Scotland, where he stayed for a while learning English. *Time Magazine*, which did not seem to have any difficulty believing the account of the Jews of the Ondo bush, described LoBagola as a kind of elderly black Marx brother—“short, stocky, gleaming-eyed, with black mustache, frizzy white hair”—and concluded he “looks like a stout little Jew in blackface.”⁸⁶ It appears that LoBagola was taken seriously by most people at the time. He traveled the world, dressed up in a pastiche of African costume, bare chest adorned with many necklaces and a big ring through his nose, giving lectures, featuring in the ethnographic exhibitions that were popular at the time, and instructing urban students of anthropology about the savage and exotic life he had known at first hand in his native Ondo. His real biography was somewhat more mundane. His actual name was Joseph Howard Lee, and he had been born to a dirt-poor African American family in Baltimore.

One of the dupes of LoBagola was none other than the pioneering anthropologist R. R. Marett, the reader in social anthropology at Exeter College, Oxford, who virtually founded anthropology as a university subject in Great Britain. In 1911 LoBagola gave a talk at Exeter College on fetishism, which he recalled “made a hit,” and in the same year was a living exhibit at the University of Pennsylvania Museum (“by far the best exhibit at the Museum”). Joseph Howard Lee, aka LoBagola, selected a Jewish racial identity as a way of avoiding the prejudice that was attached to being racially an African American and a way of appropriating the “best” kind of African origins, according to the Hamitic theory, from one of the places where black Jews were thought to reside. LoBagola’s fantastical account has quite incredibly entered academic literature as fact. His narrative started to take on the cloak of academic respectability in 1930 with a review of his book in the *Journal of the Royal African Society* by an Africa “expert.” The review did not question the authenticity of LoBagola’s story, nor did it interrogate the critical assertion that there were naked black Jews in the Ondo bush. It was only the mildly anti-colonial stance of the book that was queried.⁸⁷ More recently, in the *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, we read that “some accounts place west African Jewish communities in the Ondo Forest of Dahomei south of Timbuktu: in the 1930s these groups still maintained a Torah scroll written in Aramaic that had been burned into parchment with a hot iron instead of ink so it could not be changed.” But the editor, Avrum Ehrlich, is by no means the only one to have unwittingly perpetuated this most egregious example of the Jews in west Africa topos.⁸⁸

It is of some interest and significance that Williams’s influential *Hebrewisms of West Africa* and LoBagola’s *An African Savage’s Own Story* were both published in 1930, the year of Ford’s departure for Africa. LoBagola’s “Orientalist” account of wild Jewish goings-on in

the African bush had been published in Scribner's the year before his departure. One can only wonder whether the description of a patriarchal society with few constraints, at least on men (one of LoBagola's chapters was called "Six Girls at Once"), had played into Ford's decision to go, had colored his sense of what he would find when he got there, and if his decision to take four concubines and a wife was based in any way on the great impostor LoBagola's fictitious five wives (one, you may recall, was sent off, mutilated, to join the Jewish king's Amazon cohorts).

The various expressions of black Judaism in the United States have been created out of a complex web of factors, which include discrimination as well as colonial inventions. As we have seen, the black Atlantic world was and is interconnected in myriad ways. African ideas about connections with Israelites crossed the Atlantic from the time of Equiano, and, as we shall see, at the beginning of the twentieth century there were complex connections between Americans and Africans that were to be productive of Israelite religions of different sorts in Africa. Similarly, Igbo claims of an Israelite history and ancestry and their Israelite traditions have been carried by Nigerian Igbo emigrants and refugees to the United States. Here they have had a legitimating role in black American Jewish discourses. The Chicago-based African American rabbi Capers C. Funnye Jr. is an interesting case, which well exemplifies the growing links between the African and African American Judaic worlds. Born a Christian in the Jim Crow era, Funnye came to the view that Christianity was the religion of his white oppressor. Ordained eventually as a rabbi, he set up the Institute for Jewish and Community Research as an outreach organization in part to the Igbo in Nigeria. On one dramatic occasion in 2002, a group of Igbo émigrés met on the small island of St. Simons, Georgia, at the so-called Ibo Landing, where thirteen chained-up Ibo slaves just arrived from Africa threw themselves into

the sea and drowned rather than live in servitude. This sad story gave rise to the slave narrative of the “The Flying Negro,” which is grounded in the respect American slaves had for native-born Africans and involves a group of Igbo people flying back to Africa from a slave ship. But Rabbi Funnye situates the story in a different tradition. He wrote:

I was invited to speak and I could only compare what I was witnessing to a true awakening of Ibo people to their Hebraic cultural roots. As I thought about why we were in St. Simons Island, Georgia, my mind returned to an episode in Jewish history concerning the Jews at Masada, who . . . cast themselves from the walls of their fortress rather than come under the control of the Roman Empire. I was inspired by the history of the thirteen Ibo men, who were led by a chief of the Ibo nation, to revolt and become martyrs rather than slaves.⁸⁹

On this same occasion American Igbo community leaders presented papers on the history of the Igbo and the ancient Hebrews, stressing shared customs such as circumcision, abstention from pork and shellfish, the Sabbath, and even observance of a fast day allegedly known by the Igbo as Yomorra Kippura. Another of the speakers representing the high priest of Igboland, who wore a *tallit* and a red *kippah*—presented as the normative garments for Igbo priests—gave a lecture on the current conditions of the Igbo people. Today Funnye is the rabbi and spiritual leader of Beth Shalom B’nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation of Chicago. He is also national associate director of Be’Chol Lashon (In Every Tongue), an American organization that is devoted to pluralism in Judaism; rabbi of the Pan African Jewish Alliance; and director of the Nigeria Orthodox Sabbath Solidarity (NOSS), which is headquartered in Akwete, Nigeria. His current activities represent a meeting place for the two main legitimizing

factors in the historical worldview of African American Jews: East Africa and Ethiopia.

The ties that bind Igbo and other black Jewish communities worldwide grow stronger all the time. In October 2011 another meeting between Igbo and other groups was described as follows:

In an incredible show of unity and solidarity, Hebrew Congregations in America and Israel have called on the Igbo to return to their Hebraic roots. Making the appeal at the Second Igbo Landing Dedication and Conference held in Charleston, South Carolina (October 11–12), leaders and representatives of the religious groups, who made the trip in the company of their wives and children, said that the survival of the Igbo nation depended on an immediate return to their covenant-based Hebrew cultural heritage. Moreh (Teacher) Elesha Yisrael, who is the leader of The House of Israel, Cincinnati, Ohio, came to South Carolina because “we are part of the Igbo people. . . . We are one and the same. . . . Teach and honor our ancestors.” According to Moreh Herman Taylor of the the Shalom Congregation (House of Israel), Jackson, Mississippi, the Igbo Landing activities afforded him and his family the opportunity to “bond with my brothers who are members of the House of Israel . . . and have gone through horrible experiences in Nigeria in the last forty years.” Nasik Danyel, a delegate sent by Ben Ammi, the Anointed Spiritual Leader of The Kingdom of Yahweh (House of Israel), Dimona, Israel, delivered a powerful message from his boss reaffirming his support for the Igbo people. It declared that “Ben Ammi is with the Igbo people,” and bemoaned the tragedy that has befallen them. “You are suffering in Nigeria,” he said, “because you have broken away from the covenant. Do not let anyone legitimize you. Legitimize yourself.” The spiritual leader invited Ndigbo to come to Israel next year “so that we can reason together.” . . .

Charleston, South Carolina, was selected as the venue for this year's events because most Igbo captives passed through its port before being sold into slavery.⁹⁰

These dramatic instances of the internalization of the legitimating topos of indigenous Jews in west Africa has strong parallels in Africa too.

7 / Divine Geography and Israelite Identities

In the colonial situation, Israelite racial identities were suggested or imposed almost everywhere throughout the world. They were often accepted as useful identities, adopted and internalized and in the process imbued with area and group-specific justifications and genealogies. Societies everywhere have a tendency to construct a genealogically useful past for themselves in which desirable versions of their history are favored and unwanted narratives purged. Invented Israelite identities in the African colonial situation were used for a variety of purposes in the web of colonial relationships. The creation, suggestion, or imposition of identities, narratives, and histories by colonists, missionaries, and others was but one aspect of a complex interaction between colonizer and colonized, between Europe and Africa, Asia and the Americas, between modernity and tradition. The world of the colonized and the colonizer was one “entire interac-

tive system, one vast interconnected world,”¹ in which the trope of Israelite origins for a multitude of peoples, as a global phenomenon, formed an integral part.²

In Africa, as in America, the acceptance, adoption, or internalization of an Israelite religious or ethnic identity (although the boundary between an ethnic and religious identity was and is porous) was often a means of using a colonial discourse for some useful and dignified spiritual or social end. It was part of a wider cultural phenomenon—that of adopting the Western Hamitic hypothesis as a way of vindicating the past, which was embedded, among blacks in the United States as in Africa, in a desire to counter colonial racial slurs. The Israelite trope was a means by which Africans could turn the Bible back on their colonial masters. The scriptures could be mined for stratagems of survival and resistance and could be used to help create an identity that would be beneficial in these new and unexpected circumstances. As happened in the nineteenth century with America’s black slave population, a metaphorical association with the biblical Israelites also led to an identification with Jews, particularly after the Biafra genocide for the Igbo.

The adoption of a specifically Israelite faith in the context of a newly Christianized African country was a way of creating a certain measure of independence from colonial authority, of establishing a measure of racial superiority, of saying “this is *our* religion—you can keep yours.” Indeed, for some blacks, both in the United States and Africa, Christianity—the colonial religion par excellence—came to be viewed as a “white” religion, a religion of slavery and oppression, while Judaism or a Hebraized and Judaized form of Christianity or near-Christianity was and is viewed as an indigenous faith, as a religion of freedom, independence, and hope. An Israelite identity brought with it in different circumstances ennobling visions of the antiquity of the community, a degree of self-aggrandizement, local patriotism, and group legitimation. The adoption of such an identity

was a way of stealing a march on oppressors and in so doing striding, back straight, eyes blazing, into the pages of Western sacred history not as humble native converts, but as principal actors—as Israelites: a kind of ultimate religious one-upmanship.

The abolition of slave owning in 1807, and slave trading in 1834, throughout the British Empire, was accompanied by a more compassionate attitude toward Africa and its inhabitants. The rise of text-based evangelical Christianity, which had played a major role in the abolition movement, also gave a great boost to the proliferation of African missions. The humanitarianism of the evangelical movement was opposed to the idea that black Africans were naturally inferior. Evangelicals were staunch supporters of monogenesis—the idea that all humanity derived from the original Adam, and that color was no more than skin deep. As far as they were concerned, “God that made the world . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men” (Acts 17: 24–26). With the benefits of English culture, education, and religion, it was generally considered, there was nothing to stop blacks developing into civilized people.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, very few black people in Africa were practicing Christians, apart from Ethiopians, Coptic Egyptians, and some Roman Catholics living in Guinea and the remnants of the Kongolese Empire. In 1652, Jan van Riebeeck had established a European colony at the Cape of Good Hope, and some of the colony’s colored slaves had become Christian. But it was only in the nineteenth century that serious efforts were made to convert the black inhabitants of southern Africa, which was done through the agency of various British, German, Swiss, American, and French missionary societies. Missionary work was instituted everywhere in Africa. In 1804 the Church Missionary Society started work in Sierra Leone, and in 1806 the nondenominational London Missionary Society (it changed its name in 1812 to the Church Society for Africa and the East) arrived in Namibia. Missionaries of the American Board of

Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) started work in Africa in 1810. Many other Protestant missions—among them the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (1813) and the Baptist Missionary Society (1795)—plunged into the African mission field.³

Initially the Bibles on the colonial frontier were in English and other European languages, but it was soon clear that the Bible would need translating into African languages. In 1804 the British and Foreign Bible Society was founded, and the task of translating the scriptures into African languages began in earnest. Usually a given missionary society would work with a specific ethnic group, and a missionary or perhaps a group of missionaries from a particular society would embark on the translation work into a particular language. The challenge was enormous: of the world's seven thousand languages, around a third are spoken in Africa. However, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, translations of the Bible or parts of it were made into an impressive number of African tongues: Grebo (1836), Mpongwe (1850), Swahili (1857), Xhosa (1859), Igbo (partially in 1860 and the complete Bible by 1906), Yoruba (mid-1880s), and Southern Sotho (1881). The ABCFM's *First Book for Readers*, which included parts of Genesis and some Psalms, had been translated into Zulu in the 1830s. Some parts of the Bible were translated into Shona within months of the initial white occupation, and the complete Bible by the late 1940s.⁴ Parts of the Bible were translated into Tsonga (1906), Northern Sotho (1904), Kikuyu (between 1910 and 1920), and the complete Bible into Hausa (by 1932), Venda (1936), and so on. The remarkable industry of missionaries and their agents may be seen in the fact that by 1938 nearly one-quarter of the world's total number of New Testaments, one-seventh of the world's Bibles, and nearly one-sixth of all booklets of scripture portions were translations into Bantu languages.⁵

As Protestant missionaries set about the task of translating the Bible into African languages, they often taught themselves some Hebrew to

aid them in the task of understanding the Old Testament. Others, like some of the African re-captives training for the mission field in places like the Church Missionary Society school in Sierra Leone, were taught Hebrew, Greek, and other languages before they set off.⁶ Thus, a knowledge of Hebrew, as well as an understanding of the basic ethnography of the Jews as set out in the Old Testament, was often there in African villages, churches, schools, and mission stations and served as a guide and point of contact and reference to local cultures, religions, and languages, as the European penetration of the continent continued.⁷ The act of translating the Bible into African languages involved black African assistants and informants, usually with little or no formal education, in tasks of linguistic and cultural comparison. Soon the deciphering and reconfiguring of the cultures, ethnicities, and languages of the African interior, partly in the light of the Old Testament and the language in which it was written, became a joint enterprise shared by Africans and missionaries in which Jewish, Israelite, and Hebrew constructs of different sorts played a significant role in the unraveling of the mysteries of the continent and the creation of new racial classifications.⁸

Olaudah Equiano's 1789 autobiography suggested that the Igbo might have something to do with ancient Jews and that their religion may have been a modern survival of the ancient biblical religion. From that time to this, Jewish theories of origin with respect to the Igbo have abounded, and Equiano's ideas have won wide acceptance by black Jews in the United States and in Nigeria. Ethnographic works by westerners, such as G. T. Basden's influential *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, or C. G. A. Oldendorp's missionary history, which proposed Judaic origins for the Igbo, no doubt had some considerable influence too and are widely cited to this day.⁹ By the mid-nineteenth century the idea that the Lost Tribes of Israel might be found in the west African interior was well established. As we have seen, the 1841 British Niger expedition took with it open letters from

eminent London rabbis to the Jewish communities who were thought to flourish along the river's banks, showing that the idea of Jews in the western African interior was widespread. J. W. C. Pennington's much-loved and widely read *Text Book on the Origins and History of the Colored People*, which was published in the United States in the same year as the expedition, also spoke of the presence of black Jews on the coast of Africa, showing that this discourse had reached black circles by this date. These Jews, according to Pennington, had originally come from Judaea but had blackened over the centuries on account of the sun.¹⁰

These ideas fell on fertile ground and were soon internalized throughout Africa. In West Africa, the remarkable Igbo nationalist writer, physician, banker, businessman, and soldier Surgeon Major Africanus Horton, otherwise known as James Beale (1835–1883), provides an outstanding example. Born in Sierra Leone, the son of re-captive Igbo slave parents, Africanus was sent by the British to University College, London, and Edinburgh University to study medicine. In 1868 he wrote a powerful rebuttal of current racial theories suggesting African inferiority, attacking among others Sir Richard Burton's espousal of polygenesis, along with a description of some of the African peoples of the continent. Horton was in agreement with the main tenets of the Hamitic hypothesis, which posited that certain superior groups and tribes came from northeast Africa or beyond and survived in sub-Saharan Africa in a degenerate form.¹¹ This notion was fully absorbed by Horton, as well as the idea that the Igbo could trace their origins back to the Lost Tribes of Israel and that their language was heavily influenced by Hebrew. As this is one of the earliest examples of an African absorbing these colonial ideas, the passage has been quoted in full. He started off his argument suggesting the similarity of Jews and Igbo with a gory description of an Igbo custom, which involved the sacrifice of a human being, in this case a young girl, as an atonement for the sins of the whole community:

Do not these religious rites and ceremonies remind us forcibly of the Jewish Dispensation, when sacrifices were made to atone for the sins of the people? And does this not present an emphatic proof . . . that apart from the native religion of Africa, Judaism forms an element which enters Africa by the natural currents of nations from the north-east, from Egypt, Ethiopia and Northern Africa; and though there are comparatively few Jews south of the Sahara and Abyssinia, still by the connection of the Jews with African countries since the days of Moses, Abraham, Joseph, Solomon, as well as the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consequent scattering of the Jews all over the globe, the influence of Judaism on Africa is greater and farther diffused than that of the Jews and their geographical extension. If we take, for instance, the race under consideration, I will go still further, and assert that the more we study them in all their various relationships, the more shall we be convinced that they form a portion of those lost tribes who disobeyed the command of God and were dispersed, but are now mingled with the original inhabitants of the country, and so degenerate in the form in which they now appear.

But when Mohammedanism overspread Northern Africa destroying by fire and sword all those of another religion, the Israelitish descendants, or the inhabitants occupying the central portion of Africa, passed forward, seeking shelter to the south and west; a part, namely those from the east central, crossing the Binue or Joliba branch of the Niger, descended gradually southward and became intermingled with the original inhabitants. Protected from incursion on the north by the Binue River, and quietly settled between the Great Niger and Old Kalabar Rivers, they remained in peace and quiet, and grew from one generation to another in idolatry, but still leaving tangible proofs in the form of their religion of the Judaistic origin of the inhabitants. . . . The

language or the little of it that is known, is full of Hebraisms; the construction of sentences, the verbal significations, the mode of comparison, are all typical of the Hebrew. Like the Hebrew from a single root, of verbs and other elementary parts of speech, substantives, adjectives and adverbs are formed.¹²

As time went on, further proofs were adduced by the Igbo for their Jewish origin. Once a myth is established, it often acts as a magnet to the iron filings of supporting evidence: points of comparison and further proofs eventually accumulate and create a consistent, interlocking, convincing whole. In the case of the Igbo, their own recent historical experience has inevitably drawn further comparisons between them and the Jews: the fact that they were scattered throughout Nigeria as a minority in many cities created the sense of a Jewish-like diaspora, and the “holocaust” of the Biafra genocide provided even firmer ground for establishing commonalities with Jews.¹³ The publicists of the Republic of Biafra compared the Igbo to “the Jews of old” and in their propaganda material included the bearded figure of a military Moses. At the same time they termed anti-Igbo riots as anti-Semitic Cossack “pogroms.” The notion that the word Igbo is derived from the Hebrew word for Hebrew (Ivri) is attractive to literate Igbos because as Afigbo put it: “Igbo have seen their historical vicissitudes in this century as paralleling only those of the Jews since the days of the exodus. . . . [T]his widespread, though probably unhistorical, ideological feeling of oneness with the Jews, which as we have seen goes back to the ex-slave boy Equiano in the eighteenth century, provides some clue to understanding of Igbo psychology, motivation and drive.”¹⁴

During the Biafra war, the Igbo people, as they see it, stood alone against the rest of the Nigerian Federation, including other Christian groups who might have been expected to side with them, and against a loose alliance of African, European, and Arab countries. As victims

of discrimination and genocide encircled by enemies on all sides, many Igbo formed the opinion that the most obvious model for their unfortunate present was the State of Israel, which was also surrounded by implacable enemies but conquered them and created a viable and prosperous state. Frequent visits by Israelis and other Jews to the Igbo communities and the gifts of quantities of books on Jewish themes and ritual objects have further consolidated Jewish identification.¹⁵ These ideas were grafted on to the older identification of the Igbo with the Lost Tribes of Israel and created an ethnically exclusive, constructed racial identity that distinguishes the Igbo from other Christians in Nigeria who during the civil war sided with the natural enemy—Muslim “Jihadists” of the north. Today, then, Judaizing tendencies among the Igbo are of importance in the political as well as religious field. In African thought, as we have seen, ideas about the centrality of Egyptian and Ethiopian models for *all* Africans have been widely invoked, but for present-day Igbo nationalists, seeking as they do an exclusive origin, which sets them apart from other Nigerians, because they still cherish hopes of independence, the idea of a specifically Israelite origin is more useful.¹⁶ By the beginning of the twenty-first century the conviction was very widespread among the Igbo that they form part of the Jewish diaspora and that before the coming of the missionaries and their conversion to Christianity they already practiced a form of Judaism. Many Igbo are convinced that they are descended from specific tribes of the Lost Tribes of Israel. There are those who argue that the royal founder of the copper mining Nri civilization was a son of Gad—son of Jacob and founder of the tribe of Gad—who brought Jewish culture to Igboland. Others maintain that, on the contrary, when Moses left Egypt, he went to Igboland first, before crossing into the Sinai. In fact the teachings of Moses were actually based on the teaching of the Igbo Eri priests he had encountered.¹⁷ Similarly, Nkem Hyginus M. V. Chigere has written,

There are both oral and written explanations that trace the origin of the Igbo, and the most tantalizing . . . is an association of the Igbo to the Hebrew race. This assumption is based on the fact that Igbo culture has many similar traditional customs like that of the Jews. Similar customs are observed in marriage negotiations, childbirth and circumcision, restitution, attitude to totem animals and taboos, as well as hospitality to others especially to strangers etc. The Igbo are therefore said to be the split and lost group or tribe of Israel that refused to wander further north-east with Moses but preferred going down south-wards. But on the other hand . . . the Jews might as well be the descendants of the Igbo.¹⁸

The idea that Jewish tenets originate from the Igbo is fairly common. As one Igbo put it, “Water does not flow uphill. The Jews were living in Africa. They were living with us. When they went back they continued with the tradition, which they learnt from us.”¹⁹ But the idea that the “racial” origins of the Igbo are Israelite is very widely held. Daniel Lis, a Swiss-Israeli anthropologist, has noted that while he was doing fieldwork with the Igbo in Nigeria, he never met one who did not believe in the Israelite connection, in whichever version it manifested itself. In 2005, while she was writing a doctoral dissertation under my supervision, Edith Bruder sent a questionnaire to the Gihon synagogue in Abuja, which demonstrated that the congregation believed that they had grown up with Israelite beliefs, and that such beliefs were part of the indigenous culture of the Igbo. Dozens of books and articles, including some supposedly academic ones, have been written in support of the Israelite origins of the Igbo, some of which clad the myth with impressive detail. Professor O. Alaezi has noted, “An estimated number of 400,000 Hebrews arrived in the apparently safe territory of Nigeria in about 686 BC. . . . The Hebrews . . . more than any other thing wanted a safe place for their practice of Judaism, monotheism, worshipping.”²⁰ It has been estimated, although

this may be an exaggeration, that upward of thirty thousand Igbo are formally affiliated to one of the thirty-eight or so synagogues. Since 2008, fifteen of these synagogues have joined together to create the Union of Nigerian Synagogues. In addition to these more-or-less normative Jews, there are two further categories: the “Hebrewists,” who view themselves as pre-Talmudic Jews on the grounds that their ancestors maintained Hebraic traditions, and the “Sabbatherians,” who number more than two million and who practice a kind of Judaism while including Christian elements. But there are millions more Igbo who believe in the idea of an Israelite “racial” origin.²¹

Between this efflorescence of Jewish activity and identification in Igboland and the black Jewish movements of the United States and elsewhere in Africa, there is a good deal of connection, symbiosis, and communication. Ideas arising from black Jewish experience and ideology in the United States reinforce Israelite beliefs in Africa. At the present time there are Igbo synagogues that are in direct, regular contact with black American synagogues and organizations, and that are supported by American groups. The Black Hebrew movement, which started in Chicago and finished up, via Liberia, in and around the desert city of Dimona in southern Israel, similarly supports a number of groups in Africa, including Igbo ones. Among the Igbo and elsewhere in Africa the compelling ideas of the Black Hebrews in Israel are taking root. One of their principal ideas, taken up by many Igbo in recent times, is the repositioning of Israel within Africa. In one of their publications, *The Historical Connection of the Hebrew Israelite Community to the Holy Land*, they make the point that “prior to the excavation of the Suez Canal the entire Arabian Peninsula and what has become known today as the ‘Middle East’ were connected with the African continent. African people lived and moved freely throughout this region of the world.”²² Whereas Ali Mazrui, Martin Bernal, and others have argued in a similar vein, the Black Hebrews base their beliefs on the Bible. Invoking “divine geography” as a means of “charting the world that ‘is pleasing to

God,' the Black Hebrew Israelites have redrawn the map . . . to include Israel in Africa."²³ These ideas have been seized upon by the Igbo and others because in one stroke they dismiss any thought that Jews must be white and cannot be African. Indeed, contacts between the Igbo and black Jews from elsewhere have been numerous over the years and have had the effect of reinforcing both black American Jewish convictions and those of the Igbo. One illustrative example is provided by the 1971 visit to Nigeria (as well as to other African black Jewish groups in Ghana, Uganda, and the black Philadelphia Orthodox Synagogue of Soweto) of Rabbi Yirmeyahu Yisrael, a graduate of the Ethiopian Rabbinical College (an institution founded by Rabbi Matthew in 1925) and, by this time, rabbi of Harlem's B'nai Adath Kol Beth Yisroel synagogues. Rabbi Yisrael was received by Umorem E. Umorem, the Igbo founder and leader of the Judea Movement in Abak, in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria.²⁴

There can be little doubt that Jewish practices of various sorts are spreading: Remy Ilona, one of the Igbo Jews, has noted,

Judaism based on the written Torah is no longer a new or strange faith in Igboland and Nigeria. In Awka, capital of my state of Anambra, it is common to see many persons strolling in the streets wearing a Jewish *kippah* [skullcap]. And on the Sabbath, hundreds of people close their businesses to worship and rest. And it is so in the other towns and clans. As for the Igbo who are returning without the Torah, i.e., the Hebrewists, or Ndi Ogo Mmoo, or the Godianists, as they call themselves these days, they are equally realizing that only God should be worshipped in Igboland. And the pleasant thing is that they are taking steps to join the Judaists to institute monotheism in our homeland.²⁵

In western Africa in general the idea of an Israelite or Middle Eastern origin has been widely internalized. One example is the way in which the ideas of Western scholars and travelers with respect to the

origins of the Ashanti have been internalized by at least some of the Ashanti and by other black Jews in Africa and the United States.²⁶ Under British rule, the office of the hereditary monarch of the Ashanti—the Asantehene—was left unoccupied from 1896 to 1935. When the monarchy was restored, Osei Agyeman Prempeh II was enthroned as Asantehene. Doubts of various sorts had been voiced about his legitimacy, and in order to put the record straight he decided to prove for once and for all his inalienable right to the Golden Stool of the Ashanti, by compiling a history of his people. His purpose was to demonstrate that the power of the Golden Stool dominated the natural order of things and that this was divinely ordained. Any attempts by newfangled democrats to modify the traditional power structures would threaten the very foundations upon which Ashanti society was built. He set up a committee mandated to gather oral histories about Ashanti origins and assess their reliability. The committee was later ordered to draft a history of the Ashanti. By 1946 the task was complete and took the form of a typescript entitled “History of Ashanti,” which consisted of some 450 foolscap pages, divided into sixteen chapters. Each of the last fifteen chapters was devoted to a particular Asantehene, based on oral traditions. The first chapter, “The First Inhabitants of the Gold Coast,” did not follow this pattern: it was the last part of the book to be written and was the only section of the work not to base itself on Ashanti oral material and to cite named non-Ashanti written sources. The first chapter has significantly more handwritten marginal comments by the Asantehene than are to be found in later chapters. The chapter cites a number of fairly inaccessible sources, including some obscure French ones, but they all in fact derive from one work, already cited, which is nowhere mentioned directly—J. J. Williams’s *Hebrewisms of West Africa: From Nile to Niger with the Jews* (New York, 1930). One text that appears to provide some underpinning for Williams’s arguments is Bowdich’s *Essay on the Superstitions, Customs and Acts Common to the Ancient*

Egyptians, Abyssinians and Ashantees (Paris, 1821), which is cited extensively and followed very closely. Williams's book, which found in the language and customs of the Ashanti specific traces of ancient Israel, extended Bowdich's analysis (which essentially argued that the Ashanti came from Egypt and Ethiopia) to incorporate ancient Israel more centrally. A good deal of the first chapter of the Asantehene's "History" is lifted directly, without acknowledgment, from Williams's book and makes the claim that the Ashanti probably originated in Canaan and had "close connexion with the Hebrews." Williams also maintained that elements of ancient Israelite customs and religious rituals had been brought to Ashanti areas by an immigrant elite. In a letter to the committee that had supervised the compilation of the book, Osei Agyeman Prempeh II noted:

I know it truly to be the fact that in the ancient past Ashanti people lived by Jerusalem and removed little by little to live again to Egypt then to here. . . . When I talked to you of it, it was said that it was the fact that it was our Noble Families of Ashanti who have travelled from far but the rest of the people were natives from here. . . . This could be, for Nobility even up to the present day are a light colour (like red) even when most Ashantis are dark black (African-type). Notwithstanding I am of the firm opinion that nothing good can come in these times by saying some are better than others because they are descended from those who long since came here from the east. It may be a historical fact known to the precious few but I am quite sure it is the right thing at the present time to keep it quite hidden from view.²⁷

Overall, Osei Agyeman Prempeh II held to the idea of Israelite and Egyptian origins for the Ashanti and inserted this into his "History" because it reinforced his view that the Ashanti elite was distinct from and superior to the people it ruled. Osei Agyeman Prempeh II wanted

the traditional power structures restored so that the royal family might resume its former all-powerful role in controlling Ashanti affairs. The Hamitic hypothesis, linked in this case to Israelite history with all its religious implications, proved irresistible to a Christian king keen to restore the traditional order. There could be no better way of legitimizing his rule and his right to rule than linking himself and the elite from which he sprang to the chief actors in the sagas of Western sacred history.²⁸ In this case, then, the Israelite trope was internalized by an elite as a means of promoting the importance and grandeur of that elite for internal political reasons.

The internalization of the Israelite thesis has also occurred among the Yoruba. The Yoruba have a fairly long history of Israelite or Middle East association. Nigeria lies on the edge of the Islamic world and draws on the historical framework of Islamic traditions, as well as Christian ones. Thus theories about the origins of peoples could draw on Islamic material as well as on Christian and local traditions. An obvious illustration of this is to be found in Muhammad Bello in Sokoto, who opined in 1812 that the Yoruba could trace their origins back to Nimrod, a descendant of the cursed Ham, who had been forced to leave Mecca resisting Islam.²⁹ This entered Western discourse when in the 1820s the British explorer Captain Hugh Clapperton (1788–1827) invoked Bello's work, which he explained as showing that the Yoruba were of Canaanite extraction.³⁰ Samuel Ajayi Crowther (c. 1809–1891), the Yoruba former slave who translated the Bible into Yoruba, had so sufficiently internalized the Hamitic hypothesis that in 1852 he argued that the Yoruba had preserved elements of Hebrew myths such as the creation and the flood in their own oral traditions.³¹ The first published Yoruba historian, Rev. Samuel Johnson, pastor of Oyo, wrote a history of his people absorbing this idea of an Eastern origin.³² Johnson maintained that the Yoruba had come from Mecca, from the line of Lamurudu or Nimrod, “the mighty hunter” of the Bible. According to Johnson there could not be

“the slightest doubt” that the Yoruba came from the East. The Hebraic influences among the Yoruba were introduced by “Judeo-Negro” groups who created a local elite, which took the form of the “white aristocracy” of the civilizations of west Africa.³³ The Israelite hypothesis here again creates an effective legitimization of local power structures and traditional elites.

The similarity of Jewish and Yoruba religious praxis was stressed in 1899 by another Yoruba clergyman, Rev. James Johnson. This Johnson wrote a catechism for young Yoruba Christians that specifically pointed to the similarities between Yoruba and Jewish practice and helped to internalize the thesis of Israelite origins among the Yoruba people.³⁴ The idea of an extraneous origin for the Yoruba as well as for neighboring tribes has persisted among Africans, many of whom have accepted the Hamitic or Israelite hypothesis with open arms as a defense against allegations of ethnic inferiority or as a way of establishing and promoting claims of ethnic superiority.³⁵ In 1955 the Nigerian historian Saburi Oladeni Biobaku (1918–2001) claimed that the Yoruba came from the ancient kingdom of Meroë, while another Nigerian historian, Emmanuel Obohioye Ughulu (b. 1906), claimed a Jewish origin for the small neighboring Esan tribe of southern Nigeria.³⁶ Frederick Yamu Numa, a Nigerian historian and businessman, authored a book, *Pride of the Urhobo Nation*, which maintains that the Urhobo people, also of southern Nigeria, were of Egyptian descent.³⁷ Similarly, the Efik people from southeastern Nigeria internalized this general discourse and claimed to have originated in Palestine or Egypt and to have crossed the Sahara to Sudan, from where they migrated to Nigeria.³⁸ Yet another Nigerian historian has written a book, *Ibibio Jews of Nigeria*, which claims Jewish origins for the neighboring Ibibio, also from southeastern Nigeria.³⁹ Similarly the important Aian statesman and historian Joseph Kwame Kyeretwie Boakye Danquah (1895–1965), who is credited with giving the modern state of Ghana its name, wrote a three-volume work of

which only the final volume survived a calamitous fire. His *Akan Concept of God* (1944) endeavored to demonstrate that the Akan had come to a knowledge of the God of the Bible quite independently of Western colonial influence and that their Nyankopon Kwaame, “the Greater God of Saturday,” was none other than the biblical Jehovah.⁴⁰ A number of books have similarly endeavored to show that other Ghanaian groups are descended from ancient Israel, notably the Ga-Dangme, who, it is claimed, descend from the Lost Tribe of Gad. A Ga-Dangme website drawn from these books notes: “Throughout the culture and history of the Ga-Dangmes of Ghana, is a very strong conclusive evidence that they are direct descendants of the Hebrew Israelites that migrated to West Africa by way of Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Lake Chad, Ile-Ife, Dahome, Togo and to the Gold Coast (modern Ghana). Their cultural practices, laws, and customs and even some of their names are so identical to those described in the Holy Bible. Thus, the only logical conclusion to make is that they are, as they claim, descendants of Biblical Hebrew Israelites.”⁴¹

In west Africa, then, since the time of Africanus Horton, the Israelite trope or some other version of the Hamitic hypothesis has been seized upon by Africans first as a counterstratagem of racial vindication aimed at undermining assumptions of white colonial superiority, as in the case of Horton himself, and later through the writings of black local historians, theologians, and politicians as stratagems for the promotion of traditional elites, tribal self-aggrandizement, and racial exclusivity.⁴²

There are many other examples of the internalization of the Israelite topos. One such is the fairly recent development of the House of Israel community of Sefwi Wiawso and Sefwi Sui in Ghana, which has been a favorite locus for the Israelites-in-Africa discourse. Members of the community believe that their ancestors, the Sefwi, are descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel who migrated south through the Ivory Coast by way of Timbuktu, bringing with them certain Jewish rites and

observances. The House of Israel community was created in 1976 after a local Muslim, Ahomtre Toakyirafa, had a vision that convinced him that his Sefwi ancestors were Israelites. He came to this conclusion in part because of the similarities he perceived between the traditions of his own people and those of the Jews. According to the community, they traditionally and rigorously circumcised their young, observed a Saturday day of rest, refused to eat pork, their women were obliged to retreat into isolation during their menstrual period, and so on. As Toakyirafa did more research, he became increasingly convinced that his Sefwi ancestors were directly descended from ancient Jews. One of his neighbors, David Ahenkorah, and others from the neighboring villages went to the Ivory Coast to delve further into their history and formed some tentative conclusions that perhaps they were descended from the Jews of Timbuktu. Encouraged by this, the community started to call itself the House of Israel and began to disseminate Israelite teaching. After the death of Toakyirafa, David Ahenkorah, along with other members of the House of Israel, moved to a suburb of the town of Sefwi Wiawso, where they have constructed a synagogue to which many Jewish visitors are drawn. Like other similar communities, this one is in regular communication with mainstream Jews and black Jews or Israelites in Israel, the United States, and other parts of Africa.⁴³ The internalization of the Israelite theory has even more-dramatic consequences elsewhere in Africa.

8 / The Internalization of the Israelite Myth

During the long period of absorption of the various Israelites-in-Africa discourses, Jewish and Israelite identities were often embedded in anticolonial rhetoric and selected or adopted at least in part as a means of asserting some measure of independence from colonial authority, and this was as true in central and southern parts of the continent as it was in the west.

There are some striking examples of this in the early twentieth-century history of Uganda. The first envoys of the Church Missionary Society arrived at King Mutesa's Ganda court in 1877, and by 1914 nearly the whole of the area was evangelized. One of the stratagems employed by the missionaries was to stress that what they were preaching was not just a cunning plot cooked up by the British to extend their control over the region and legitimize their presence. They explained that the British themselves had learned this wisdom from

Oriental foreigners—a people called the Jews. It followed then that if the all-powerful British could accept religious truth from foreigners, so too could Africans.

It was not long before Africans, already introduced to the Bible, started showing a keen interest in its authors and principal players. In the 1890s, Philip O’Flaherty, a CMS missionary at the Ganda court, observed that “the customs and manners of the Jews” were of the greatest possible interest to black people in Uganda. In his preaching he stressed “that Jesus Christ was a Jew . . . [and] we Europeans did not follow one of our own race, we looked for the truth where it was to be found, and we found it among the Jews.”¹

The impact of the Israelite trope in Uganda was powerful and swift. British explorers had reached the area of today’s Uganda by the 1860s, followed by the first Protestant missionaries in 1877. Uganda was ruled by Great Britain as a protectorate from 1894. One of the Judaizing groups that sprang up, as a response to colonial intervention, was the Society of the One Almighty God, which was founded in 1913 by a Muganda called Musajjakawa Malaki (1875–1929). Within seven years his movement numbered ninety thousand people. His followers, who kept the Jewish Sabbath, were known as the Malakites, or as the “Christian Jews.” They opposed the colonial government in a number of critical areas, including land redistribution and public health—they vehemently opposed the use of Western medicine. Malaki himself died as a result of a hunger strike, having refused to allow his followers to participate in a vaccination program.² A follower of Malaki was Semei Kakungulu (1869–1928), who had been converted to the Protestant faith in the 1880s. He was one of the most remarkable Ugandans of his generation, a man of great spiritual and intellectual curiosity, and, as a military leader and gifted military strategist on the British side against the Muslims, one of the architects of modern Uganda. Kakungulu formally joined the Malakites in 1913 but within a couple of years moved further in the

direction of the practice of a kind of Judaism. He had scrutinized the Bible and had perceived that the British, who were fond of telling blacks how to behave in a Christian way, and who regularly invoked the Bible, failed in fact to observe most of its laws. He thought this was wrong and set about observing Saturday Sabbath, refused to eat pork, and introduced other Old Testament measures. He obliged his followers to do likewise. He realized that the British calendar was at odds with the arrangements set out in the Bible, and he established his own calendar on biblical principles. In 1919, having declared “we now will be known as Jews,” he was circumcised along with his first son, whom he called Yuda. His second son was subsequently circumcised on the eighth day, in the Jewish fashion, and was named Nimrod. In 1922 Kakungulu published a ninety-page book of rules, which was essentially a guide to Judaism intended to help his followers observe Jewish law correctly. After 1924 some Jews working for the British brought further information about Judaism, which was incorporated into the group’s observance. Kakungulu made no claims of ancient Israelite origin, and to this day his followers consider themselves as converts to Judaism. The inspiration for his self-identification as a Jew came from the preaching of British missionaries and from the Bible but did not lead to an interrogation or rereading of his own tribal narrative or the creation of an alternative ethnicity. He used his self-identification as a Jew as a weapon: disenchanted with the British, whom he accused of having exploited him and his troops for their own purposes, he withdrew his cooperation and moved his principal residence into the western foothills of Mount Elgon east of Mbale, to a place called Gangama, where he inaugurated a separatist sect known at first as Kibiina Kya Bayudaya Absesiga Katonda (the Community of Jews who trust in the omnipotent God). There was little the British could do about it, and he thus became quasi-independent of colonial rule.

His followers, who are called the Abayudaya, numbered around three thousand at their peak and are still to be found in and around the town of Mbale in eastern Uganda in a number of communities centered on synagogues and other communal institutions. Despite persecution at the time of Idi Amin, when many of the community converted to Christianity or Islam, they are today some thousand strong. I visited the community in 1998, along with an Orthodox Jew with whom I was traveling to Ethiopia. He remarked that the Sabbath service we attended in one of the synagogues was identical to services in his own synagogue in north London. There have been regular and growing links between the Abayudaya and Israeli and Western Jews, and the community is often sent books and ritual objects, sometimes with the encouragement of the Israeli authorities.³ The Abayudaya are observant followers of Judaism, many having taken formal Conservative conversions, helped in this by visiting rabbis, and they now have strong links with Jewish communities in the United States and Israel. In addition they have close links with black Jewish communities in Africa and the United States. The genesis of the faith of the Abayudaya is to be found in the internalization of ideas that were planted in Uganda in the first years of missionary intervention and colonial rule.⁴

Perhaps the most dramatic and tragic of the consequences of the invention of a defiant Israelite identity as a defense against colonialism in the African context may be perceived in the life and work of the Prophet of God, Enoch Josiah Mgiijima (1858–1929).⁵ In this case, the Israelite topos can be traced back, in part, to a transatlantic influence. William Saunders Crowdy, the African American Hebrew Israelite, founded his Church of God and Saints of Christ in 1896. Far away in Africa, Albert Christian, a West Indian or Xhosa sailor, had what he took to be a vision in which he saw a particular man and was bidden to go to the United States, where he would meet him in

the flesh. He eventually arrived in the United States, and one day, in Philadelphia, walking along Fitzwater Street, he saw a man at a shoe-shine stand, whom he recognized as the man in his dream. It was William Crowdy.⁶ Crowdy made Christian an elder of his church, and Christian went on to help spread the Crowdy message in the United States. Later he was ordained as a bishop of the movement and was ordered to return to South Africa to propagate Crowdy's message. In 1905 he set up the Church of God and Saints of Christ in Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape Province, where it is still going strong. He died the following year at the age of thirty-eight upon his return to the United States. Christian was succeeded by Charles Mohlabane as head of the South African movement. Mohlabane succeeded in setting up branches in Natal—but during a mission to Mozambique disappeared and was never seen again. In 1909 Crowdy sent Bishop John Msikinya, a South African who had become a follower of Crowdy's while studying at Lincoln University in Philadelphia, to run the movement in South Africa.

Two years before the arrival of Msikinya in South Africa, Enoch Mgiijima had *his* first vision while hunting in the mountains. In his vision he perceived three mountains of different heights, which he took to be a sign that some people would accept him as a prophet immediately, some reluctantly, and some only with the gravest difficulty. He saw an angel in his dream who warned him about a coming conflict in which only the faithful would be spared. Three years later, in 1910, he saw Halley's comet and took this as a confirmation of his prophetic mission and a sign that he should abandon Christianity and embrace the religion of the ancient Hebrews. He soon attracted a considerable following. Seeing the similarity between his own beliefs and those of the Church of God and Saints of Christ, Mgiijima now joined forces with Crowdy's disciples.⁷ Upon Msikinya's death in 1918, Mgiijima inherited the leadership of the church. By this time,

the main tenets of his syncretistic faith were the keeping of Sabbath; a scorn for the New Testament, which was regarded as a white man's invention; a millennial belief that the Israelites were the holy elect of Jehovah and would be delivered from the tyranny of whites, as the Hebrews had been delivered from the power of the Pharaoh in Egypt; and a belief, along Pentecostal and Holiness lines, in the imminence of the end of days. Passover was celebrated, white gowns were worn and trumpets blown during religious meetings in approximate imitation of Jewish practice.

Not far beneath the surface of Mgijima's teaching was a clear anti-colonial agenda. His visions, which he freely shared with his followers, became incendiary. One starkly political vision involved two goats (taken to be the British and Boers), which were bloodily torn apart by a great black baboon—representing black people. His visions continued along these lines, and a few months after taking over the leadership of the church he was asked to resign. He immediately set up his own organization, which he called the Israelites.

In 1920, on Ntabelanga Mountain in the Eastern Cape, he received another message from God and decided to set up a community around the place where he had received the divine inspiration. Many Israelites flocked to the area and built several hundred huts around Ntabelanga on what was crown land. The following year the Israelites compounded the crime of squatting by refusing to divulge their names for the census. They argued that this was unnecessary, as God knew who they were. A force of policemen arrived at Ntabelanga to evict them, and the two sides prepared for battle. The Israelites were armed with knobkerries, assegais, one or two antiquated guns, and knives; the police had modern rifles and machine guns. In probable imitation of the Xhosa prophet-chief Maqana Nxele during the Fifth Xhosa War and the Xhosa prophet Mlanjeni during the Eighth Xhosa War, Mgijima assured the Israelites that the police bullets

would turn to water and that they could not be harmed. The outcome was tragic. One policeman was speared, while 163 Israelites were left dead on the field of battle and a further 129 were wounded.⁸

At the Conference of the Pan African Freedom Movement in Addis Ababa in January 1962, where Nelson Mandela was representing the ANC, he picked out the Bulhoek massacre (as the Ntabelanga massacre had come to be called) as perhaps the single worst atrocity in the history of South Africa. It is still remembered. A Bulhoek Massacre Heritage Memorial was unveiled with due ceremony on May 27, 2001.

In southern Africa the Church of God and Saints of Christ is very active. The church has tabernacles in Durban, Soweto, Uitenhage, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, and Pretoria. There is a community without a permanent building in Khayelitscha Township in Cape Town, and there are branches in Botswana, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. The group is increasingly in contact with Judaizing groups elsewhere, including the large groups in west Africa.⁹ Through the work of Mgiijima, Christian, Mohlabane, and Msikinya, the ideals of black Judaism as expressed by Crowdy and to some extent adapted by Mgiijima spread throughout South Africa and beyond, influencing independent African churches such as the African Hebrew Community, the Church of God, the Saints of Christ, the Zionist Churches, and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church and many others, all of which have strong Israelite elements. The group's Holiness Pentecostal style was to find fertile ground throughout Africa and particularly in areas where indigenous forms of worship included spirit possession, prophecy, and faith healing. Black Israelite churches of different sorts subsequently spread throughout southern and eastern Africa, and "Israelism" became a critical part of Zionist churches of the independent church movement.¹⁰

If some of the impetus for these Israelite elements came from America, elsewhere the internalization of Israelite identities can be traced back directly to colonial inventions. We have seen that in the

early days of contact between whites and Zulus there was a good deal of speculation about the relationship between Zulus and Israelites. To what extent were the ideas of the early explorers and colonists absorbed by the Zulus themselves? There is a remarkable collection of material collected by James Stuart (1868–1942), a magistrate and fluent speaker of Zulu, with a unique sense for the time in which he lived and of the need to record in detail the historical beliefs, traditions, and customs of the Zulu people.¹¹ In his papers we are vouchsafed one privileged glimpse of a particular conversation, which reflects very clearly the kinds of processes we have been contemplating. In 1901 Stuart spent a day at the Royal Hotel in Ladysmith interviewing three Zulu elders in an attempt to re-create something of the Zulu past from the oral history retained by these men. In the conversations, one of them, Lazarus Mxaba, traced Zulu history back to ancient Israel and Greece and suggested that the Zulus were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel. Many customs of the Zulus, Mxaba maintained, were common to Jews as well; he specifically mentioned the butchering of sacrificial meat and the burning of incense for sacrificial and other ritual purposes. He also maintained that the Jews, like the Zulus, slit their earlobes. These common features proved to Mxaba that there had been contact between the Jews and the Zulus in the past. Stuart accepted that such common features existed but could not understand how the Zulus could be descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel, since they had lost any knowledge of the Godhead. Mxaba pointed out that even the Israelites had forgotten their God and started worshipping the golden calf; if the Israelites could forget in such a short time, clearly it was not surprising that in the course of the centuries the Zulus had forgotten too. Stuart mentioned that in fact there were those in Britain who believed that the British too were descended from the Lost Tribes; Mxaba wanted to know what points in common existed between the British and the Jews. Stuart had no ready reply. Mxaba was unimpressed; he was

convinced that it was the Zulus who in fact were the lost children of Israel and that they would be redeemed when they remembered and starting worshipping their lost and unknown God. By 1900, then, the idea that the Zulus were of Israelite origin, which had been presented to them time and time again throughout the nineteenth century, had been internalized and incorporated by some into their own religious heritage.¹² What is beyond any reasonable doubt is that before colonial and missionary intervention in the area, the Israelite trope would not have been used as an explanation of the origins of the Zulu people.

The idea regularly enunciated throughout the nineteenth century that the Tutsi too were of Israelite or Middle Eastern origin has also put down deep roots. Tutsis outside Africa today have an organization called “Havilah,” which promotes the idea of “Israelite” supremacy in the Great Lakes area. On the website of Kulanu, the American-based organization interested in “lost” Jewish communities, there is a piece that corresponds perfectly with some of the Hamitic theories we have seen above:

These tall, muscular, highly intelligent, and arrogant warriors claim to be remnants of Israel. . . . The Banyamulenge of South Kivu Province, Congo, have told me the following: They came from Ethiopia in ancient times to protect the high holy places on Mt. Kilimanjaro, and secret gold and diamond mines, for the House of Israel. They came long before their Watutsi brothers who also migrated to the Great Lakes region from Ethiopia. They claim their ancient sacred calling was the basis for the first legends of King Solomon’s lost mines. . . . Watutsi/Tutsi of Rwanda and Burundi have told me the following: Their ancestors were disaffected royal family members from the remnants of the House of Israel living in Ethiopia who migrated to “The Land of the Everlasting Hills” in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa.¹³

The “Israelite” Tutsis have appealed to Israel and to the international community in general and have asked them to condemn and take action against all “anti-Israelite” violence throughout Africa.¹⁴ In a hostile French-language report from Brussels, the accusation was made that the “process of Judaisation of the Tutsis” is no more than a means of taking over the whole area. According to this, the term “Havilah” is used by the Judaizing Tutsis to describe the whole region of the Great Lakes, which they see as a future Judaic empire. Havilah meetings are customarily adorned with Jewish symbols such as the Star of David and also with depictions of the “Drum of Solomon,” over which the Lords of Havilah are guardians.¹⁵ The movement claims to have a number of “research centers” dedicated to the idea of recovering the “lost memory” of the Hebraic culture of the “Cushitic” peoples—the guardians of the mines of Solomon. The Israelite Tutsi, inspired by the teachings of Yochanan Bwejeri, who believes that the Tutsis are literally one of the Lost Tribes of Israel, are drawn by the notion of the salvation of Israel, and they believe that the physical reunification of the Lost Tribes of Africa is taking place.¹⁶ Bwejeri has fully internalized not only the idea of a remote Israelite racial ancestry but also a more recent Jewish past. As he wrote: “Ninety years ago, my ancestors, the renowned pastoralist Watutsi/Tutsi Israelites of Kush—in Burundi, Rwanda, Eastern Congo, Uganda, Northern Tanzania—wore tzitzit and head tefillin. Today the survivors wear fear, humiliation, and despair. Millions of Tutsi have been killed and the ongoing Holocaust is an endless tragedy of ‘Again and Again.’ . . . The Tutsi (or Batutsi/Watutsi) are the traditional keepers of the South Kush Jewish Kingdoms.”¹⁷

The general discourse equating Tutsi with Israelites or other Middle Eastern peoples started with Speke in the nineteenth century. It was taken as serious science by the German and later Belgian colonial authorities and subsequently came to have an impact upon the local population. In *The Rwanda Crisis*, the Africa scholar Gérard Prunier

explained that the massacres of eight hundred thousand Rwandese, mainly Tutsi, in 1994, was a function of a racially obsessed colonial heritage and particularly of the way in which racialist and cultural projections and constructions of the nineteenth century and later, fortified by Western influence, linked with the ruthless attempts to exploit intertribal tensions, led inexorably to the genocide “by inflating the Tutsi cultural ego inordinately and crushing Hutu feelings until they coalesced into an aggressively resentful inferiority complex.” The Tutsi were constructed as a superior racial category because of their “non-Negro” characteristics. In time the idea of a distant Hamitic or Semitic past for the Tutsi was used by the Hutu against them. As one journalist put it: “Just like the Nazis, the Hutus were told it was their patriotic duty. The same intention existed—the complete elimination of the targeted group. The same words were used: ‘the final solution.’ The mistake that was made in earlier massacres—allowing thousands of Tutsi to escape to live in exile, plotting ways to come back—was not to be repeated.” Leon Mugesera, an influential member of the Habyarimana government, said in 1992: “The fatal mistake we made in 1959 was to let them [the Tutsis] get out. They belong in Ethiopia and we are going to find them a shortcut to get there by throwing them into the Nyabarongo River. I must insist on this point.”¹⁸

After the 1994 massacre, as Filip Reyntjens, professor of African law and politics at the University of Antwerp and an expert on Rwanda, has pointed out, some Tutsi parties such as PARENA and PRP adopted the general outlines of the Hamitic/Israelite myth as part of their political credo, thereby invoking the “Jewish origin” of the Tutsi. Their Jewish perspective may have received some support from an article that was published in the *Jerusalem Post* on November 23, 1998, in which Geneva-based Tegegne Muse observed that “the Ethiopian-Hebrew-Israelites from Guihon are also found in East Africa where they are called Tutsi. The flag of Burundi dominated by

the Tutsi still bears the Star of David,” and he evoked the genocide of “more than 500,000 Tutsi-Hebrew-Israelite in Rwanda.” Muse elsewhere has argued that “the Queen of Sheba sent the Tutsi to protect the White Nile and to found a tributary kingdom.”¹⁹ Reyntjens has noted, among many different groups in the area, not just Tutsi and Hutu, a general adoption of polarized “Bantu” or “Hamitic” identities, which are taken to be necessarily inimical one to the other. The fact that the Tutsi Israelite myth was formulated at all, according to Reyntjens, “and above all repeated by Burundian actors illustrates the great desire to use identity as a pawn.”²⁰

A Jewish journalist who was in Rwanda in 2010 noted:

I was surprised when I arrived in this emerald-green country to find people treating me like a brother. I was greeted with a fist-pound and a touch to the heart by the money changer, who called me a fellow Jew. But what caught my attention most were the references to Israel, the references to the Jews. At first it seemed obvious; as historical cousins of genocide Israel and Rwanda had a special bond. Like Israel, Rwanda had escaped genocide to become a shining example in a troublesome part of the world. But the reference and affirmation was much more than historical contingency; it was, according to them, true blood. According to some historians and Tutsi scholars, the group originally came to Rwanda from Ethiopia in the 15th century. To Tutsis, the genealogical lineage to Ethiopia connects them to a greater constellation including ancient Hebrews. For people like Claude Bizimana, a former soldier who fought alongside President Paul Kagame, the link has become a useful shorthand. “That’s where the Jews lived,” he says, pointing to a shadowy suburban Kigali home in the dark starry night. “Those were all non-Jews,” he says, moving his finger all around. When he introduces me to his friends he begins with a familiar greeting.

“He is also a Jew,” Claude says to me. “Josh is an Israelite too,” he says to his friend.²¹

On October 17, 2011, I received an e-mail from the Havila Institute in which the Tutsi spiritual leader, Yochanan Bwejeri, also Prince of Nkoronko, invited me to watch a video, which is available on YouTube.²² In the words of the e-mail: “With this video-test, the Tutsi Jews are captured through their genuine voice, their concrete faces, and their thousands years expectations for GE’ULAH (Redemption), . . . The video shows a kind of Biblical World that some people don’t like to see or to deal with, but a colorful world that is physically sounded, almost touched, and even smelt.” The video makes it clear that there is a deeply held view that the Tutsi people originated in the Land of Israel—that they are literally of the seed of Abraham.

In Kenya, similarly, there are Judaizing Christian movements, including a branch of the American Church of the Living God, and there are examples of different groups, including the agrarian Meru and pastoralist Kalenjin tribes, that have internalized colonial attempts to explain their history and who now claim origins from the Lost Tribes.²³ In pre-independence days there was a black Jewish community in the town of Ol Kalou, near Gathundia, Central Province, where the remains of their Mount Zion Synagogue may still be seen. Theories suggesting an Israelite origin for the Masai are still to be found a hundred years or so after the first colonial suggestions that they were of Jewish origin. Leonard Heatherly, a self-proclaimed “prophet to the Masai and bishop-evangelist,” wrote:

I have had the great honor of being received into their confidence by a society that has been closed to outsiders. I have sat with their Elders and heard their history, which has been passed down to them only by word of mouth. Elders of the Maasai have told their people for nearly a 100 generations, “We crossed a great sea with a

man named Moses.” (“So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea . . .”—Exodus 14:22) Their history of crossing the Red Sea, as mighty warriors and devoted cattlemen, was consistent with tribal linkage to the Manasseh. I had seen many ties of the culture to Laws of Moses such as drink offerings, no graven images, and not eating pork. As leaders emerge among the Christian Maasai, they tell me of their receiving a revelation—of God speaking to them about their relationship with Israel.²⁴

Both Africans and African Americans appropriated and advocated Judaism, Jewishness, Jewish history, and often an Israelite bloodline in their attempts to counter oppression, gain approval, re-create lost history, revolt against white authority, and forge new, more-useful identities. The mingling of biblical and old and new local, oral histories in what Eric Hobsbawm calls “the invention of tradition,” often in a racialized framework, was a very widespread phenomenon both in Africa and the United States. But it was not simply a question of molding and adapting rituals or tribal traditions, myths, and practices. Often the creation of a Jewish or Israelite identity not only involved new processes of formalization or ritualization but also a new genealogy. The claims of the Inadan in Mali, who claim descent from King David, or traditions in Uganda claiming an ancient lineage of thirty-three kings going back to King David, or the Ethiopians whose claims go back to King Solomon, or the Igbo, Tutsi, Masai, or Yoruba, or some of the Yibr clan in Somalia, or of the black Jews in different parts of the United States evoking very ancient Ethiopian, Middle Eastern, or Israelite ancestry, are predicated on the understanding that being a Jew is, in its essence, something to do with descent and race rather more than belief and ritual.

9 / History, Genetics, and Indigenous Black African Jews

Black Judaism developed as a radical alternative to other identities in a partly religious, partly racial frontier zone between black and white, master and slave, colonizer and colonized, and in the case of the Beta Israel of Ethiopia in a partly religious, partly tribal frontier zone between them and their Amhara Christian neighbors, and later their white Jewish visitors. Israelite origins for certain groups in Africa were constructed by white colonists and travelers but not with the intention that the constructed groups should ever start practicing Judaism. The subsequent adoption by blacks of racial Israelite identities and religions both in Africa and the United States was a subversive way of shedding a racial identity that was sullied by slavery, segregation, and colonial oppression. The renunciation of Christ in strongly Christian societies was subversive. The renunciation of race, at a time when racial identities were of paramount im-

portance, was also subversive. Yet the subversive act may have harbored seeds of doubt and self-interrogation. There was perhaps, even in their own eyes, a certain motleyness or uncertainty in the composite ethnic identity embraced by many black Jewish and Israelite communities, both in the United States and in Africa, which was heightened by the reluctance of white Jews and other black and white observers to accept their version of sacred and racial history.

It is for this reason that proofs of their adopted history and identity were (and are) so hungrily and enthusiastically seized upon. The main historical proofs (outside the frequently cited biblical proof-texts suggesting the inclusion of black Africans in early Israelite sacred history)¹ lay in the fact that there were already supposed to be some authentic, verified, indigenous black Jewish communities in the world who were in direct descent from the Hebrew patriarchs. Many black Jewish and Israelite communities cite one or other of these groups to demonstrate that there is nothing impossibly quixotic about the idea of being black and Jewish. Others claim descent from or kinship with such groups. The indigenous, black Jewish communities with this ancient pedigree that were and are most regularly invoked in the vindication of black Jews' and black Israelites' claims are the mixed black Jewish communities that existed along the west coast of Africa and other west African groups: the Beta Israel (Falasha) community in Ethiopia, which now is to be found almost in its entirety in Israel, and more recently the Lemba community of southern Africa. The websites of many of the black Jewish movements throughout the world still invoke one or more of these proof-communities. The website of the Moorish Biafran Temple of Israelites, for instance, notes the "growing evidence that the . . . people of the ancient biblical world were an African people. Today, many people of African descent around the world practice Judaism and trace their lineage to ancient times. For example, the 'Beta Israel' of Ethiopia believes that they are descendents of Manlike (*sic*), son

of Solomon, and the Lemba Tribe of South Africa believes that they are the descendents of the tribe of Levi.”² In 2002, following the genetic tests on the Lemba, which were widely reported by the media and construed as proving that the Lemba were of Jewish origin, the minister of Shalom Hebrew Israelite Congregation of Jackson, Mississippi, Rev. Herman Taylor, wrote to me expressing his satisfaction that the scientific proof recently provided of the Lembas’ Jewish origins had so fundamentally proven his own black Jewish group’s kinship “with Israelite populations in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Burundi, the Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda and Malawi.”

Descriptions in the burgeoning travel and missionary literature, of Jews, or descendants of Jews living along the western coast of Africa, were available in the libraries of the United States and Europe from the mid-seventeenth century, and by the end of the eighteenth century some black intellectuals in Europe and the United States undoubtedly knew of them. The supposed substantial presence of Jews in west Africa took on particular importance in the development of black Jewish movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not least because there was a verifiable kernel of fact, supported by this distinguished literature, to which they could attach their aspirations and beliefs, and in the United States particularly, the west coast of Africa was imagined as an important locus of black Jews, including misplaced “Falashas.”

Descriptions of black Jews living in west Africa go back to John Ogilby (1600–1676), the English translator and publisher, whose works ranged from translations of Homer to his famous series of books on geography. He noted of the coast of Guinea: “Many Jews also are scattered over this region; some Natives, boasting themselves of Abraham’s seed, inhabiting both sides of the River Niger: Others are Asian strangers, who fled hither either from the desolation of Jerusalem by Vespasian or from Judea wasted and depopulated by the Romans, Per-

sians, Saracens and Christians.”³ Similarly, there are scattered references to black Jews in Portuguese territories in west Africa. Friedrich Ratzel described them as “Mavumba, renowned as potters and smiths, to whom some assign a Jewish origin—Jews expelled from Portugal being alleged to have settled at Sao Thomé and to have sent a branch this way.”⁴ In São Tomé and neighboring Príncipe, islands about 150 miles off the northwestern coast of Gabon, there were indeed well-attested communities of people of part-Jewish descent who were originally expelled from Portugal in considerable numbers following the forced expulsion of Jews from Portugal in 1497. In 1601 the Portuguese crown gave orders permitting Jewish merchants, based mainly on Cape Verde island, to settle and trade along the Senegambian and Upper Guinea coasts. Soon, Jews were working as trade factors along the coast and even in the interior among the Wolof and other African communities. They traded for slaves, wax, gum, ivory, and gold.⁵ In Senegambia a number of *conversos* (forced Jewish converts to Christianity) took advantage of the distance from Portugal to return publicly to their ancestral faith.⁶ At Portudale, south of Dakar, in 1606, a certain Father Barreira observed “a village of 100 Portuguese who follow the laws of Moses.” From the beginning of the seventeenth century these Jews, some of mixed Portuguese-African descent, some with African wives and servants, were often engaged in the illegal import of swords. The descendants of these Jews and other Portuguese émigrés, of Cape Verde islanders, and of west Africans “developed a culture that was itself a synthesis of African and European elements.”⁷ The famous Scottish explorer Mungo Park (1771–1806) described having encountered some Arabic-speaking Jews in west Africa, on the left bank of the River Niger, and remarked that there were said to be many Jews in nearby Timbuktu.⁸ It might be imagined that the presence of Sephardi Jews and their African descendants along the west coast of Africa and Jews active in the trade routes to the north left some traces and influenced African religious praxis in some places. This seems to

be suggested by John Leighton Wilson (1809–1886), the American missionary and Bible translator from South Carolina, who observed of northern Guinea that

paganism and Judaism are united: and in southern Guinea, paganism, Judaism, and some imperfect traces of a corrupted form of Christianity. In the former region of country Judaism is more prominently developed; some of the leading features of which are circumcision, the division of tribes into separate families, and very frequently into the number twelve, the rigid interdiction of marriage between families too nearly related; bloody sacrifices, with the sprinkling of blood upon their altars and door posts; the formal and ceremonial observance of new moons; a specific time for mourning for the dead, during which they shave their heads; and wear soiled and tattered clothes; demoniacal possessions, purifications and various other usages, probably of a Jewish origin. Some of these usages, especially the rite of circumcision, might be supposed to have been of a Moham-medan origin, if it were not for the entire absence of all other traces of this religion among the pagan tribes of both Guineas.⁹

The Jewish element of this mixed population seems to have been swallowed up by the host society. In any event it was not markedly visible in 1864 when William Winwood Reade (1838–1875), the Scottish explorer and historian, visited west Africa. Summarizing the history of these communities, he noted that “John II of Portugal in 1484, finding that the climate (of San Thomé) was so unhealthy, gave the Jews in his kingdom the agreeable choice of being baptised, or of colonising San Thomé. Great numbers were sent out, and married women brought over from Angola. From this union arose a mixed race, which the Portuguese firmly perpetuated. I could detect no relic of the Jewish type which is decidedly providential, for a union of the

Jew and the negro would be, commercially speaking, dangerous to Christianity.”¹⁰ What was true for Reade in 1864 is even truer now: the Jews of the Bilad al-Sudan and western coastal areas have disappeared without leaving much of a trace, at least in Africa.

It is unlikely, however, that these practices, most of which suggest Israelite rather than rabbinic Jewish practice, had anything to do with Portuguese Jews or *conversos*. Probably the religious practices here described were simply African. The influence of these scattered Jewish communities along the west African coast cannot be held responsible for the “discovery” by missionaries and others of people of Israelite origin, Judaic customs, and traces of Hebrew throughout the entire African continent. Nor can the millions of people throughout the world who claim Israelite ancestry be understood as descending from such communities. Whether these historical communities contributed to the knowledge American slave communities had of Judaism, which is not unlikely, is a topic that requires further research. At the time of writing, however, there is little to suggest that the Judaic communities or practices described by Olaudah Equiano, Charles Pennington, Bata Kindai Amgoza ibn LoBagola, or Rabbi Wentworth A. Matthew (who had claimed to originate from a small Falasha village in Lagos, Nigeria), or indeed any of the movements adopting Israelite identities on either side of the Atlantic in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, owe much if anything to these communities.

The question now is whether the two other groups in Africa that have some claim to be considered indigenous or autochthonous black Jews, and which have been used and are being used to validate and legitimate the historical vision of much of black Judaism, form part of the theoretical scheme outlined throughout this book. In other words, were the Beta Israel and the Lemba constructed out of European myths and racist and colonial fantasies, in the same way as the Igbo, Ashanti, Yoruba, Tutsi, Zulu, Masai, and many others, or

are they “authentic” historical Jewish communities, who may be viewed as descending from some perhaps ancient Israelite, Hebrew, or Jewish stock?

For hundreds of years Ethiopia was the locus par excellence of the Israelites-in-Africa myth, and until the nineteenth century attempts were still being made to locate the Lost Tribes of Israel in and around this mountainous African kingdom. Various reports filtered through to Europe concerning the existence of Jews in Ethiopia. The arrival in Rome, at the end of the fifteenth century, of a group of Ethiopian Christians who founded a monastery called San Stefano degli Abissini began to provide some reliable-sounding information. Abraham Farissol (c. 1451–c. 1525), the polemicist and geographer, who spent most of his life in Ferrara, commented on accounts he had heard from “the black priests who arrived and continued to arrive each day and relate in detail the reality of many Jews among them (in Ethiopia). And in Rome there is a sect made up of these priests, whose number is close to thirty, residing in a monastery established anew for them.” The Jesuit bishop Andrew de Oviedo, who had been sent to Ethiopia by the king of Portugal, wrote in 1557 “that the Jews possessed great inaccessible mountains; and they had dispossessed the Christians of many lands which they were masters of, and that the kings of Ethiopia could not subdue them, because they have but small forces, and it is very difficult to penetrate into the fastness of their rocks.”¹¹

John Pory (1572–1636), the English traveler, administrator, and translator of Leo Africanus’s *Description*, referred specifically to more than one independent Jewish polity in the vicinity of Ethiopia. “At this day,” he wrote, “also the Abassins affirm that upon the Nilus towards the west there inhabiteth a most populous nation of the Jewish stock under a mightie king. . . . And likewise on the north part off the kingdom of Goiamé and the southerly quarter of the kingdom of Gorham there are certain mountains, peopled with Jews,

who there maintain themselves free and absolute through the inaccessible situations of the same.” Further information about Jews in Ethiopia was provided by the seventeenth-century Portuguese Jesuit missionary Balthazar Tellez (1595–1675) in *Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*. About the Galla of Ethiopia he observed:

The most received Opinion among learned Men is, that these people are originally descended from those Jews who on occasion of the Transmigration, or Dispersions of the said Nation under Salmanasar, Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, Adrian and Severus, settled on that Part of the Borders of Ethiopia; and that from them came those we now call Gallas, or Callas, which signifies Milks, changing the C into G, as it is frequently done in other Nations: for the Abyssinians changing Calla into Galla gave the name to these Jews and to other Greeks and Assyrians, who mix’d with them, Gallas or Callas signifying White Men, for Calla in the Hebrew signifies Milk, and they were called Milks, to denote they were white; and still these people are call’d Gallas, that is Whites, tho’ they are now Black.

However, there were other “Jews” apart from these “Milks” in Ethiopia: “Besides,” he wrote,

betwixt the Emperor’s Dominions and the Cafres dwelling near the River Nile and now free from any Subjection to the Empire, there are still many of these Jews, whom they there call Falaxas, which signifies Strangers and it may be suppos’d they also came into Ethiopia out of the Captivity of Salmanasar or afterwards, when they were expell’d, at the Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and Vespasian and therefore the Abyssinians tho’ many were also Jews, descended from those who came with Melilecc [*sic*] the Son of the Queen of Sheba, by Solomon, always treated them as

Strangers, God so ordering, that they should have no settled Dwelling on this Earth, who would not receive the King of Heaven. These still have Hebrew Bibles, and sing the Psalms very scurvily in their synagogues.

Tellez constructed the Beta Israel as despised Jews, rejecters of Christ, “with no settled dwelling,” by suggesting (falsely) that the Beta Israel in these areas, perhaps near the current border between the Sudan and Ethiopia, not only had Hebrew texts but also spoke Hebrew “but with much corruption in the Words, as there is in their Lives and Manners.” Historically the Beta Israel community had no knowledge at all of Hebrew. There is no mention in any of the literature that they owned or held any Hebrew texts, of any description, but of course Jews elsewhere in the world had Hebrew texts and knew at least some Hebrew, and therefore in order to confirm their Jewishness, or to construct their Jewishness, Tellez made the Beta Israel Hebrew-speaking and provided them with Hebrew texts.¹²

Certain factors that were responsible for the creation of an imagined Israelite identity in so many different parts of Africa and the world were nonetheless absent in Ethiopia. For one thing, Ethiopia was already a predominantly Christian country with a long history. For another, it had a written culture. Moreover, it was not colonized until the 1930s and then only partially and briefly. And in any case the invention, in this case self-invention, of an Israelite identity in Ethiopia had already occurred: the national epic of Ethiopia celebrates the Israelite origins of the royal house, and this became “the basic metaphor for legitimacy and authority within Ethiopian culture.”¹³ It was even embodied in the 1955 Ethiopian Constitution: “The imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line . . . [which] descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem.”¹⁴

For those travelers and missionaries who penetrated the kingdom, the construction of extraneous origins for some of Ethiopia's peoples was a way of accounting for certain unexpected phenomena, such as certain customs of the Galla, as was the case elsewhere in Africa.¹⁵ There were, however, great differences between Ethiopia and sub-Saharan African countries. In independent Ethiopia the missionaries did not have the free rein they often had elsewhere. Their activity was restricted because of the suspicions of the established national church and the court. The missions were only permitted to preach to non-Christians, and the non-Christians who held out the greatest appeal (at a time when for millenarian reasons the conversion of the Jews was so ardently sought by many evangelicals) were the Beta Israel or Falashas—the so-called Ethiopian Jews. The London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews commenced its activities in Ethiopia in 1860, but between 1860 and 1922 European missionaries were never active in the country for more than a few months at a time, and the work of evangelizing was done by “native agents.”¹⁶

Before the contact with Western missionaries and visiting European Jews in the nineteenth century, the Beta Israel had an identity that was in part constructed from the Ethiopian national epic, the *Kebrä Nagast*, and the Bible. They participated in the national myth that the first emperor of Ethiopia—Menelik—was the son of King Solomon by the Queen of Sheba. They perceived themselves as Israelites, as did the elites of Christian Ethiopia.¹⁷ When James Bruce, who traveled in Ethiopia between 1769 and 1774, came across the Beta Israel, they explained “that they came with Menelik from Jerusalem,” so Bruce could note “that they perfectly agree with the Abyssinians in the story of the Queen of Saba.” From as early as the sixteenth century, however, Ethiopian non-Beta Israel sources began to suggest that the Beta Israel had come to Ethiopia *after* the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE; this may reflect a Portuguese influence on local views of Beta Israel origins. By the time the

Swiss Lutheran missionary Samuel Gobat (1799–1879) visited the Beta Israel in 1830, there was a mixed tradition: as he put it, “They do not know of what tribe they are; nor have they any adequate idea as to the period when their ancestors settled in Abyssinia. Some say that it was with Menelic, the son of Solomon; others believe that they settled in Abyssinia after the destruction by the Romans.” Gobat, however, was adamant that he knew who they were and where they were from. “It is generally maintained by themselves,” he wrote,

that they came over prior to the time of Solomon and Rehoboam; but notwithstanding the prevalence of this opinion, it is probable that the migration, properly so-called, did not take place until after the destruction of Jerusalem. It is well known that the Jews swayed the sceptre of dominion over Arabia, and a portion of Persia, for several ages previous to the appearance of Mohammed; but when that malignant star arose, they withered beneath its influence, and soon bowed to the Arabian yoke. But as Christian Ethiopia resisted . . . the Jews who resided within her borders, were screened from the powers of the destroyer, and succeeded in maintaining their political constitution; and it is affirmed that they have still preserved their religion without contamination.¹⁸

Their status as black Jews became institutionalized when, perhaps at the suggestion of Joseph Wolff, the Jewish convert to Christianity, missionary, and fervent seeker of the Lost Tribes, Gobat urged the London Society for the Promoting of Christianity amongst the Jews to take over the mission to the Beta Israel, which it did in 1859.

There was not exactly a stampede on the part of Western Jews to go and greet their long-lost black brethren in Ethiopia. Filosseno Luzzatto (1829–1854), the Italian Jewish scholar, was one of the first to take an interest in this remote community when he read about

them in Bruce's *Travels* when he was a boy of thirteen. Subsequently, in 1845, he read in the *Journal des débats* an account of the community in a report sent in by the remarkable Franco-Irish traveler and savant, Antoine d'Abbadie, who traveled in Ethiopia between 1837 and 1848. Luzzatto sent Abbadie a list of questions about the Beta Israel, and Abbadie's replies to the questionnaire eventually arrived in France and were published first in *Archives Israélites* and later in the *Jewish Chronicle*. Abbadie's various reports explained that the Beta Israel believed that they had arrived in Ethiopia at the time of Solomon but that they "entertain some extraordinary notions altogether incompatible with Judaism as understood by other Jews." These notions included celibacy, ritual suicide, and the clitoral excision of girls at eight days old.¹⁹

Despite this first show of interest, Western Jews only started to show anything other than a vague and superficial interest in the Beta Israel once it became known they were being targeted by Christian missions.²⁰ It could well be that, during a period when Western Jews were increasingly being constructed as being black and having African blood, the last group in the world they wanted to have anything to do with was black African "Jews."

At the time of the first European intervention in Ethiopia, it is important to note that the Beta Israel did not perceive themselves as Jews (*ayhud* in Ge'ez). They thought of themselves as Israelites. In earlier periods *ayhud* had been used as one of several derogatory designations of the Beta Israel by the Christians, but the term was equally used to describe pagans or Christian heretics. It was never used by the Beta Israel of themselves. Joseph Halévy (1827–1917), the Ottoman-born Jewish-French Orientalist and traveler, most famous for his remarkable journeys in the Yemen, and the first Western Jew to contact the Beta Israel, did not realize this when, in 1867, he went to Ethiopia as an emissary of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. He wrote of his first encounters: "The crowd that surrounded me prevented me

from entering into conversation with them, but I managed to ask them in a whisper ‘Are you Jews?’ They did not seem to understand my question, which I repeated under another form, ‘Are you Israelites?’ A movement of assent mingled with astonishment, proved to me that I had struck the right chord.” Jacques Faitlovitch (1881–1955), who devoted his life to the cause of the Beta Israel, did much to perpetuate the construction of the Beta Israel as non-Ethiopian outsiders descended from a pre-Talmudic lost tribe of Israel that had found its way from ancient Israel to Ethiopia.²¹ This racial construction was accompanied by another racial construction that was at odds with the Beta Israel’s account of themselves: the construction of the community as black. The color terms in Ethiopia include white for foreigners (*ferenji*), red (*qey*), black (*t’equr*), and light brown (*t’eyem*). The Beta Israel never considered themselves as the “racially inferior” *t’equr* but as *qey* or *t’eyem*. If you were *t’equr*, the chances were that you were a slave. Faitlovitch described the Beta Israel in quite different terms—both as Jews and blacks. “They have kept the flag of Judaism flying in their country,” he wrote, “and can proudly proclaim ‘We are black but comely.’”²²

Thus from the nineteenth century, Beta Israel were constructed as black Jews and widely accepted as black Jews, and their “blackness” has underpinned most discussions of the Beta Israel to this day.²³ The intervening years have witnessed a transformation in this community. Once they utterly rejected the appellations “Jew” and “black,” while now in Israel—where they are universally known as “Ethiopian Jews,” and often as “black Jews”—they have embraced them. As a result of European intervention, and European constructions, right from their beginnings, a new identity—a black Jewish identity—has been imagined for the community and in time was essentially absorbed by it.²⁴ It was constructed in part because of the surprising, oppositional, and quixotic nature of the combined terms “Jew” and “black,” which could be calculated to attract attention.

From the standpoint of most white Jews, the most striking, noteworthy, and disturbing feature of the Beta Israel was not the purity of their religious observance nor the precise modalities of their relations with Jewish history. It was their color.²⁵

These disturbing associations and contradictions between the terms “black,” “African,” and “Jewish” were soon addressed. Following the usual logic of the Hamitic hypothesis, “Jewish” features were discerned among the Beta Israel. Henry Aaron Stern (1820–1885), a Jewish convert to Christianity who worked as a missionary to the Beta Israel in Ethiopia, observed of them: “There were some whose Jewish features no one could have mistaken who had ever seen the descendants of Abraham either in London or Berlin. Their complexion is a shade paler than that of the Abyssinians, and their eyes, although black and sparkling, are not so disproportionately large as those which characteristically mark the other occupants of the land.” In other words, not only do these people follow Jewish customs and follow the Jewish faith, but also they *look* like European, Ashkenazi Jews. Before the visit of Joseph Halévy and before anything much was known about the Beta Israel, there was a reassuring conviction on the part of some European Jews that in any event the Beta Israel were not really black at all. It was only some lowly members of the community, originally slave converts, who were of a darker hue. In other words, any true member of the community was a pale-skinned immigrant from elsewhere, associated with other members of the Jewish faith by blood, facial structure, and skin tone. A member of the Beta Israel community, who spent many years outside Ethiopia and who had internalized these external constructions of Beta Israel appearance, mentioned to a Western researcher that the community could recognize one another by their faces and particularly by their noses. Some foreign observers, having by now discovered that the Beta Israel were dark-skinned, thought that once they moved to the more temperate climate of the land of Israel their skin color would

soon revert to an appropriately Jewish off-white. Faitlovitch, as a part of his general project to make the Beta Israel bona fide Jews, explained away their color by arguing that they had once been white but “their bodies were assimilated due to the heat of the burning Ethiopian sun which had darkened the skin of these immigrants.”²⁶ Attempts to discover among the Beta Israel phenotypical features that distinguish them from other Ethiopians, that are of a more-or-less Caucasian nature and suggest that their skin color and shape of face are different from other Ethiopians, continue until modern times.²⁷ In a hostile pre-review of my book *Operation Moses*, the president of the American Association for Ethiopian Jewry disputed my claim that the Beta Israel looked very much like other Ethiopians. He claimed he had observed that “a different degree of blackness of skin characterizes the Falasha from other Ethiopian tribes . . . they are less African and more Mediterranean than the others—they have less frequency of African associated chromosomes.”²⁸

In other words, the same kind of process has been at work among the Beta Israel as pertained during the same period among many other constructed African groups, from Guinea to Natal.²⁹ This act of “Jewish construction” among the Beta Israel was also undertaken by a number of scholars. We now know that the origins of the Beta Israel do not lie either in the Lost Tribe of Dan, or in the Jewish colony of Elephantine, or yet in wandering Karaites but rather in the evolution of a kind of Judaic-looking faith in Ethiopia that grew out of Ethiopian Christianity. Recent scholarship carried out by Ethiopianists, and since about 1999 supported most unambiguously by geneticists, has produced a radically different perspective on their history, “which denies their direct links to any ancient Jewish groups, dates their emergence as a separate people to the last five hundred years, and places them firmly in the context of Ethiopian history and society.”³⁰ This body of work, which inevitably has been seen as po-

littically incorrect, given that the Beta Israel are now in Israel and have enough problems as it is, has shown that in fact there is no “blood” connection between the Beta Israel and Jews elsewhere; yet a good deal of scholarly and publicistic writing continues to maintain, along the lines of the Hamitic hypothesis (and despite a truly impressive lack of evidence), that the Beta Israel were blood relatives of mainstream Jews—that they were descended from Abraham and that their origins therefore were from outside the African continent.³¹ Can the Beta Israel reasonably function as a “proof society” for the world’s black Jews and Israelites? Yes and no. Their historical experience cannot be employed to argue that black Jews, wherever they are, descend biologically from the Israelites of old. But their historical experience could well be used to argue that for half a millennium a kind of Israelitism was indeed practiced on African soil by indigenous Africans.

The historical experience of another proof community, the Lemba, has not a little in common with the Beta Israel. Their traditional heartlands are the Mberengwe/Mposi area of Zimbabwe, and they are to be found today in small groups throughout northeast South Africa and in central and eastern Zimbabwe.³² For much of the twentieth century many Lemba have claimed to be of Jewish or Semitic origin, and many European observers have made similar claims for them for an even longer period. The Lemba claim to have come from “Sena,” which they placed across the sea, somewhere in the north. The tradition of an origin far away—outside Africa or in the remote northeast of the continent—is found among very many African ethnic groups, and European support for and construction of such theories of extraneous origins clearly form part of the racial scheme embedded in the Hamitic hypothesis that was presented to and adopted by so many different African peoples. In the 1930s one observer noted of the Lemba:

They are strongly suspected of being Semitic in origin. The reasons for this belief are, amongst others, that they speak, not Venda as one would expect, but Karanga, obviously acquired during a sojourn farther north; and that their features, though of course dark, are distinctly non-Negro. They eat no pork, nor any animal which has not been kosher-killed by a slitting of the throat; and they do not intermarry with those not of their race, all such being called *washenzi* a word used along the east coast for “wild folk, pagans.” They live by barter only, and used to be the best craftsmen in metal work and pottery. It is also said that they were the first to introduce circumcision: at all events, Lemba men certainly do often take a leading part in these rites.³³

Much of the colonial travel and early ethnographic literature on the Lemba suggests an extraneous origin for the tribe. However, a detailed study by A. Ruwita, the senior curator of ethnography at the Museum of Human Sciences in Harare, categorically rejected any suggestion that the Lemba came from outside Africa or that they were different from any other Zimbabweans. According to his paper, which contains a detailed review of the literature on the subject, the Lemba are purely African, purely Zimbabwean, and the idea that they came from elsewhere was “invented” by outsiders who created what he called a “false Remba identity.”³⁴ Papers such as Ruwita’s could well have been written about many of the groups described in this book, who were endowed with constructed identities often through the paradigm of the Hamitic hypothesis, as part of the symbiosis between Europeans and Africans in the colonial period. The reasons that Ruwita went to some lengths to try to demolish the idea that the Lemba were “foreign” is connected to one of the great obsessions of the colonial period in southern Africa: the Great Zimbabwe stone-building civilization. Buildings such as the ones found in the area are without close par-

allel in other parts of Africa, and the identity of the builders has been hotly contested. Claims were made, from the first days of colonial intervention in the area, that Lemba “outsiders” had played a role in the construction of the sophisticated stone-building civilization.

As white settlers moved into the fertile lands north of the Limpopo, they were astonished to find stone buildings, old mine workings, and most of all the imposing Great Zimbabwe ruins. One of the first white men to see these ruins was Karl Mauch (1837–1875), a German explorer and geologist, who spent from 1865 to 1872 in almost continuous travel in little-known parts of Africa hoping to make his fortune through the discovery of gold. Before Mauch set off on his journey, Alexander Merensky (1837–1918), a German missionary, told Mauch that somewhere north of the Limpopo River was a fabulous stone city, which he identified as the biblical Ophir. In 1868 Mauch reported that he had found gold to the northwest of the Transvaal on the Tati River, which gave rise to a short-lived gold rush.³⁵ In 1871, guided there by the German explorer and hunter Adam Renders (1837–c. 1871), who had first laid eyes on the ruins in 1867, Mauch came across the Great Zimbabwe ruins. As he noted in his journal: “Always taking advantage of the tall grass which unfortunately prevented a clearer inspection of the area between the mountain and the rondeau, I crept into the interior of the latter and commenced drawing a rough sketch-map.” It seemed to him inconceivable that local people, living in their simple adobe huts, could ever have been capable of building these majestic constructions. During his examination of the site, Mauch came across an undamaged wooden lintel (subsequently shown to have been made from an African hardwood, *Spirostachys africana*). That evening he wrote in his diary:

It can be taken as a fact that the wood which we obtained is in fact cedar-wood and from this that it cannot come from anywhere else

but from the Lebanon. Furthermore only the Phoenicians could have brought it here; further Solomon used a lot of cedar-wood for the building of the Temple and of his palaces: further—including here the visit of the Queen of Sheba and considering Zimbabwe or Zimbae or Simbae written in Arabic (of Hebrew I understand nothing) one gets as a result that the Great Woman who built the *rondeau* could have been none other than the Queen of Sheba.³⁶

Immediately, with no scrap of evidence, Mauch declared that these ruins had been erected by the Queen of Sheba and were in fact a copy of Solomon's temple and palace in Jerusalem, and that this entire area was the Ophir of the Bible—Solomon's gold lands. In addition, the Queen of Sheba was in fact the Queen of Zimbabwe, and one of the wise men mentioned in the New Testament was also from this very place. Mauch's enthusiasm was entirely in the spirit of the time. Indeed, he simply followed the assumptions about Africa embedded in the Hamitic hypothesis, that anything fine or sophisticated must have come from elsewhere. Unwittingly he was also echoing earlier Arab and Portuguese accounts that maintained that the ruins had something to do with King Solomon. For the Arabs, Solomonic and other Judaic legends, some of which entered the Quran, were as much conscripted in the explanation of strange places as were such legends for Western Christians.³⁷

When the Portuguese first observed the east African coast of what is today Mozambique they found a culture that had been greatly influenced by the culture of Arab Muslims. At Great Zimbabwe, not altogether surprisingly, a range of imported items at the site suggested strong links with the coast. What these items demonstrated was that Great Zimbabwe was an important city whose wealth was substantially connected to trade routes running down to the Indian Ocean. This was not, however, the broad conclusion reached by early

British attempts to understand the Zimbabwe sites. The subtleties of the evidence were completely missed, and the conclusion was immediately reached that the Zimbabwe civilization had been created by ancient Phoenicians or King Solomon. This fitted perfectly with the prevailing Hamitic hypothesis. In addition, this theory suggested that the British, as the heirs of the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition and according to many at the time direct biological heirs of the ancient Israelites, were indirectly more responsible for the wonders of the site than the locals—or at least most of the locals. The archeological efforts to prove this as quickly as possible succeeded in destroying the site, as valuable material was carted away and viewed as the decadence and filth of “the Kaffir occupation.”

The Zimbabwe ruins from the very beginning of the colonial period were universally considered to be beyond the capacities of black people. This discourse has persisted until today: white Zimbabweans are often incapable of accepting that the ruins were built by Africans. As one white woman exclaimed of the Shona people in general: “They are baboons, they do not build anything—they destroy!”³⁸ The wildest theories were customarily put forward to explain the ruins: that they were built by visitors from outer space, by the Egyptians, and so on. But even today the preferred option is King Solomon and the Phoenicians.³⁹

In the early days of the colonization of Rhodesia, a great deal then hung on these issues. It was in the colonial interest to be able to prove that white supremacy was a fact and that subjugation of native peoples was legitimate. Moreover, if the country had once been controlled by a small maritime nation (the Phoenicians), why should it not now be controlled by another small maritime nation (the British)? Clearly, if traces could be found of these ancient colonizers, it would serve this particular historical vision. The Lemba, with their Semitic-looking customs and apparently Judaic habits, who were to be found in the vicinity of the Zimbabwe ruins, were no doubt descended from

those responsible for the ancient ruins, and their new identification as black Jews (who nonetheless had been white Jews before they degenerated) thus suited imperial needs.

Not long after Mauch had made his discovery, efforts were made to show that these once white Jews had in the past lived at Great Zimbabwe and had been responsible for its creation. The Lemba tribe were identified as Jews and defined in precisely the same way as so many other African tribes and groups had been before and since, and for similar reasons. Already in 1867 Lemba people living in South Africa had been observed by the German missionaries Alexander Merensky and Theodor Wangemann (1818–1894) in the vicinity of Potgietersrus.⁴⁰ Somewhat later in Rhodesia, the solicitor and journalist Richard Nicklin Hall (1852–1914) wrote a book about Great Zimbabwe in which he devoted considerable space to the “Jewishness” of the surrounding populations. He made a list of twenty-four supposed similarities of custom and belief and concluded: “Additional parallelisms with Jewish customs could be stated, and all these peculiar practices, together with the lighter skin and the Jewish appearance of the Makalanga, distinctly point to the ancient impress of the Idumean Jews, which can also be traced on the present peoples of Madagascar and of the coasts of Mozambique and Sofala. . . . The Lemba tribe of Makalanga is noted for the preservation and observance of these Jewish practices, which are distinctly pre-Koranic in origin.”⁴¹

In recent times, as prevailing attitudes about race and Africa have changed, the construction of the Lemba as a “Jewish” and non-African community has taken on a politically incorrect character, much in the same way as the contrary presentation of the Beta Israel as an African people has taken on a politically incorrect coloring. It is true that white racists until now have found the tradition of an extraneous origin for the Lemba extremely useful: in 1967 George Robert Gayre (1907–1996), the editor of the racist journal the *Mankind Quarterly*,

wrote a short article, followed by another three years later, and finally in 1972 a book in which he posited the connection of the Lemba with what he took to be the very ancient stone-building culture of Great Zimbabwe.⁴² He argued that the Lemba had Jewish cultural and genetic traits and that their “Armenoid” genes must have been acquired from Judaized “Sabeans” who had settled in the area thousands of years before, introducing more sophisticated technologies and culture to the region. One objective of his work was to show that the indigenous Shona people had never been capable of building in stone; of creating advanced social structures, as had obviously existed at Great Zimbabwe; or of governing themselves. However, there is no evidence that “Judaized Sabeans” or any other Middle Eastern people settled in the area thousands of years before, and there is every evidence that Great Zimbabwe was built something less than a thousand years ago, over a considerable number of centuries, by local people.⁴³ Gayre’s line has been followed by contemporary white supremacy groups in the United States and elsewhere.⁴⁴

The fact that the Lemba narrative has been associated with racist explanations of Africa has had one serious consequence, namely that few scholars have taken the issue of the Lemba and the role they played in the Great Zimbabwe civilization seriously. This was pointed out in a review of my book *Journey to the Vanished City* in 1997. The idea that the Lemba were from the Middle East “simply did not fit in,” wrote the reviewer, “with the ‘Merrie Africa’ version of indigenous initiative and development that Africanists propagated in the heady days of African nationalism forty years ago. It looked too much like the (racist or mystic) paradigm of ‘primitive’ earthlings living in ignorance until ‘civilized’ aliens brought enlightenment. But the profession of African history is now much more self-confident, with the basic outlines of indigenous initiative and development well established. We should therefore positively welcome scholarship that seeks historical connections outside Africa, especially in Asia.”⁴⁵

In many respects the modern identity of the Lemba seems to have been constructed by outside observers following the usual paradigms of the Hamitic hypothesis. The Lemba are physically similar to their African neighbors in South Africa and Zimbabwe and (to me at any rate) all but indistinguishable from them. Members of the tribe display a wide degree of color variation, as do many other neighboring peoples, but in general they are termed black, and their “look,” if one can generalize, is similar to that of other local groups. This did not prevent the travelers who ventured into Lemba areas in the past, and who thought of the Lemba as Jews or Semites, from expressing the conviction that the Lemba had phenotypical traits that confirmed their racial origin, as others did with respect to the Beta Israel. An English writer in the 1880s spoke of “the lighter skin and Jewish appearance” of the Lemba.⁴⁶ Another in 1893 described a group near Umyali who

are, for the most part, tall and slim, with gentle and even dignified ways. Their skins are as dark as any of the natives I had yet met with, but their noses are straight, and not flattened out at the base like those of the true Ethiopian [*sic*]. Their lips, too, though broader than those of the European, are quite Caucasian when compared with the blubber excrescences carried about by the ordinary Zulu or Basuto. The Umyali boys have rather long crinkly hair, very soft looking, well shaped eyes and looking at their physiognomies as a whole, and, leaving out the question of colour, it was easy to believe that they were descended from some scattered remnant of the great Hebrew race.⁴⁷

A. A. Jaques noted in 1931 that the whites of the northern Transvaal could distinguish a Lemba by his features and observed that “many Lemba have straight noses, rather fine features and an intelligent expression which distinguish them from the ordinary run of natives. . . .

One does occasionally meet with a Lemba who possesses strikingly Semitic features. One of my informants, old Mosheh, even had what might be termed a typical Jewish nose, a rare occurrence in any real Bantu."⁴⁸ Some of the early ethnographic work on the Lemba include profile photographs to establish that they did indeed have "Jewish" noses.⁴⁹ In 1942 an article by Louis Thompson, which included a profile photograph showing "the Semitic features of the Lemba" (essentially a prominent nose), following the Hamitic hypothesis idea of the degeneration of such immigrant societies, noted: "As the blood of the Semite became more diluted with that of the Bantu, so did their arts decrease." Being awarded a Jewish nose and Jewish features had its disadvantages. As Howard Jacobson points out in *Kalooki Nights*, in the general European perception, "big nose bad: small nose good." Constructed with Jewish noses, the Lemba were also deemed to have other Jewish qualities, some good, some bad. On the one hand, as possessors of a superior blood (Jewish was better than black), European "look," and Caucasian features, they were regularly put in a higher and more favored category than other tribes and were considered to be more trustworthy, more loyal, more hardworking, and more intelligent than others. The general racial classification in South Africa was a tripartite system of black, white, and colored. The Lemba were never considered officially as "colored," but they derived certain benefits in much the same way as did colored people. It has been pointed out that while, in such a system, "colored, though they will never be white, benefit concretely from not being black, they also benefit from the existence of those who are."⁵⁰ It should also be stressed that by being constructed as Jews, as they were in the first decades of the twentieth century, they were being inserted into a highly ambiguous racial category. Jews may have been more or less white, but they were racially much less desirable than Nordics, Anglo-Saxons, or the English, and Jewish immigration was not encouraged on these racial grounds.⁵¹ In the mid-1920s, when the South

African government was introducing an earlier version of “group areas,” South African Jews were so acutely aware of their racial ambiguity that they were afraid they might find themselves defined as a special “class” with their own area.⁵² Whites in the region of the Transvaal in South Africa were no strangers to anti-Jewish prejudice and would often comment on the Lembas’ money grubbing, on their sharp business skills, on their reluctance to spend unnecessarily, on their success, and on the unusual number of Lemba who had become university teachers, doctors, and lawyers, viewed by them as “Jewish” professions.

Some of these ideas were internalized by the Lemba themselves. In a South African compilation of “vernacular accounts,” M. M. Motenda, a Lemba, observed: “The Vhalemba in respect of their faces and noses are well known to have been very handsome people, their noses were exactly like those of Europeans.” Plate IV in this compilation showed a profile of a Lemba with a prominent “Semitic-looking” nose.⁵³ When I was doing fieldwork in a Lemba village in Zimbabwe in 1987, I was urged to meet a man who everyone said was a “typical Lemba”: he had a prominent nose, blue eyes, and what they said was a “European face.” They were very proud of this man’s “look,” and I suspect that the important ritual roles he occupied were given on the strength of it. But in reality, he was the only Lemba I met while I was in the Mposi chieftainship in Zimbabwe who really had this kind of “look.” He was atypical but presented as typical. The illustrations in the ethnographic literature follow this principle. The Lemba were constructed as Jews and were therefore expected to have a “look” that corresponded to a Jewish stereotype. The Lemba themselves are emphatic about looking Jewish. “I love my people,” a Lemba woman told me in Soweto in 1989; “we came from the Israelites, we came from Sena, we crossed the sea. . . . We were so beautiful with beautiful long, Jewish noses and so proud of our facial structure. We no way wanted to spoil our structure by carelessness, eating pig or mar-

rying non-Lemba gentiles!” During fieldwork carried out in 2003 I discovered that in one Zimbabwe village the majority of Lemba respondents maintained that their “Jewish” noses were one of the most important things about them, one of the most important things in their lives.⁵⁴

No matter that the outsiders usually commented on their paler skin, they were always unequivocally tagged as “black Jews.” But this color designation certainly sits uneasily with the Lembas’ own view of themselves. If you ask a Lemba villager, “Who is black round here?” he will point at some Shona village far away over the hills and mutter, “Ah, *man*, those *wa-senzhi* people up there—they are *black*.” However, Lemba frequently refer to themselves as “varungu vakabva Sena”—“the white men who came from Sena”—and frequently make fulsome allusion to the remarkable and attractive lightness of their own skin.

My own engagement with the Lemba, which started in 1987, resulted in a book that connected them with the Islamization and Arabization of the east coast of Africa. There were no written records that indicated to me anything about their ultimate origins beyond the eastern coast of the African continent. The trail, as far as I was able to determine it, stopped at the Indian Ocean. There was similarly nothing to suggest that they were of Jewish origin, although there was a good deal to suggest that the religion they had practiced prior to the colonization of the areas in which they lived had much in common with the religion of the ancient Israelites. Indeed, their religion, insofar as it was possible to reconstruct it, was not entirely dissimilar to the religion of the Beta Israel prior to their Judaization, and it was not dissimilar either to the various constructions of Israelite-type precolonial religions throughout Africa.⁵⁵

The Lemba may have been connected with a coastal civilization based on a city, called Sayuna by the medieval Arab geographers. After the coming of the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century,

the Lemba, now settled inland, far away from Islamic or other coastal influences, developed their identity and religious system independently of Islamic influence.⁵⁶ By the time they were first described by Europeans, they had lost any strictly Islamic characteristics that they may possibly have had. There was no mention of Allah or of Muhammed, and they did not possess the Quran. Many aspects of tribal traditions suggested an appreciation of the concept of separation, of things, animals, people, which indeed may be taken as a fundamentally Jewish principle. They observed a number of seemingly Semitic practices: endogamy, food taboos (such as a refusal to eat with other groups, a refusal to eat animals that had not been ritually slaughtered), circumcision (which they may have introduced to southern Africa), and menstrual seclusion.⁵⁷ But many African communities had some, if not all, of these characteristics.

In 1996 a new and unexpected tool of research came into play. Trefor Jenkins, a distinguished geneticist at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, was introduced to the topic of the Lemba through his friendship with the physicist Frank Nabarro, FRS (1916–2006) and his wife, Margaret, an ethnomusicologist and a music teacher. Frank came from a well-known English Sephardi family. Margaret, however, was not Jewish, but had converted. Margaret—perhaps marginalized in her relations with the South African Jewish community as a non-Orthodox convert—found a sphere of Jewish activity in which she could engage among the Lemba, whose music she considered to have Jewish roots. Margaret introduced Trefor Jenkins to some of the community—giving him an account of what their history was and what claims had been made on their behalf.

Jenkins was inspired to put Lemba and outside commentators' claims to the test. For the first time in a thousand years of constructions of Jewish identity in Africa, and after countless claims of Jewish or Semitic ancestry with respect to myriad groups, it was possible to put the question of distant historical origins to an objective test. On

the basis of samples of DNA from forty-nine Lemba men, Jenkins wrote what was a historic article, which was published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics* (59, 1996). The results of the paper were that 50 percent of the Lemba Y chromosomes tested were Semitic in origin, 40 percent were “Negroid,” and the ancestry of the remainder could not be resolved. Jenkins noted: “These Y-specific genetic findings are consistent with Lemba oral tradition, and analysis of the history of Jewish people and their association with Africa indicates that the historical facts are not incompatible with theories concerning the origin of the Lemba.”⁵⁸ The following year witnessed the publication of a quite different genetic study, based on a number of Jewish groups worldwide, which would prove to be extremely useful. This study made use of two Y-chromosome markers, and constructed haplotypes for 188 male Jews, which showed that a specific haplotype was common among the hereditary Jewish priestly caste, the Cohanim, who according to the Bible and Jewish tradition are patrilineal descendants of the founder of the priestly clan, Aaron, the brother of Moses.⁵⁹ The following year another study extended the Y haplotype to include five further markers, and this time Thomas et al. found a more specific haplotype in the Cohanim, which they termed the Cohen Modal Haplotype (CMH). The CMH is found in members of the Jewish priesthood (56 percent in Sephardi Jews, 45 percent in Ashkenazi Jews, and between 3 and 5 percent in general Jewish non-priestly families). The authors inferred from this that the CMH was probably a constituent of ancestral Jewish populations and calculated that this marker arose 106 generations ago at about the time of Moses, according to the biblical account.⁶⁰

My own work on the Lemba in the 1980s and 1990s was disseminated quite widely. In addition to writing a book and a number of articles, I also did a series of BBC radio documentaries, which were broadcast on Radio 4 and also the World Service of the BBC, which is beamed to Africa and often gets even into the villages, and a television

documentary that was broadcast by Channel Four in the United Kingdom and NOVA PBS in the United States. Thus my work, which included a reconstruction of Lemba history, became quite well known to members of the Lemba elite. Also a few copies of my book were passed round from hand to hand and were read by many Lemba in South Africa and Zimbabwe.⁶¹

Without knowing that Jenkins was about to publish his article, I had by 1996 independently come to the conclusion, on the basis of historical and anthropological data, that there may have been a connection between the Lemba and the practically deserted town of Sena at the eastern end of the Wadi Hadhramaut valley in the Yemen. I had the idea of comparing DNA collected from the eastern end of the Wadi Hadhramaut and Lemba DNA. In 1997 Neil Bradman, the chairman of the Centre for Genetic Anthropology at University College, London, and I collected DNA in the Wadi Hadhramaut which was subsequently compared with a number of other populations. The ensuing paper, which analysed analyzed 399 Y chromosomes in six populations, including Lemba, Bantu, and Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, discovered that Lemba Y chromosomes were divided into Semitic and Bantu clades, and that one of the Lemba subclans - the Buba - which traditionally contained the Lemba priesthood, to our surprise, carried the CMH at a high frequency.⁶² The new genetic evidence seemed to take the conclusions of Jenkins a little further, as now there appeared to be a precise connection not only between the Lemba and southern Arabia—which, given the close historic ties between the east coast of Africa and South Arabia, was not altogether surprising—but more specifically with ancient Jewish populations. Once again the genetic findings seemed to be consistent not only with some of the oral tradition of the Lemba, but also with the way in which the Lemba had been “constructed” by outsiders.⁶³ A recent genome-wide, as yet unpublished analysis of the Lemba data suggests that some Lemba in fact derive not from a South

Arabian group, which is what was previously thought, but from a Levantine, east Mediterranean population.

As a result of these and other studies, it is now widely believed that the Lemba are of Jewish origin, and that this has a scientific basis.⁶⁴ One work concludes, “This [research] provides validation for the Lemba and important news to the worldwide Jewish community about their far-flung cousins. But it is equally fascinating for what it tells everyone about race. This surprising genetic link between a tribe of black Africans and their European and Middle Eastern cousins suggests that if there is such a thing as race, it isn’t a matter of skin color or a prominent nose.”⁶⁵ Even though no official Jewish religious or Israeli authority has yet determined that any specific DNA could affect the question of who is or who is not a Jew, a number of groups and many individuals throughout the world and particularly in the United States have taken the genetic research on the Lemba as an indication that they are indeed Jewish and should be “admitted” as a matter of urgency into the family of Israel. To them the DNA results appeared as a vindication of the efforts made by the Lemba to have themselves recognized by other Jews as Jews: the results have been taken as a weapon against what such groups perceive to be racist and exclusive attitudes in Israel and among Jewry in general. Lemba informants now insist that they have the same blood as Jews. This fact confirms for them what they had always said: that they were phenotypically different from their non-Lemba neighbors. Those Lemba with whom I have discussed the results often recall the fact that they habitually refer to themselves as the ‘white men who came from Sena’ and that the DNA evidence proves that they were once white and that they are Jews. The worldwide, massive interest in these findings has suggested that the Lemba DNA results “are becoming an evidentiary ground on which historical claims are made plausible (or implausible), cultural, religious, and political practices are made possible, and disputes are adjudicated.” Indeed, genetic

results are now considered “evidentiary ground” by many people, and it could well be that in the future such results will be included in Israel’s criteria for immigration purposes, which might lead to general recognition of groups like the Lemba by Jews.⁶⁶ Elizabeth Povinelli has suggested that the “politics of recognition” presupposes an archive. It has been proposed that the genetic historical archive “may prove to be (or in Derrida’s articulation, may prove to have been) essential to the ‘hope’ of self-described lost tribes to be recognized by the mainstream of the Jewish world and by the Israeli state as (potential) Jews.”⁶⁷

For the Lemba themselves, the genetic results had particular value quite simply because orthodox sources and archives were unable to prove that their own cherished narratives of origin were true. They have been ridiculed and belittled, particularly by southern African Jews, because their oral traditions seemed fanciful and unhistoric. Now they have what they regard as proof of the authenticity of their traditions. The outside interest in this genetic research on the Lemba derives mainly from the fact that DNA helps to prove a theory about which historians and other scholars had severe reservations. For many people the Lemba claims prior to the genetic findings seemed too far-fetched to be true. Indeed, geneticists and those who reported their activities almost “invented” the Lemba as a Jewish community for “outsiders.” For the Lemba elite, the DNA evidence had further usefulness. As a result the Lemba leadership was increasingly drawn into a wide range of Jewish and other networks in South Africa and the United States that were closed to them before. Indeed, now it can be stated with a considerable degree of certainty that the genetic findings will have an overwhelming impact upon the future narratives of the Lemba community, upon their sense of where they belong, and indeed upon the way in which the community is regarded by other people.

Despite this positive aspect, the whole issue sometimes is taken as politically incorrect. Since the Holocaust and the grotesque representations of Jewish physicality in Nazi and other propaganda, great efforts have been made to deconstruct Jews as a race. There can hardly be a more sensitive topic than the constructions of Jewish biological difference. Indeed, orthodox anthropology and international efforts spearheaded by UNESCO through the medium of its four Statements on Race between 1950 and 1967 have insisted that there are no biological differences between peoples. To anyone with a knowledge of how Jews have suffered at the hands of the false race sciences of recent times, any suggestion that Jews possess specific biological features appears in itself to be racist. Yet, paradoxically, genetic findings, while purporting to prove that races do not exist, seem also to be proposing bodily inscribed markers common to Jews. To some people this is perplexing, to others downright offensive.

Whether indeed a genetic signature conveys Jewishness in any meaningful sense is a complex topic. The Israeli geneticist Karl Skorecki has said: “Being Jewish is a spiritual, metaphysical state and DNA is a physical characteristic. . . . We’re not going to determine who is Jewish by the sequence of their DNA.” But is being Jewish ‘a spiritual, metaphysical state’? If it is true, it is only partly true. A Jew essentially is someone born of a Jewish mother—and that is obviously a physical characteristic. In any event, for the Lemba their sense of Jewishness has little to do with spiritual matters—for them it is a question of birth, blood, and a question of what they perceive as their Jewish culture. Most Lemba were converted to Christianity in the early years of colonization, when efforts were made to stamp out their ancestral faith. Lemba children, for instance, were offered places in mission schools, but on condition that they ate pork and attended church. Today the religious life of the Lemba is highly syncretistic. Many of them belong to various Christian churches (for

example, the Zion Christian Church and Pentecostal groups), whereas a few in Zimbabwe are Muslims. Some Lemba, however, claim to be Lemba by religious practice as well as by ethnic identification, although despite the long periods I have spent living with the Lemba, particularly in Zimbabwe, I have never been permitted to witness much in the way of their traditional practices. However, Zimbabwe elders have recently invited me, I think uniquely, to accept traditional circumcision and thereby become a Lemba, which would, should I embark upon this hazardous project, enable me to study their secret prayers and songs.

The religious praxis of these Lemba probably does not have very much in common with Judaism as it is practiced elsewhere. Moreover, many of the Lemba who perceive themselves as ethnically “Jewish” find no contradiction in regularly attending a Christian church. Indeed, by and large the Lemba who are most stridently “Jewish” are often those with the closest Christian attachments. The Lemba Muslims I have interviewed were more reticent about their “Israelite” origins. Most Lemba see absolutely no contradiction in being Christian and Jewish. In Africa in general there is no reluctance to fuse religious traditions. Certainly Judaism and Christianity rarely seem incompatible. Former Liberian president Charles Taylor, who is awaiting judgment in The Hague for alleged crimes against humanity, has recently decided to convert to Judaism. Taylor’s wife, Victoria Taylor, told BBC radio that the former warlord, the first African dictator to appear before the international tribunal, “has decided to become a Jew. And he wants to follow the true religion according to him. He wants to know deeply about God.” According to his wife, Taylor discovered Judaism after being put on trial. “When he got to The Hague, he got to know that he really, really wanted to be a Jew . . . and he wanted to convert to Judaism. And that’s what he has done. He wants to know deeply about God and all about creation, and he wants to

serve God accordingly and immediately.” Taylor’s wife said that he still believes in Christ and hoped to embrace both religions simultaneously. “He wants to follow the two religions,” she told the BBC.⁶⁸

For the Lemba, the impact of the various genetic tests has been considerable and has had the effect of bolstering their sense of being Jewish and encouraging some of their number to embrace mainstream Judaism. For the Lemba the results appear to confirm their ancient traditions and prove that their male ancestors were Jews. Indeed, this is a reasonable interpretation of the data. Shaye J. D. Cohen, now the Littauer professor of Hebrew literature and philosophy at Harvard University, has been dismissive of the genetic anthropological project. “As a historian,” he has said, “I find the whole enterprise rather silly. Are the Lemba descendants of the Lost Tribes who disappeared from the face of the earth? The answer, of course, is no. They might well be, however, a ‘kind of modern lost tribe’—a group of people unbeknownst to us and to themselves carrying Jewish genetic material.” According to Cohen, the Lemba will be accepted as Jews not as a result of their own practices, or as a result of genetic markers, but rather if and when “the Jewish people want them to become Jews. And that’s the way it’s been since Moses and Aaron.” There are a number of things fundamentally wrong with this formulation. Phenomenologically, Judaism, except in the biological sense of being descended from Jews, is a free-floating entity, like any ideology, religious or otherwise. The very many Jewish and Israelite groups in the world, who may by now outnumber mainstream Jews, do not need the permission or the authorization of the (mainstream) Jewish people to consider themselves as Jews or to be Jews. The consent of the Jewish people is only relevant to the more limited concern of their being accepted by *them* as Jews. Historically, a number of adoptions of Judaism or Israelitism, from the Himyarites to the Beta Israel, have not come about because the Jewish people so wished it. Anyone is free to

adopt any ideology and call it and himself or herself whatsoever he or she pleases. It is simply the nature of ideologies. These days the key to acceptance by world Jewry is the State of Israel, whose policy on immigration and on the status, in Jewish terms, of such groups as the Lemba, Bene Menasheh of India, or indeed the Beta Israel, is highly pragmatic. But the acceptance as Jews by the State of Israel does not in and of itself make such groups Jewish, or more Jewish, in any meaningful phenomenological sense.

Time will tell whether genetic markers will one day be taken as criteria for determining eligibility for the purposes of Israeli immigration. There are signs that they will. Quite apart from immigration issues, the general topic of Jews and genetics is problematic. The issue of Lemba and genetics is no less so. Nadine Epstein, a Washington-based writer, argued in *Hadassah Magazine*, an organ of the Women's Zionist Organization in America, that though in the beginning she was "troubled by the idea of a genetic elite among Jews who could trace themselves back to Abraham, Moses thanks to their Y chromosome," she concluded that the positive aspects of this sort of research far outweighed the possible negative outcomes. She declared that this study provided a good tool for the reconstruction of Jewish history. As she put it: "There is no hiding from DNA research; it is one of the forces of our time." Others have found the Lemba DNA results "dazzling" and a proof that Judaism "crosses all races."⁶⁹

Without doubt the genetic results and their dissemination through television films, radio, newspaper articles, and books have complicated the ethnic identity of the Lemba. The DNA research and the worldwide puzzlement and controversy it has provoked have contributed to a centuries-old debate. The newsworthiness of the topic is embedded in Giordano Bruno's conviction that Jews cannot be black. But the research has also spoken to millions of people, black and white, who believe that Jews *can* be black and others who believe that in some sense all Jews are black. The tension between these various perspec-

tives now resonates with unfashionable ideas of bodily inscribed Jewishness, which is perceived as being in the DNA, but which transcends black and white color categories. In part this is because the media interpret genetic results in an exaggerated way and give the impression that a DNA sequence is significantly more than just a more-or-less meaningless sequence. In this sense the “Jewishness” of the Lemba may be seen as a twenty-first-century genetic construction. Nonetheless, in the case of the Lemba, the age-old questions of Can a Jew be black? or Can a black be a Jew? have been answered with a forceful response. The black Lemba, “the white men who came from Sena,” with their bodily inscribed genetic history that ties them with the Middle East, now serve for many aspiring black Jewish groups throughout the world as the one black Jewish “proof community” whose authenticity, in their view, is based on the most unassailable scientific proof of all. It is most unlikely that this will change.

Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832–1912), the great Americo-Liberian writer, diplomat, and politician, noted that “the great body of the ‘Dark Continent’ has been apparently overlooked by the Jews. . . . There is not, to my knowledge, a single synagogue in West Africa along three thousand miles of coast, and probably not two dozen representatives of God’s chosen people in that whole extent of country—not a Jewish institution of any kind—either for commercial, religious or educational purposes. Have the Jews no witness to bear in inter-tropical Africa?”⁷⁰ Today he would be astonished. In Africa—in Ghana and Ivory Coast, in Nigeria, in Sierra Leone and Cameroon, in Zimbabwe, in South Africa, in Uganda and Kenya, in Malawi, in Cape Verde, in Ethiopia and Somalia, in Zambia, around the Great Lakes, in Congo, various groups have been constructed or have emerged into being, for a wide range of historical reasons, and now form part of differentiated cultures, which are increasingly

linked one with the other. In the United States, Israel, Africa, and elsewhere, including Papua New Guinea where there are altogether millions of adherents to some or other aspects of black Israelism, groups that exist increasingly consider themselves and may be considered by others as a completely legitimate, transnational, black Hebrew/Israelite community, with increasingly strong links with other sections of the Jewish world.

Notes

Preface

1. “Black Judaism is . . . a form of institutionalized (congregational) religious expression in which black persons identify themselves as Jews, Israelites, or Hebrews . . . in a manner that seems unacceptable to the ‘whites’ of the world’s Jewish community, primarily because Jews take issue with the various justifications set forth by Black Jews in establishing this identity. Thus ‘Black Judaism,’ as defined here, stands distinctly apart from ‘black Judaism,’ or that Judaic expression found among black persons that would be acceptable to the world’s Jewish community, such as conversion or birth to a recognized Jewish mother. ‘Black Judaism’ has been a social movement; ‘black Judaism’ has been an isolated social phenomenon.” This typology is taken from J. E. Landing, *Black Judaism: Story of an American Movement* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 10. This is not a definition that finds favor in the eyes of black Jews themselves, and given that some “Black Jews” may also be “black Jews,” it could be somewhat confusing. In the case of the Beta Israel, it is unclear which formulation should be used. Certainly in the 1980s when I encountered them there were many Jews who took “issue with the various justifications set forth . . . in

establishing this identity.” Nathan Irvin Huggins, who is commemorated in the Huggins Lectures, was himself a “black Jew”—of Landing’s second type—according to Jewish definitions of what constitutes a Jew. His father, Winston J. Huggins, was a black waiter and railroad worker, and his mother, Marie Warsaw Huggins, who brought him up until her early death, was a “recognized” white Jewess of Polish origin. His task as a historian, however, was perceived in terms of his blackness. See Lawrence W. Levine, “The Historical Odyssey of Nathan Irvin Huggins,” *Radical History Review* 55 (1993), Cambridge University Press, 114–15. Throughout this book I have refrained from capitalizing the word “black.”

2. D. Kessler and T. Parfitt, *The Falashas: The Jews of Ethiopia* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1985).

3. T. Parfitt, *Operation Moses: The Untold Story of the Secret Exodus of the Falasha Jews from Ethiopia* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985).

4. T. Parfitt, *The Road to Redemption: The Jews of the Yemen, 1900–1950*, Brill’s Series in Jewish Studies, bk. 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

5. “Tudor Parfitt’s Remarkable Quest,” NOVA beta (online), posted February 22, 2000, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/israel/parfitt.html>.

6. The study of the Ethiopian Jews has generated a considerable bibliography. See, for example, *Ethiopian Jewry: An Annotated Bibliography*, ed. S. Kaplan and S. Ben-Dor (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute 1988); *Ethiopian Jewry: An Annotated Bibliography, 1988–1997*, ed. H. Salamon and S. Kaplan (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute 1998).

1. The Color of Jews

1. J. L. Graves, *The Emperor’s New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003) 25; C. West, “A Genealogy of Modern Racism,” in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence E. Cahoon (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

2. In contemporary urban slang, “black Jew” is “a term used for something that never has, does, or will exist. Derives from the fact that there are no black Jews.” <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=black+jews> (accessed September 9, 2011).

3. Indeed, he argued that they were “so dangerous to the public that they deserved to be exterminated before birth.” See A. Bein, *The Jewish Question*:

Biography of a World Problem (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1992), 713.

4. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 283.

5. Bruno elsewhere followed the idea that the Hebrews of the Exodus were in fact Egyptian lepers who had been hounded out of the country, and called them “the excrement of Egypt.” This makes his statement about Jews and blacks even odder—as Egyptians were after all Africans of a sort. But following the story about Gehazi in the Book of Kings who was cursed with leprosy and became “as white as snow,” it could possibly be that Bruno thought that Jews were white because of their leprous affliction. F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Henley-on-Thames: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 223. The connection between leprosy and a sort of whiteness was commonplace in discourses about color; see note 17.

6. M. T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964).

7. C. Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25–27.

8. J. Finn, *Sephardim; or, the History of the Jews in Spain and Portugal* (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1841), 324; A. H. Godbey, *The Lost Tribes a Myth: Suggestions towards Rewriting Hebrew History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1930), 247: “Moreover, we forbid that any Jew should dare to make his slave turn Jew, although the slave be a Moor or of any other barbarous people. But should it be done, the slave who has been made a Jew or Jewess shall become free and withdrawn from the owner.”

9. Just a few years before Bruno’s death, the Radbaz, the *Hakham Bashi* or chief rabbi of Egypt, had declared quite categorically that a particular black woman of the Ethiopian Beta Israel tribe, whose husband had been killed and who had been captured, sold into slavery, bought, and impregnated by a Cairene Jew, was indeed Jewish in the full halakhic sense of the word, and her daughter, the product of her liaison with her master, could legally marry a Jewish man. But this was the point of the *responsum*. For the Radbaz, the issue of the woman’s identity as a Jewess was not at all in doubt. “It is clear that she is of the seed of Israel, of the tribe of Dan,” he declared, “for in Abyssinia there are three kingdoms: part of the land is inhabited by Moslems,

part by Christians steadfast in their religion, and part by Jews of the tribe of Dan . . . and daily they take captives one from the other.” D. Bleich, *Contemporary Halakhic Problem* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977), 297ff. Thus during Bruno’s lifetime black indigenous Jews were known to exist in some limited Jewish circles.

10. J. Schorsch, “Blacks, Jews and the Racial Imagination in the Writings of Sephardim in the Long Seventeenth Century,” *Jewish History* 19, no. 1 (2005): 111.

11. In the versions of 1549, 1552, and 1662.

12. Schorsch, “Blacks, Jews and the Racial Imagination,” 112.

13. *Ibid.*, 112–13.

14. J. Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 179–82.

15. F. M. Misson, *New Voyage to Italy* (London, 1714), 2:139, (mis)cited by S. Gilman, *The Visibility of the Jew in the Diaspora: Body Imagery and Its Cultural Context*, B. G. Rudolph lectures in Judaic studies (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 3.

16. A. Melamed, *The Image of the Black in Jewish Culture: A History of the Other* (London: Routledge, 2003), 201.

17. *Ibid.*, 26; Negaim 2:1, Taharat: “A bright-white leprous spot [which is ritually impure] will appear dull [and therefore mislead the priest into declaring it pure] on a German, while a dull-white one will appear bright on an Ethiopian. Said Rabbi Ishmael: The Children of Israel—may I be their atonement!—are [mostly] like boxwood, neither dark nor light, but intermediate.”

18. *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekanne*, ed. Y. Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1970).

19. S. Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 89.

20. Quoted by S. Gilman in “The Jewish Nose: Are Jews White? Or, the History of the Nose Job,” in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 372.

21. Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful*, 89.

22. S. Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 174.

23. S. Gilman, “Dangerous Liaisons: Black Jews, Jewish Blacks, and the Vagaries of Racial Definition,” *Transition* 64 (1994): 41–52.

24. Gilman, *Jew's Body*, 99.
25. Quoted in S. Gilman, *The Visibility of the Jew in the Diaspora: Body Imagery and Its Cultural Context*, B. G. Rudolph lectures in Judaic studies (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 4.
26. S. Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 20; see J. M. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
27. Quoted in Gilman, *Visibility of the Jew*, 5.
28. J. W. C. Pennington, *A Text Book on the Origins and History of the Colored People* (Hartford, CT: L. Skinner, 1841); M. Omi and H. Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 148; H. Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States; and the Prejudice Exercised towards Them: With a Sermon on the Duty of the Church toward Them* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837).
29. S. J. Gould, "The Hottentot Venus," in *The Flamingo's Smile* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 291–305; S. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1985): 202–42; S. Qureshi, "Displaying Sarah Baartman, 'The Hottentot Venus,'" *History of Science* 42 (2004): 233–57.
30. H. S. Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Elibron, 1911), 1:388–89, 387.
31. Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, 167, 169, 179, 195–97.
32. J. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 102; W. Klooster, "The Jews in Suriname and Curaçao," in *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West, 1400–1800*, ed. P. Bernardini and N. Fiering (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004); *Essai historique sur la colonie de Surinam* (1788) (Amsterdam: S. Emmering, 1968), 2:39; W. Isaac, "Locating Afro-American Judaism: A Critique of White Normativity," in *A Companion to African-American Studies*, ed. L. R. Gordon and J. A. Gordon (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).
33. *The Jewish Record*, January 23, 1863, quoted in "Locating Afro-American Judaism," 512.
34. R. S. Gold, "The Black Jews of Harlem: Representation, Identity, and Race, 1920–1939," in *American Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (June 2003): 179. Nazi

anti-Semitic propaganda was full of references to dark, swarthy Jews with huge noses, as illustrations in *Der Stürmer*, which contrast hideous, dark Jews with white, noble Aryans, make amply clear.

35. <http://www.answers.com/topic/jew-black-racism> (accessed February 15, 2011).

36. M. Kaye-Kantrowitz, *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); K. Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks: And What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); N. Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 2008).

37. Melamed, *Image of the Black in Jewish Culture*, 210.

38. T. Parfitt, "Hebrew in Colonial Discourse," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 2, no. 2 (2003): 159–73; T. Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002), 205.

2. Lost Tribes of Israel in Africa

1. The Sambatyon was thought to separate the Ten Lost Tribes from the rest of the Jewish people. It was mentioned in the *Targum Yonathan* on Exodus 34:4: "I will remove them from there and place them beyond the River Sambatyon." The first-century Jewish historian Josephus placed the Sambatyon in Syria, Nachmanides or the Ramban (1194–1270) put it in Media, while others have suggested Ethiopia or other parts of Africa or India.

2. T. Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002).

3. There is some genetic support for the historical division of the tribes. See T. Parfitt, M. Thomas, N. Bradman, and D. Goldstein, "Origins of Old Testament Priests," *Nature* 394 (July 1998): 138–40.

4. 2 Kings 17:6–23.

5. H. Tadmor, "The Period of the First Temple, the Babylonian Exile and the Restoration," in *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. H. Ben-Sasson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 138.

6. Some may have returned with the exiles from Judah when they went back to the land of Israel.

7. Giuseppe Veltri has suggested that as the keeping of the Sabbath was such a bone of contention between Jews and Romans (the Roman view was that the Jews were slothfully giving up an entire seventh of their lives to total indolence), the legend of the Lost Tribes can be seen as “an attempt to explain Jewish law as a *lex naturalis* . . . a natural law to which natural phenomena are subject.” Giuseppe Veltri, “The East in the Story of the Lost Tribes of Israel,” paper presented at a conference on Orientalism and the Jews at the University of Toronto, May 2001.

8. N. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 28–29.

9. Jerusalem Talmud *Sanhedrin* 29b.

10. A. Neubauer, “Where Are the Ten Tribes?” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 1 (1899): 20; see also W. Rosenau, “What Happened to the Ten Tribes?” Hebrew Union College jubilee volume, 1925, 79.

11. *Sepher Eldad* has been printed in many different editions. E.g., *Eldad ha-Dani*, ed. A. Epstein (Hebrew) (Pressburg: Alkalai, 1891) and E. N. Adler, *Jewish Travelers* (London: Routledge, 1930). See C. E. Nowell, “The Historical Prester John,” *Speculum* 28, no. 3 (July 1953): 435–45.

12. E. N. Adler, *Jewish Travellers: A Treasury of Travelogues from Nine Centuries* (New York: Herman Press, 1966), 4–21. Giuseppe Veltri has suggested that the stones in the river represent the stone tablets of the ten commandments and points out that fire is the symbol of the presence of God in the book of Exodus.

13. D. Wasserstein, “Eldad Ha-Dani,” in *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes*, ed. C. F. Beckingham and B. Hamilton (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 213–236.

14. *Ibid.*, 217.

15. S. Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia* (New York: NYU Press, 1992), 43.

16. E. Ullendorff and C. Beckingham, *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 154; Wasserstein, “Eldad ha-Dani,” 225, n. 20.

17. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006) (vol. 6, 577)

18. Ullendorff and Beckingham, *Hebrew Letters*, 153; cf. Wasserstein, “Eldad ha-Dani,” *passim*.
19. S. Munro-Hay, *The Quest for the Ark of the Covenant: The True History of the Tablets of Moses* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 25.
20. J. Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 187.
21. See B. Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, vol. 54, no. 1 (January 1997): 115.
22. M. T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 71.
23. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900), 174ff.
24. A. H. Hyamson, “The Lost Tribes and the Influence of the Search for Them on the Return of the Jews to England,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 15 (1903): 640–76.
25. B. Hamilton, “Prester John and the Three Kings of Cologne,” in Beckingham and Hamilton, *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes*.
26. Ullendorff and Beckingham, *Hebrew Letters*, 60.
27. Captured by Italian pirates off North Africa returning from Mecca in 1518, Hassan was compelled to convert to Christianity.
28. The original manuscript of his work in the National Library at Rome is written in sixteenth-century dialectal Italian with traces of Arabic and other Mediterranean languages. Giovanni Battista Ramusio’s first edition transformed this manuscript into an elegant Venetian text. *The Description of Africa* was published in the 1540 and subsequent editions of Ramusio’s *Delle navigationi et viaggi*.
29. See J. J. Williams, *Hebrewisms of West Africa: From Nile to Niger with the Jews* (New York: Biblio & Tannen, 1930), 208, 224, 232, 281, 292. This book has had a considerable impact upon later Old Testament studies in Africa. See K. A. Dickson, “Hebrewisms of West African,” *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 1 (1974): 23–34; and D. N. Wambutda, “Hebrewisms of West Africa,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 2 (1987): 33–41. See also David Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera*, Oxford Studies in African Affairs 11 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

30. *The Hakluyt Handbook*, ed. D. B. Quinn (London: Hakluyt Society, 1974), 197.

31. J. Pory, *A Geographical Historie of Africa written in Arabicke and Italian by John Leo a More, borne in Granada, and brought up in Barbarie* (London: George Bishop, 1600), 379.

3. Ham's Children

1. Genesis 9:20–29, “And Noah began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father’s nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. And God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years: and he died.” (KJV). See also E. R. Sanders, “The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective,” *Journal of African History* 10, no. 4 (1969): 521–32.

2. R. Graves and R. Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 121; Sanders, “Hamitic Hypothesis.”

3. R. Hess, “The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: a Twelfth-Century Jewish Description of North-East Africa” *Journal of African History* 6 (1965), 17.

4. *The Early Cape Hottentots described in the writings of Olfert Dapper (1668), Willem Ten Rhyne (1686) and Johannes Gulielmus de Grevenbroek (1695)*, ed. I. Schapera and B. Farrington (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1933), 93.

5. V. Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt during the Campaign of General Bonaparte* (London: Cundee, 1803), 8, quoted in Sanders, “Hamitic Hypothesis.”

6. Constantin-François Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt 1783–1784–1785* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787), 83.

7. W. G. Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt and Syria from the Year 1792 to 1798* (London: T. Cadell, W. Davies, T. N. Longman, and O. Rees, 1806), 164–65.

8. Rev. M. Russell, *Egypt: Ancient and Modern* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1857), 27.

9. D. M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 176; B. Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, vol. 54, no. 1 (January 1997).

10. D. Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery*, St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 15.

11. H. Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist* (London: Macmillan, 1870), 286.

12. In 1863, along with James Hunt, Burton founded the Anthropological Society and became its first president. On his travels throughout Africa, Burton collected African skulls and, using the popular sciences of phrenology and craniometry, which members of the society set great store by, set about proving African inferiority. Women were banned from the society, as one of the aims of the body was to discuss things like African penis size, which was considered unsuitable for mixed company. Nineteenth-century anxiety among European Christians about the circumcised penis of Jews may be compared with the anxiety about the African penis, and may contribute to assumptions of shared physicality between Jews and blacks.

D. M. Knight, *The Making of Modern Science: Science, Technology, Medicine and Modernity; 1789–1914* (Oxford: Polity, 2009), 159; N. Seidman, “Carnal Knowledge: Sex and the Body in Jewish Studies,” *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, vol. 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 115–46; S. G. Morton, *Crania Aegyptiaca: Or, Observations on Egyptian Ethnography, Derived from Anatomy, History and the Monuments* (Philadelphia, London: J. Penington, 1844).

13. For example, R. N. Cust, *A Sketch of African Languages* (London: Trübner & Co., 1883).

14. Whitford, *Curse of Ham*, 15, 34, 175; J. Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009),

135ff.; C. Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19; Sanders, “Hamitic Hypothesis.”

15. Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question,” *Screen* 24, no. 6 (November–December 1983): 23.

16. J. S. Prichard, *Researches into the Natural History of Mankind* (London, 1836), (2:97); Braude, “Sons of Noah.”

17. R. Knox, *The Races of Man: A Fragment* (London: Henry Renshaw, 1850), 276.

18. C. Seligman, *Races of Africa* (London: T. Butterworth, 1930), 61.

19. Compare J. Schorsch, “Blacks, Jews and the Racial Imagination in the Writings of Sephardim in the Long Seventeenth Century,” *Jewish History* 19, no. 1 (2005): 124.

20. S. Dulucq, “Zulu/Spartiates et autres analogies antiquisantes: Des usages de l’Antiquité dans l’Afrique des XIX^{ème} et XX^{ème} siècles,” in *Retrouver, imaginer, utiliser l’Antiquité*, ed. Sylvie Caucanas, R. Cazals, et P. Payen (Toulouse: CRNS, 2001), 135–40.

4. Judaic Practices and Superior Stock

1. A. J. Christopher, *Colonial Africa* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1984), 83.

2. N. Abu El- Haj, “Jews—Lost and Found: Genetic History and the Evidentiary Terrain of Recognition,” in *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, ed. M. Hirsch and N. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 40–41.

3. Major D. Denham and Capt. H. Clapperton, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the Years 1822, 1823 and 1824* (London: John Murray, 1826); S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1921), 5.

4. R. F. Burton, *Abeokuta and the Camaroons Mountains*, 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863), 1:176–77, 206, 231.

5. J. Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773*, 5 vols. (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1790).

6. He later referred to the Beta Israel as “mere proselytes” and therefore not “racially Jewish.”

7. His views on Africans provoked staunch opposition from the likes of the Igbo, Surgeon Major Africanus Horton, otherwise known as James Beale (1835–1883), and the black West Indian lawyer William Rainy.

8. R. Burton, *The Jew, the Gipsy and El-Islam* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1898); D. Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); W. Rainy, *The Censor Censured: Or, the Calumnies of Captain Burton (Later Her Majesty's Consul at Fernando Po) on the Africans of Sierra Leone* (London: printed for the author, 1865), 5; A. Vincent, "The Jew, the Gipsy and El-Islam: An Examination of Richard Burton's Consulship in Damascus and His Premature Recall, 1868–1871," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1985): 155–73; J. R. Godsall, *The Tangled Web: A Life of Sir Richard Burton* (London: Troubador Publishing, 2008).

9. S. S. Farrow, *Faith, Fancies and Fetich or Yoruba Paganism: Being Some Account of the Religious Beliefs of West African Negroes, Particularly Tribes of Southern Nigeria* (London: Greenwood, 1926), 166–68; D. Lange, "Yoruba Origins and the 'Lost Tribes of Israel,'" *Anthropos* 106 (2011): 579–95.

10. Olaudah Equiano, *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (London: by the author, 1789), 19–21; *The Classic Slave Narratives*, ed. with an introduction by H. L. Gates Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1987).

11. Equiano's baptismal record in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, was dated February 9, 1759, and states that he was born in "Carolina." Similarly, a Royal Navy muster roll from Phipps's Arctic expedition of 1773 notes that Equiano was born in "South Carolina." In both, the information almost certainly comes from Equiano himself. In *The Interesting Narrative* Equiano maintains that he was born, the son of a chief, around 1745 in an area called "Eboe" in Guinea and at the age of eleven was seized and put on a slave ship.

12. See T. Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002).

13. Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005); P. E. Lovejoy, "Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, Alias Olaudah Equiano, the African," *Slavery and Abolition* 3 (2006): 317–47; C. J. Korieh, ed., *Olaudah Equiano and the Igbo World: History, Society and Atlantic Diaspora Connections* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009); A. Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophet and*

Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005).

14. The Protestant ethos was somehow innately British, whereas Catholicism was considered a “foreign” ideology.

15. See *The Dictionary of National Biography from the Earliest Times to 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917), 1350ff.; R. Mathews, *English Messiahs* (London: Methuen, 1936), 85–126.

16. R. Brothers, *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times* (West Springfield, MA: Printed by Edward Gray, 1797), 34. First published in London in 1795.

17. Dryden suggested in *Absalom and Achitophel* (1684) that a bloody-minded spirit of independence characterized Jew and Briton alike. Jews and British Protestants were perceived as being allies against the “Scarlet Woman of Rome” and having a good deal in common besides. This putative alliance underlies the events surrounding the life of the rabidly anti-Catholic Lord George Gordon (1751–1793), who sparked off the Gordon Riots in June 1780 and converted to Judaism in 1786–1787. These ideas were swirling round London during Equiano’s time in the capital. A contemporary who had a long-term influence on the diffusion of Lost Tribes ideology was Richard Brothers (1757–1824), who was convinced initially that it was his mission in life to lead the Jews back to Palestine along with the “invisible Hebrews,” the descendants of the Lost Tribes, some of whom were domiciled in England and other parts of Europe, and some of whom were to be counted among his own disciples. See Parfitt, *Lost Tribes of Israel*, 45.

18. Quoted in D. Lis, “‘Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch Out Her Hands’: Ethiopian Jewry and Igbo Identity,” *Jewish Culture and History* 11, no. 3 (Winter 2009): 21–38; W. Simpson, *A Private Journal Kept during the Niger Expedition* (London: John Shaw, 1843). See also E. Bruder “The Proto-History of Igbo Jewish Identity from the Colonial Period to the Biafra War, 1890–1970,” in E. Bruder, T. Parfitt, eds., *African Zion: Studies in Black Judaism* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012) 31ff; J. Harnischfeger “Igbo Nationalism and Jewish Identities,” in E. Bruder, T. Parfitt, eds., *African Zion*, 65ff; D. Lis, “Israel Foreign Policy towards the Igbo,” in E. Bruder, T. Parfitt, eds., *African Zion*, 87ff.

19. James Frederick Schön and Samuel Crowther, *Journals of the Expedition up the Niger in 1841* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1843), 50–53. Quoted in Lis, “‘Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch Out Her Hands.’”

20. J. O. McWilliam, *Medical History of the Expedition to the Niger during the Years 1841–2* (London: John Churchill, 1843), 60; W. Allen and T. R. H. Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841 under the Command of Captain H. D. Trotter*, (London, 1848), 1:215. See Lis, “Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch Out Her Hands,” 21–38.

21. G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria: An Account of the Curious and Interesting Habits, Customs and Beliefs of a Little Known African People by One Who Has for Many Years Lived amongst Them on Close and Intimate Terms* (London: Seeley, Service and Co., 1938 [1st ed. 1921]), 31–32. To this day for some Igbo the idea that “Igbo” and “Hebrew” (or “ivri”) are one and the same word and that the two languages are closely related is quite widespread.

22. There are those who believe that very ancient traces of Israelite practices can be found among, for example, the Hausa. See, for example, D. Lange, “Das kanaanäisch-israelitische Neujahrsfest bei den Hausa,” in *Schnittpunkt Ugarit*, ed. M. Kropp and A. Wagner (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999), 112–49.

23. D. Conrad and H. Fisher, “The Conquest That Never Was: Ghana and the Almoravids, 1076. I. The External Arabic Sources,” *History in Africa* 9 (1982): 21–59; C. Monteil, “La légende de Ouagadougou et l’origine des Soninkés,” *Mélanges ethnologiques* 3 (Dakar, 1953): 369–382; M. Delafosse, ed., *Tarikh el-fettach par MahmoÅd Kʒti et l’un de ses petits fils*, 2 vols. (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1913).

24. G. Feyre, *The Masters and the Slaves* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 307.

25. S. Dulucq, “Zulu/Spartiates et autres analogies antiquisantes: Des usages de l’Antiquité dans l’Afrique des XIXème et XXème siècles,” in *Généalogies revées*, special issue of *Diasporas, histoire et sociétés* 5 (2005) 138ff; Delafosse, *Tarikh el-fettach*.

26. E. D. Morel, *Affairs of West Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1902), 149, 151–52.

27. See A. Holl, “West African Archeology: Colonialism and Nationalism,” in *A History of African Archeology*, ed. P. Robertshaw (London: James Currey, 1990), 296ff. See also D. P. de Pedrals, *Archéologie de l’Afrique Noire* (Paris: Payot, 1950).

28. Pierre Bertrand Bouche, *Sept ans en Afrique Occidentale: La Côte des Esclaves et le Dahomey* (Paris: E. Plon Nourrit, 1885), 268. Dahomey is the present-day Republic of Benin.

29. T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee, with a Descriptive Account of That Kingdom* (London: Griffith & Farran, new ed., 1873), 266.

30. B. Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35 (July 2005).

31. F. Ratzel, *History of Mankind* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1896), 3:142.

32. H. M. Stanley, *Coomassie and Magdala* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1874), 167.

33. See, for example, F. Willett, *African Art: An Introduction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 109ff.

34. J. J. Williams, *Hebrewisms of West Africa: From Nile to Niger with the Jews* (New York: Biblo & Tannen Publishers, 1930), 55, 56, 57.

35. R. Patai, "The Ritual Approach to Hebrew-African Culture Contact," *Jewish Social Studies* 24 (1962): 86–96.

36. Williams, *Hebrewisms*, 43ff.

37. Review by A. E. R., *Journal of the Royal African Society* 29, no. 117 (October 1930): 554–55.

38. J. Goody, "Ethnohistory and the Akan of Ghana," review article in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 29, no. 1 (January 1959): 67–81.

39. J. B. Danquah, "The Culture of Akan," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 22, no. 4 (October 1952): 360–66; Robert W. Wyllie, "The 'Aboakyer' of the Effutu: A Critique of Meyerowitz's Account," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 37, no. 1 (January 1967): 81–85.

5. Half White and Half Black

1. H. W. Nevinson, *Fire of Life* (London: Nisbet, with Victor Gollancz, 1935), 432.

2. E. D. Morel, *Affairs of West Africa* (London: Heinemann 1902), 152.

3. D. Campbell, *In the Heart of Bantuland: A Record of Twenty-nine Years' Pioneering in Central Africa among the Bantu Peoples, with a Description of Their Habits, Customs, Secret Societies & Languages* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 266. See also T. Turner, *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth and Reality* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 57.

4. H. Norden, *White and Black in East Africa: A Record of Travel and Observation in Two African Crown Colonies* (London: H. F. & G. Witherby, 1924), 248; *Straits Times*, December 3, 1931, 19; H. Norden, *From Golden Gate to Golden Sun: A Record of Travel, Sport and Observation in Siam and Malaya* (London: H. F. & G. Witherby, 1923).

5. H. Johnston, *Britain across the Seas—Africa—a History & Description of the British Empire in Africa* (London: National Society's Depository, 1910), 31.

6. T. Broadwood Johnson, *Tramps round the Mountains of the Moon and through the Back Gate of the Congo State*, with an introduction by T. F. Victor Buxton (Boston: D. Estes & Co., 1909), 184ff. This discourse continues: "The 'Abairu' in Ankole are actually descended from 'Hebrew,' and an analysis of their current fortunes explain why only the strong Abairu Christians are successful in this world. It is their destiny; if the Abairu (Hebrews) honor only God, he rewards them; if they serve any other lesser gods or kings, he does not bless them." See <http://www.africaresource.com/rasta/sesostris-the-great-the-egyptian-hercules/amazing-ancestry-of-'abairu'-of-ankole-revealed-by-dr-adyeri-muchori/> (accessed September 30, 2011).

7. J. H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (London: William Blackwood, 1863), 247.

8. *Rapport annuel du Territoire de Nyanza* (1925), quoted in G. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis* (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 1998), 6.

9. *Rapport sur l'administration belge de Ruanda-Urundi* (1925), quoted in Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, 7.

10. M. H. Bradley, *Caravans and Cannibals* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1926), 65.

11. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, 7.

12. *Ibid.*, 8.

13. P. del Perugia, *Les derniers Rois-Mages* (Paris, 1970), quoted in Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, 8. The strange views of of del Perugia are reminiscent of the wilder theories white Rhodesians used to be fond of advancing with respect to the Zimbabwe ruins.

14. P. Rigby, *African Images: Racism and the End of Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1996), 68.

15. See M. Merker, *Die Masai: Ethnographische Monographie eines ostafrikanischen Semitenvolkes* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1904).

16. T. O. Lloyd, *The British Empire, 1558–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 141; D. Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, Studies in Religion and Culture (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 38.

17. J. G. Grevenbroek, *An Elegant and Accurate Account of the African Race Living Round the Cape of Good Hope Commonly Called Hottentots, from a Letter Written by J. G. Grevenbroek in the Year 1695*, ed. I. Schapera (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1933), 209, 281, 287, quoted in G. Schrire, “Did the Hottentots Descend from the Jews? Early Travellers Debate This Issue,” *Jewish Affairs* 64, no. 2: 12–18.

18. Peter Kolb is known for his book *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum, das ist vollständige Beschreibung des Afrikanischen Vorgebürges der Guten Hoffnung . . .*, published in Nuremberg in 1719. The second part is of the greatest interest, as it described the customs of Cape Khoihoi. The book was translated into Dutch in 1727, French in 1742, and appeared in English in 1731 as *Present State of the Cape of Good Hope: Or, A Particular Account of the Several Nations of the Hottentots: Their Religion, Government, Laws, Customs, Ceremonies, and Opinions; Their Art of War, Professions, Language, Genius, etc. Together with a Short Account of the Dutch Settlement at the Cape*. See Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 47–56.

19. Schrire, “Did the Hottentots Descend from the Jews?” 13; G. Hemmy, *De promontorio bonae spei: oratorio latina de promontorio bonae spei, in schola hamburgensi d. 10 aprilis 1767 publice recitata* (Hamburg: Harmsen, 1767); *De promontorio bonae spei / The Cape of Good Hope: a Latin oration delivered in the Hamburg Academy, 10 April 1767*. Trans. and ed. by K. D. White, with additional notes by G. S. Nienaber and D. H. Varley (Cape Town: South African Public Library, 1959).

20. T. Hahn, *Tsuni-Goam, the Supreme Being of the Khoi-Khoi* (London: Trubner and Co., 1881).

21. Wilhelm Bleek, a Prussian student of African languages, was the son of a famous German biblical scholar, one of those whom Matthew Arnold later called the “Higher Critics.” In the next two decades, Bleek worked on the grammars of several South African languages, including

the Bantu languages (Bleek selected the name of this language family). In 1851 Bleek went to Natal to assist the Anglican bishop John Colenso. In his doctoral thesis—a comparative study of Hottentot grammar—he maintained that the Hottentots could be traced back ultimately to North Africa because of the similarities he had observed in the structures of Khoikhoi, Galla, Coptic, and Berber. Some sixty years before, in a Yiddish textbook of 1792, a Jewish convert to Christianity, Gottfried Selig, had observed of Yiddish that it used Hebrew words in a way that was “so deformed that they appear to be parts of the Hottentot language.” Selig’s was an attempt to put the locus of the language of the Eastern Jews outside the pale of civilized Europe. In the case of Bleek, it was an attempt to racially construct the Khoisan partly through supposedly foreign influences upon their language, and to dislocate and delegitimize them—to place their origins outside Africa. G. Bertin, “The Bushmen and Their Language,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, new series (January 1886): 55. See O. Spohr, ed., *The Natal Diaries of W. H. I. Bleek* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema for the Friends of the South African Library, 1965).

22. Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 124.

23. *Ibid.*, 95.

24. *Ibid.*, 98.

25. R. Godlonton, *A Narrative of the Irruption of the Kafir Hordes into the Eastern Province of the Cape of Good Hope, 1834–35* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1965), vol. I, 261, 212–15, 223–26, quoted in Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 98.

26. A. Gardiner, *Narrative of a Journey to the Zoolu Country in South Africa* (Cape Town, C. Struik, 1966 [1st ed. London, 1836]), 95.

27. It is interesting to note that not only was the presence of latter-day Israelites in Zulu areas good from a millenarian point of view, it also had a more practical immediate advantage in that it would make the Zulus that much easier to convert to Christianity—so he thought. Edward Muntu Masina, “Zulu Perceptions and Reactions to the British Occupation of Land in Natal Colony and Zululand, 1850–1887: A Recapitulation Based on Surviving Oral and Written Sources,” PhD thesis, University of Zululand, January 2006.

28. See Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 125.

29. See S. Dulucq, “Zulu/Spartiates et autres analogies antiquisantes: Des usages de l’Antiquité dans l’Afrique des XIX^{ème} et XX^{ème} siècles”.

30. G. Parsons, “Rethinking the Missionary Position: Bishop Colenso of Natal,” in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. 5, *Culture and Empire*, ed. J. Wolffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 135–75; D. Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 168.

31. Parsons, “Rethinking the Missionary Position,” 135–175; J. W. Colenso, “The Diocese of Natal,” *Monthly Record of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* 4 (November 1853): 241–64, quoted in Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 133.

32. Parsons, “Rethinking the Missionary Position.”

33. It is worth mentioning that nowhere in the world was color a barrier to people being constructed as Jews; throughout the world, black or dark-skinned communities were perceived as Jews too: the Maori in New Zealand, groups in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, the Pacific in general, aboriginal peoples in Australia, assorted Native Americans, and so on. The development of similar ideas may be observed elsewhere in the Pacific. In the last two decades of the seventeenth century the great English explorer and adventurer William Dampier (1652–1715) crossed the Pacific twice. According to John Campbell’s map of Dampier’s discoveries, there was thought to exist a race of Jews in New Guinea “suspected to be a remnant of the Ten Tribes of Israel.” *The Journals of Captain Cook*, ed. J. C. Beaglehole, vol. 1 lxxvii, n. 1. This idea resurfaced in 1904 when Mr. Oliver Bainbridge FSA, FRGS, reported to the *Cape Times* that he had discovered a race of “strange people in Central New Guinea.” He referred to them as “Black Jews.” A year later he gave a talk illustrated by “a magnificent series of magic-lantern pictures” at the Lyceum theater in Shanghai on his discoveries “in the Land of the Black Jews.” At one point “a really remarkable picture was projected on the screen, showing in profile the head of a black New Guinea Jew, and the lecturer pointed out in convincing and eloquent terms how the subject of the picture differed from the ordinary inhabitants of the country, in his prominent Hebraic nose,—a very well-marked feature high, bold, intellectual forehead and ‘Kinky’ hair. He told of the temples these people have on the island of Kwei . . . and about a strange hieroglyph . . . painted in black on the white bark of a tree in the country, and which no one had yet succeeded in deciphering, though its distinct

resemblance to an ancient Hebrew character was well marked. Mr. Bainbridge had many pictures to show of these strange and interesting people, all of the same distinctively Jewish type and much to tell of their superiority in intelligence to the ordinary Papuans, their abstention from pork, scaleless fish and other articles of diet forbidden by the Law of Moses. . . .” He stressed the similarities of customs and religions, as well as physical appearance: “The likeness of the white Hebrew race is remarkable, the one great difference being that the New Guinea specimens of the twelve tribes are black. Among them are to be found many Albinos.” As *Israel’s Messenger*, the Shanghai Jewish newspaper, reported it: “Asked if they were intelligent, Mr. Bainbridge replied that they were[,] but the only sign of an educational system he observed was tablets used in religious observances.” *Israel’s Messenger*, December 30, 1904, October 20, 1905.

34. On travel literature and ethnography, see M. B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); L. Daston, “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Europe,” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991): 92–124; D. Defert, “The Collection of the World: Accounts of Voyages from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1982): 11–22; R. W. Frantz, *The English Traveller and the Movement of Ideas, 1660–1732* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1934); S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); M. Harbsmeier, “Elementary Structures of Otherness: An Analysis of Sixteen-Century German Travel Accounts,” in *Voyager à la Renaissance*, ed. Jean Céard and Jean-Claude Margolin (Paris: Maison Neuve et Larose, 1987). On the centering of Europe, see L. Baritz, “The Idea of the West,” *American Historical Review* 66 (1960–1961): 618–40; D. Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957); M.-R. Trouillot, “Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness,” in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991).

6. The Emergence of Black Jews in the United States

1. Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin Dunraven (Earl of), *Christopher Columbus and the New World of His Discovery: A Narrative* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1906), 1:23.

2. *The Journal of Christopher Columbus (during His First Voyage 1492–93) and Documents Relating to the Voyages of John Cabot and Gaspar Corte Real*, translated, with notes and introduction by C. R. Markham (London: Hakluyt Society, 1893), 66.

3. Juan de Torquemada, *Primera Parte de los veinte i un libros rituales i monarchia indiana, con el origen y guerras de los Indios Occidentales*, vols. 1–3 (Madrid: Nicolás Rodríguez Franco 1723; first published 1613).

4. Edward King (Lord Kingsborough) et al., *Antiquities of Mexico: Comprising Facsimiles of Ancient Mexican Paintings and Hieroglyphics*. . . . 9 vols. (London: A. Aglio [vols. 1–5], R. Havell [vols. 6–7], H. G. Bohn [vols. 8–9], 1830–1848); L. Glaser, *Indians or Jews? An Introduction to a Reprint of Manasseh ben Israel's "The Hope of Israel"* (Gilroy, CA: R. V. Boswell, 1973).

5. D. Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians of New England* (Boston: Belknap and Hall, 1792), reprinted (New York: Research Library of Colonial America, 1972).

6. *William Penn's own account of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians*. 1683, rev. ed., edited and with an introduction by Albert Cook Myers (Somerset, NJ: Middle Atlantic Press, 1970), 37.

7. See T. Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002).

8. C. Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 213; Parfitt, *Lost Tribes of Israel*.

9. Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 213.

10. In the 1780s a missionary came to Philadelphia to preach the Gospel: he said that “many of the Indians in America were the descendants of the ten tribes. He said his design was to go and live among them to learn their language, that he might teach the gospel and proceed with them in person to Jerusalem; to obtain which he supposed an expedition would soon be entered upon. . . . He died a natural death, it is supposed, some little time after being among the Indians.” C. Crawford, *An essay on the propagation of the gospel in which there are numerous facts and arguments adduced to prove that many of the Indians in America are descended from the ten tribes* (Philadelphia: Printed and sold by James Humphreys, 1801).

11. J. Wolff, *Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara in the Years 1843–1845 to Ascertain the Fate of Colonel Stoddart and Capt. Conolly* (London, 1845), vol. 1, 64–65. This is possibly a reference to Mrs. Barbara Anne Simon,

author of *The Hope of Israel: Presumptive Evidence That the Aborigines of the Western Hemisphere Are Descended from the Ten Missing Tribes of Israel*. . . (London: L. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1829) and *The Ten Tribes of Israel Historically Identified with the Aborigines of the Western Hemisphere* (London: L. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1836).

12. L. D. Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew* (New York: Ungar Publishing Co., 1982), 228; S. M. Lyman, "Postmodernism and the Construction of Ethnocultural Identity: The Jewish-Indian Theory and the Lost Tribes of Israel," in *Sociological Spectrum* 17 (1997).

13. I. MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); T. E. Fulop and A. J. Raboteau, *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

14. Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 216.

15. W. D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes towards the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 22; D. D. Daniels, "Charles Harrison Mason: The Interracial Impulse of Early Pentecostalism," in *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders*, ed. J. R. Goff and G. Wacker (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002).

16. M. E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996); R. M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); V. Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997); H. Baer, *The Black Spiritual Movement: A Religious Response to Racism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

17. H. W. Bowden, *Dictionary of American Religious Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1993), 148; S. Drake, "The Falasha Way of Life" (review of *Falasha Anthology* by Wolf Leslau), *Phylon* (1940–1956) 13, no. 1 (1st Qtr., 1952): 71–73.

18. Born into slavery in Maryland with the name Jim Pembroke.

19. J. W. C. Pennington, *A Text Book on the Origins and History of the Colored People* (Hartford, CT: L. Skinner, 1841), 96.

20. H. Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States; and the*

Prejudice Exercised towards Them: With a Sermon on the Duty of the Church toward Them (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837), 8–9.

21. See that host all dressed in white / God's agonna trouble the water / The leader looks like the Israelite / God's agonna trouble the water.

22. F. Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Boston: The Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), chap. 7.

23. M. A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

24. J. S. Dorman, "‘I Saw You Disappear with My Own Eyes’: Hidden Transcripts of New York Black Israelite Bricolage," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 11, no. 1 (August 2007): 61–83.

25. L. A. McKethan, "Another Great Moses," *Malach* (March 1966): 1, quoted in H. Waitzkin, "Black Judaism in New York," *Harvard Journal of Negro Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1967): 19.

26. J. S. Dorman, *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

27. Y. Chireau, "Black Culture and Black Zion," in *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18.

28. M. A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 149.

29. There was no Jewish community in Madagascar, although colonial theories suggesting that there were abounded. See Parfitt, *Lost Tribes of Israel*.

30. R. Melnick, "Billy Simons: The Black Jew of Charleston," *American Jewish Archives* 32 (1980): 3–8; A. V. Goodman, *American Overture: Jewish Rights in Colonial Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1947), 16, 206.

31. W. Pencak, "Jews and Anti-Semitism in Early Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no. 3 (July 2002): 366; W. Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles in Early America, 1654–1800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

32. *Afro-American*, February 8, 1936.

33. Roberta S. Gold, "The Black Jews of Harlem: Representation, Identity, and Race, 1920–1939," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (June 2003): 179.

34. H. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: Americans Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995 [1st ed. 1977]), 69.

35. B. Z. Goldberg, “A Negro Bris,” *B’nai B’rith Magazine*, August 11, 1927, 465–66, quoted in J. E. Landing, *Black Judaism: Story of an American Movement* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 199.

36. M. Gerber, *Jazz Jews* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2009).

37. J. Stratton, *Jews, Race and Popular Music* (London: Ashgate, 2009).

38. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*. 69.

39. M. Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 4, 6–7.

40. F. Dikötter, “The Racialization of the Globe: An Interactive Interpretation,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 8 (November 2008): 1478–96.

41. H. Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the U. States*. . . (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837); R. B. Lewis, *Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History* (Boston: A Committee of Colored Gentlemen, 1844); Joseph Elias Hayne, *The Negro in Sacred History: Or, Ham and His Immediate Descendants* (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans & Cogswell Co., 1887); Rufus Perry, *The Cushite, or the Descendants of Ham* (Springfield, MA: Willey, 1893); Joseph E. Hayne, *The Black Man; or, the Natural History of the Hamitic Race* (Spartanburg, SC: W. Du Pre, printer, 1893); D. E. Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy before the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1989). It may be that one reason for the spread in the popularity of Egypt and its history was the importance of Egypt for Freemasons, which attracted many black members.

42. D. M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 357.

43. S.S.N., “Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Africans,” *Anglo-African Magazine* 1, no. 8 (August 1859): 248.

44. Pennington, *Text Book*, 92.

45. *Ibid.*, 96; M. Omi and H. Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 148; Easton, *Treatise*.

46. Pennington, *Text Book*, 96.
47. G. White, "Patriarch McGuire and the Episcopal Church," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 38 (1969): 109–41; B. Rushing, "A Note on the Origin of the African Orthodox Church," *Journal of Negro History* 57 (1972): 37–39.
48. Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 158.
49. *Ibid.*, 248.
50. Fulop and Raboteau, *African-American Religion*, 296.
51. R. Landes, "Negro Jews in Harlem," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 9, no. 2 (1967): 176, quoted in T. Parfitt and E. Trevisan Semi, *Judaising Movements: Studies in the Margins of Judaism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 16.
52. See S. Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Past and Imagined Homes* (London: Verso, 1998), 36. See also M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1991).
53. S. Drake, "The American Negro's Relation to Africa," *Africa Today* 14, no. 6 ("Black Power and Africa," December 1967): 12–15.
54. Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia* (London: James Currey, 1991), 81; E. L. Drago, "American Blacks and Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia," *Negro History Bulletin* 41 (1978): 883–84.
55. W. A. Shack, "Ethiopia and Afro-Americans: Some Historical Notes, 1920–1970," *Phylon* 35, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1974): 144.
56. Landing, *Black Judaism*, 47; Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 176; M. Singer, "The Southern Origin of Black Judaism," in *African Americans in the South: Issues of Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. H. A. Baer and Y. Jones (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 123–38; E. V. Gallagher and W. M. Ashcraft, *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America: African Diaspora Traditions and Other American Innovations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2006), 61.
57. E. Trevisan Semi, "The 'Falashisation' of the Blacks of Harlem: A Judaising Movement in 20th Century USA," in Parfitt and Trevisan Semi, *Judaising Movements*, 99; Shack, "Ethiopia and Afro-Americans," 146–48.
58. J. Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, In the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773*, 5 vols. (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1790).

59. E. Trevisan Semi, *Jacques Faitlovitch and the Jews of Ethiopia* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007); Trevisan Semi, “The ‘Falashisation’ of the Blacks of Harlem,” 103.

60. It is interesting to note that Faitlovitch’s visits to Harlem were in part stimulated by looking for traces of Lost Tribes among New York’s blacks and at the same time by his long-term devotion to the idea of Jewish missionary work throughout the world. Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 265; Trevisan Semi, *Jacques Faitlovitch and the Jews of Ethiopia*; E. Trevisan Semi, “The Quest for the Indigenous African Jew,” forthcoming; Nahum Slouschz, “Les Falacha (tribu d’Abyssinie),” *Revue du monde musulman* 7 (1909): 229, quoted in Trevisan Semi, “Quest for the Indigenous African Jew” (forthcoming).

61. H. Brotz, *The Black Jews of Harlem: Negro Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Negro Leadership* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 49.

62. Trevisan Semi, “The ‘Falashisation’ of the Blacks of Harlem,” 93.

63. J. V. Malcioln, *The African Origin of Modern Judaism: From Hebrews to Jews* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996).

64. Trevisan Semi, “‘Falashisation’ of the Blacks of Harlem,” 98.

65. P. S. Zachernuk, review of I. Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914–1940*, in *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 40, no. 2 (2006): 384.

66. *Chicago Defender*, August 16 and 23, 1913, quoted in Landing, *Black Judaism*, 6.

67. *The Forward*, New York, October 22, 1920, quoted in Landing, *Black Judaism*, 6–7, 493. This group formed part of Elder Warren Roberson’s organization—the Ever Live and Never Die Society, which had been founded in Harlem in 1917.

68. Goldberg, “Negro Bris,” 465–66.

69. Trevisan Semi, “‘Falashisation’ of the Blacks of Harlem,” 98.

70. C. Hyams, “The Strange Life of ‘Father Abraham,’” *Jewish Digest* 12, no. 4 (January 1967); Landing, *Black Judaism*, 487.

71. Trevisan Semi, “‘Falashisation’ of the Blacks of Harlem,” 98.

72. M. Singer, “Symbolic Identity Formation in an African American Religious Sect: The Black Hebrew Israelites,” in *Black Zion: African Ameri-*

can Religious Encounters with Judaism, ed. Y. P. Chireau and N. Deutsch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57.

73. See Landing, *Black Judaism*, 340; A. H. Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), 31–36; C. Jenkins, *The Black Hebrews of the Seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of the Tribe of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, after 430 Years in America* (Detroit, 1969); M. Könighofer, *The New Ship of Zion: Dynamic Diaspora Dimensions of the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2008); There is some uncertainty about the founding date of the movement.

74. J. Dorman, *Chosen People*; E. Wynia, *The Church of God and Saints of Christ: The Rise of Black Jews* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 31–33; B. C. Walker, *The Life and Works of William S. Crowdy* (Philadelphia: E. J. P. Walker Press, 1955); Gallagher and Ashcraft, *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*, passim.

75. Dorman, *Chosen People*.

76. H. A. Baer and M. Singer, *African American Religion: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 117.

77. Könighofer, *New Ship of Zion*, 110; Trevisan Semi, “The ‘Falashisation’ of the Blacks of Harlem.”

78. Baer and Singer, *African American Religion*, 117; Brotz, *Black Jews of Harlem*, 9.

79. Trevisan Semi, “The ‘Falashisation’ of the Blacks of Harlem,” 96–106; Y. Chireau, “Black Culture and Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism, 1790–1930, an Overview,” in Chireau and Deutsch, *Black Zion*, 26; K. J. King, “Some Notes on Arnold J. Ford and New World Black Attitudes to Ethiopia,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 10 (1972): 81–87; W. R. Scott, “Rabbi Arnold Ford’s Back-to-Ethiopia Movement: A Study of Black Emigration, 1930–1935,” *Pan-African Journal* 8 (Summer 1975): 191–202 ; W. R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba’s Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935–1941* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 181–84; Landes, “Negro Jews in Harlem,” 175–89; A. Ehrman, “Black Judaism in New York,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 8 (1971): 103–14; Shack, “Ethiopia and Afro-Americans,” 142–45; M. Ford,

Short History of Princess Zenebe-Worg School (Addis Abbaba, 1962); H. L. Gates Jr. and E. Brooks Higginbotham, eds., *African American Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 301–302; Dorman, *Chosen People*.

80. Trevisan Semi, “The ‘Falashisation’ of the Blacks of Harlem,” 96–106; Landes, “Negro Jews in Harlem,” 180–81; Dorman, *Chosen People*.

81. J. H. Boykin, *Black Jews: A Study in Minority Experience* (Miami: J. H. Boykin, 1996), 32.

82. Trevisan Semi, “The ‘Falashisation’ of the Blacks of Harlem,” 97; Brotz, *Black Jews of Harlem; Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973): 268–69; H. Waitzkin, “Black Judaism in New York,” *Harvard Journal of Negro Affairs* 1 (1967): 12–44; J. F. Heijbroek, “Matthew, Wentworth Arthur,” in *American National Biography*, ed. A. Garraty and M. C. Carnes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 275–76.

83. Trevisan Semi, *Jacques Faitlovitch and the Jews of Ethiopia*, 135; Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 265; Landing, *Black Judaism*, 177; Trevisan-Semi, “The ‘Falashization of the Blacks of Harlem,’”

84. M. Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 with an Account of a Subsequent Mission to That Country in 1805* (London: John Murray, 1817), 309.

85. G. Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 349.

86. *Time*, book review, “Lobagola, an African Savage’s Own Story—Bata Kindai Amgoza Ibn Lo-Bagola,” March 24, 1930; D. Killingray and W. Henderson, “Bata Kindai Amgoza Ibn LoBagola and the Making of an African Savage’s Own Story,” in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. B. Lindfors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 233, 240; *LoBagola, An Africans Savage’s Own Story* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930). LoBagola was regularly incarcerated in prisons on both sides of the Atlantic for theft or homosexual acts.

87. “*An African Savage’s Own Story* by Lobagola,” review by A. E. R., *Journal of the Royal African Society* 29, no. 117 (October 1930): 557.

88. *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, vol. 1, ed. M. Avrum Ehrlich (ABC-CLIO, 2008), 454; see also Rivka Gonen, *The Quest for the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel: To the Ends of the Earth* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2002); Landing, *Black Judaism*,

145: “There is little in his story that would offer much to the American leaders of Black Jewish groups other than his identity as a ‘Black Jew’ and his account of Jewish survivals among his people. Now, a genuine Black Jew from Africa resided in New York”; Rudolph Windsor, in *From Babylon to Timbuktu: A History of the Ancient Black Races including the Black Hebrews* (New York: Exposition Press, 1969), 131, describes the Bene-Ephraim, who lived among the Yoruba in the Ondo District of Yorubaland. “There are Black Jews in Southern Nigeria who are called the ‘EMO YO QUAIM’ or ‘Strange People’ by the native Africans but these Black Jews call themselves by the Hebrew name ‘B’nai Ephraim’ or ‘Sons of Ephraim.’ These Jews claim that their ancestors immigrated from Morocco, a fact which Godbey says is supported by their language, a mixture of Maghrebi Arabic and local Negro speech. . . . Nevertheless, most of their language is similar to the Black Yorubas around them.” This is in turn taken up by a contemporary Igbo group called the Moorish Israelite Temple of Israelites, <http://moorishamerica.webs.com/thebiafrans.htm> (accessed January 16, 2012).

89. A letter from Rabbi Capers C. Funnye to Kulanu 10:3 Autumn 2003 7–8.

90. <http://magazine.biafranigeriaworld.com/revnnorom/2003oct18.html> (accessed January 24, 2012).

7. Divine Geography and Israelite Identities

1. P. D. Morgan, “Encounters between British and ‘Indigenous’ Peoples, c. 1500–c. 1800,” in M. J. Daunton and R. Halpern, eds., *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 68.

2. T. Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002), *passim*.

3. D. Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 414.

4. L. Togarasei, “The Shona Bible and the Politics of Bible Translation,” *Studies in World Christianity* 15, no. 1 (2009): 51–64.

5. C. M. Doke, “Scripture Translation into Bantu Languages,” *African Studies* 17, no. 2 (1958): 82.

6. J. L. Wilson, *Western Africa: Its History, Condition, and Prospects* (London: Sampson Low, 1856), 422.

7. E. A. Hermanson, "A Brief Overview of Bible Translation in South Africa," in *Contemporary Translation Studies and Bible Translation: A South African Perspective*, ed. J. A. Naudé and C. H. J. van der Merwe, 6–18, *Acta Theologica*, Supplementum 2 (Bloemfontein, University of the Free State, 2002); H. L. Bosman, "The Study of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament in Africa," in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament*, vol. 3, ed. M. Saebo (Tübingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2010).

8. R. B. Beck, "Bibles and Beads: Missionaries as Traders in Southern Africa in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 30 (1989): 213, 225.

9. C. G. A. Oldendorp, *History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren on the Caribbean Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John* (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma Publishers, 1987), trans. from *Geschichte der Mission der Evangelischen Brüder auf den Caraibischen Inseln S. Thomas, S. Croix and S. Jan* (Barby: Johann Jakob Bossart, 1777); D. van den Bersselaar, "Missionary Knowledge and the State in Colonial Nigeria: On How G. T. Basden Became an Expert," *History in Africa* 33 (2006): 433–50.

10. J. W. C. Pennington, *A Text Book on the Origins and History of the Colored People* (Hartford, CT: L. Skinner, 1841), 96.

11. *Ibid.*

12. J. Africanus Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples, British and Native: And a Vindication of the African Race* (London: Johnson, 1868; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 35, 186–88; P. Edwards and D. Dabydeen, eds., *Black Writers in Britain, 1760–1890: An Anthology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 185; C. Fyfe, *Africanus Horton, 1835–1883: West African Scientist and Patriot*, *Modern Revivals in African Studies* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Gregg Revivals, 1993).

13. See D. Lis, "'Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch Out Her Hands': Ethiopian Jewry and Igbo Identity," *Journal of Jewish Culture and History* 11, no. 3 (2009): 21–38. See Oldendorp, *Geschichte der Mission der Evangelischen Brüder auf den Caraibischen Inseln S. Thomas, S. Croix and S. Jan*; A. Douglas, *Ethnicity, Power and Violence in a Nigerian City, 1966 to 1986* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002). An Igbo author had compiled a list of comparisons between Igbo customs and Judaism. See R. Ilona, *The Igbo and*

Israel: An Intercultural Study of the Oldest and Biggest Jewish Diaspora, (forthcoming).

14. V. Manfredi, "Philological perspectives on the Southeastern Nigerian diaspora" *Contours: A journal of the African diaspora* 2004; 2.2, 239–287.

A. Afigbo, "Through a glass darkly; eighteenth-century Igbo society through Equiano's Narrative" *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo history & culture*, (Ibadan: University Press Ltd., 1981) 82.

15. "Maryland Rabbi Visits Pittsburgh, Collects Books for Infant Jewish Community," *Jewish Chronicle*, http://thejewishchronicle.net/view/full_story/6838715/article-Maryland-rabbi-visits-Pittsburgh—collects-books-for-infant-Jewish-community (accessed November 10, 2011).

16. The Igbo university teacher N.T. Ogbukagu has suggested that the original inhabitants of Igboland were the Essenes who had been driven out of Israel: "The Essenes," he wrote, "were the black Jews who were the most despised, persecuted, rejected, humiliated and hated by other Jews of the Caucasian denomination." I am greatly indebted to Johannes Harnischfeger, who generously shared with me the manuscript of his forthcoming work *Igbo Nationalism and Biafra*.

17. Harnischfeger's "Igbo Nationalism and Jewish Identities" in E. Bruder, T. Parfitt, eds., *African Zion*, 65–86.

18. Nkem Hyginus M. V. Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*, vol. 15 of *Ecumenical Studies* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2001), 19.

19. Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, *Eastern Voice*, June 10–16, 1996, 15.

20. O. Alaezi, *Ibos: Hebrew Exiles from Israel: Amazing Facts and Revelations* (Aba, Nigeria: Onzy Publications, 1999), 32.

21. The Voice of Igbo Israel, <http://igboisrael.blogspot.com/2009/01/recovery-of-igbo-israel.html>; <http://www.kulanu.org/newsletters/2003-spring.pdf> (accessed May 5, 2011).

22. M. Singer, "Symbolic Identity Formation in an African American Religious Sect: The Black Hebrew Israelites," in *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism*, ed. Y. Chireau and N. Deutsch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 66–67.

23. F. Markowitz, S. Helman, and D. Shir-Vertesh, "Soul Citizenship: The Black Hebrews and the State of Israel," *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 2 (June 2003): 302–12.

24. E. Bruder, "The Proto History of Igbo Jewish Identity, from the Colonial Period to the Biafra War, 1890–1970," in E. Bruder, T. Parfitt, eds., *African Zion*, 31–64.

25. R. Ilona, "Igbo Are Moving towards Judaism," <http://www.kulanu.org/newsletters/2005-spring.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2011).

26. "Israelites in West Africa," *Gleanings in Hebrew: Regaining a Lost Heritage*, <http://gleaningsinhebrew.blogspot.com/2010/07/israelites-in-west-africa.html> (accessed January 26, 2012); "Images of the True Israelites," <http://sarabe3.tripod.com/israeliteimages.html> (accessed January 26, 2012): "The Ashanti people of West Africa are definitely Hebrew Africans as are the Fulani, and elements of the Yoruba people. We as American Negroes are descendents (sic) of West African Tribes—the people of Ashan (Ashanti Tribe) (Ashan was a city in ancient Israel) Ibo, Yoruba, Fulani, Lemba (South Africa)—these tribes with the exception of the Lemba were forced converted to Islam before the Arabs sold us to the Europeans. Before Islam these West African Tribes were Hebrew and followed the Torah. They were called the Jews of Bilad el Sudan. The Empire of Ghana were Jews that originated in Yemen. The Ashanti were Jews that migrated from Ashan. Not to mention Jewish communities in Mali and Timbuktu. When the Jews were expelled from Spain they migrated to these West African Communities. Israelite blood in Africa is self evident and before Islam it remained. So for you claiming negroes are stealing history, I say some are putting Christianity and Islam down and picking up the way of life of our forefathers of West Africa." <http://www.topix.com/forum/afam/TKP93UB1QJKS906TV/p22> (accessed January 26, 2012).

27. T. McCaskie, "Asante Origins, Egypt, and the Near East: An Idea and Its History," in *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa*, ed. D. R. Peterson and G. Macola, New African Histories Series (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 107.

28. T. McCaskie, "Asante Origins," 125–48.

29. P. S. Zachernuk, "Of Origins and Colonial Order: Southern Nigerian Historians and the 'Hamitic Hypothesis' c. 1870–1970," *Journal of African History* 35, no. 3 (1994): 428.

30. Major D. Denham and Capt. H. Clapperton, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the Years 1822, 1823 and 1824* (London: John Murray, 1826); S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from*

the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate (London, 1921; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5.

31. S. Crowther, *A Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (London: Seeley, 1852), i–ii.

32. The manuscript was dispatched to a British missionary society in 1899, but was misplaced. The author died in 1901, and it was not until 1921 that the work, edited by Samuel's brother, saw the light of day.

33. S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Nigeria: CSS Bookshop, 1997), 3–5; Zachernuk, "Of Origins and Colonial Order."

34. J. Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism* (London, 1899).

35. Zachernuk, "Of Origins and Colonial Order."

36. E. O. Ughulu, *The Short History of (Esan) Ishan* (Lagos: Ribway Printers, 1950); S. Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* (London: Verso, 1998), 120.

37. Howe, *Afrocentrism*, 120; Zachernuk, "Of Origins and Colonial Order," 451.

38. R. I. J. Hackett, *Religion in Calabar: The Religious Life and History of a Nigerian Town* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1989), 21.

39. M. M. Umoh-Faithmann, *Ibibio Jews of Nigeria* (Obo Etok, Nigeria: Menorah Publishing, 1999).

40. G. O. West and M. W. Dube Shomanah, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (Leyden: Brill, 2000), 459; H. M. Feinberg, review of *The Akan Doctrine of God*, by J. B. Danquah, *Fanti Customary Laws* by John Mensah Sarbah; *Fanti National Constitution* by John Mensah Sarbah, *African Historical Studies* 2, no. 1 (1969): 149–51.

41. D. Henderson Kwatei Quartey, *The Ga of Ghana: History and Culture of a West African People* (London: by the author, 2002); Joseph Nii Abekar Mensah, *Ga-Dangmes of Ghana: Hebrew Israelites Origins and Traditional Customs*, <http://gadangme.weebly.com/ga-dangme-origins.html> (accessed January 31, 2012).

42. P. S. Zachernuk, *Intellectual Life in a Colonial Context: The Nigerian Intelligentsia, 1860–1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 451.

43. E. Bruder, *The Black Jews of Africa: History, Religion, Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 148–53; "The House of Israel Community of Ghana," *The Jews of Africa*, <http://www.mindspring.com/~jaypsand/ghana2.htm> (accessed May 11, 2011).

8. The Internalization of the Israelite Myth

1. M. Twaddle, *Kakungulu and the Creation of Uganda: 1868–1928*, Eastern African Studies (London: James Currey, 1993), 281.

2. B. Jones, *Beyond the State in Rural Uganda*, vol. 39 of International African Library (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 118; J. E. Landing, *Black Judaism: Story of an American Movement* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002).

3. A. Oded, *Judaism in Africa: The Abayudaya of Uganda* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Africa Friendship Association, 2003), 103.

4. Twaddle, *Kakungulu and the Creation of Uganda*; A. Oded, “The Bayudaya of Uganda: A Portrait of an African Jewish Community,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 6 (1974): 173, 167–86; Oded, *Judaism in Africa*; K. Primack, *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing, 1998), 168–244; I. M. Berg, “Among the Abayudaya,” *Commentary* 103, no. 1 (1997): 52–54; R. Sobol and J. Summit, *Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2002). It should be added that such group conversions from Christianity to Judaism are far from rare. As far as Africa is concerned, the diligent work of scholars over the last twenty years has revealed that this is indeed the genesis of the Ethiopian Jews. Similarly, in the last twenty years the central Cameroon community of Sa’a, from evangelical Christian beginnings, has developed largely through the good offices of the Internet into an Orthodox Jewish community seeking conversion. Outside Africa, in Andhra Pradesh over the same period, a large community of Hindu Dalits has abandoned its Baptist roots and embraced Judaism. See Y. Egorova and S. Perwez, “Children of Ephraim: Being Jewish in Andhra Pradesh,” *Anthropology Today* 26 (2010): 14–18.

5. His Hlubi family originally came from Natal.

6. Landing, *Black Judaism*, 161.

7. In South Africa the first “Ethiopian” churches seceded from established churches as early as 1892.

8. “The Bulhoek Tragedy: The Full Story of the Israelite Settlement at Ntabelanga” *Daily Dispatch*, 1921.

9. R. Edgar, *Because They Chose the Plan of God: The Story of the Bulhoek Massacre* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988), 38; J. Cochrane, *Servants of*

Power: The Role of the English Speaking Churches, 1903–1930 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); A. Lea, *The Native Separatist Church Movement in South Africa* (Cape Town: Juta, 1925); *The Times* (London), May 30, 1921.

10. E. V. Gallagher and W. M. Ashcraft, *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America: African Diaspora Traditions and Other American Innovations*, vol. 5 of *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 78.

11. *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighboring Peoples*, vol. 1, ed. C. de B. Webb and J. B. Wright, Killie Campbell Africana Library Manuscript Series No. 1 (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1976).

12. See D. Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, *Studies in Religion and Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 168. See also M. le Roux, *In Search of the Understanding of the Old Testament*, (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1999) 22–25.

13. See the *Kulanu* website: <http://www.kulanu.org/>.

14. *Jerusalem Post*, November 23, 1998.

15. A report from Agence France-Presse (September 18, 1998) noted that the famous gold mines of Solomon were to be found in the region of Kivu.

16. See, for example, www.africa2000.com/indx/rwanda2c.htm; <http://www.geocities.com/Burundibwacu/Doc0052.html>; <http://www.grandslacs.net/bbsgen/messages/98.html>.

17. Professor Yochanan Bwejeri, “The Tutsi Jews and the Pan-Kush Hebrew Diaspora,” <http://www.kulanu.org/tutsi/tutsijews.php> (accessed October 7 2011).

18. P. Bones, “Rwanda—the Children’s Return,” in <http://www.walkleyindex.com> (accessed February 5, 2011); see G. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

19. T. Muse, *Stigma, “Gojjam”: The Abyssinian Pariah* (Geneva: Guignon Books, 1997), 27–29.

20. F. Reyntjens, *Talking or Fighting? Political Evolution in Rwanda and Burundi, 1998–1999* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 1999).

21. “Israel in Africa,” <http://mg.co.za/printformat/single/2010-02-09-israel-in-africa/> (accessed February 2, 2011).

22. *Tutsi People of Israel: Jews of Kush in Africa (Part 1)*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKpZi2I-27U> (accessed October 17, 2011).

23. D. B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 130; “Kenyan Political Exile Finds Jewish Home, Soul in S.F.,” *Jweekly.com*, <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/5646/kenyan-political-exile-finds-jewish-home-soul-in-s-f/> (accessed November 10, 2011); “Kenyan Branch,” *Tablet*, <http://www.tabletmag.com/news-and-politics/63212/kenyan-branch/> (accessed November 10, 2011).

24. The website about the Masai is titled “Home of the 13th Tribe of Israel—Birth Place of African Restoration,” http://kingdompathway.com/Masai_Land-Preview.pdf (accessed September 28, 2011).

9. History, Genetics, and Indigenous Black African Jews

1. See, for example, R. Jackson, *Black People in the Bible* (New York: Vantage Press, 2002).

2. For example, <http://moorishamerica.webs.com/thebiafrans.htm> (accessed October 10, 2011); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQDvDNRxLEk> (accessed December 9, 2011); <http://gleaningsinhebrew.blogspot.com/2010/07/israelites-in-west-africa.html> (accessed January 26, 2012); <http://www.topix.com/forum/afam/TKP93UB1QJKS906TV/p22> (accessed January 26, 2012).

3. J. Ogilby, *Africa: Being an Accurate Description of the Regions of Aegypt, Barbary, Lybia, and Billedulgerid* (London: T. Johnson, 1670), 34.

4. F. Ratzel, *The History of Mankind* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1898), 3:134; M. D. W. Jeffreys, “An Extinct Jewish Colony,” *Jewish Affairs*, November 1954.

5. R. Hull, *Jews and Judaism in African History* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009), 109; P. Mark and J. da Silva Horta, *The Forgotten Diaspora: Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); P. Mark and J. da Silva Horta, “Two Early Seventeenth-Century Sephardic Communities on Senegal’s Petite Côte,” *History in Africa* 31 (2004).

6. N. de Moraes, *A la découverte de la Petite Côte au XVIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Dakar: Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar-IFAN edition, 1993), 1:116,

cited in P. Mark, "The Evolution of 'Portuguese' Identity: Luso-Africans on the Upper Guinea Coast from the Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 40, no. 2 (1999): 177.

7. Mark and da Silva, *Forgotten Diaspora*, passim.

8. M. Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 with an Account of a Subsequent Mission to That Country in 1805* (London: John Murray, 1817), 309.

9. J. L. Wilson, *Western Africa: Its History, Condition, and Prospects* (London: Sampson Low, 1856), 221.

10. W. W. Reade, *Savage Africa: Being the Narrative of a Tour in Equatorial, Southwestern, and Northwestern Africa; with Notes on the Habits of the Gorilla; on the Existence of Unicorns and Tailed Men; on the Slave Trade; on the Origin, Character, and Capabilities of the Negro, and on the Future Civilization of Western Africa* (London: Harper, 1864), 227 (perhaps what he intended by this strange remark was that the combination of Jewish and African talents would provide formidable competition to the British). See also M. Mitchel, *Jews of Cape Verde: A Brief History* (Brooklyn, NY: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1997); I. Diadie, *Les Juifs à Tombouctou: Recueil de sources écrites relatives au commerce juif à Tombouctou au XIXe siècle* (Bamako: Editions Donniya, 1999).

11. A. Farissol, *Orhot Olam*, chap. 25 quoted in J. Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 124; D. Kessler, *The Falashas: A Short History of the Ethiopian Jews* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 84; A. H. M. Jones and E. Monroe, *History of Abyssinia* (London: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 88; B. Tellez, *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (London: J. Knapton, 1710), 39.

12. Tellez, *Travels of the Jesuits*, 66, 39. On the Ethiopian Jews see *Ethiopian Jewry: An Annotated Bibliography*, ed. S. Kaplan and S. Ben-Dor (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1988); *Ethiopian Jewry: An Annotated Bibliography, 1988–1997*, ed. H. Salamon and S. Kaplan (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1998); J. Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); S. Kaplan, "The Beta Israel (Falasha) Encounter with Protestant Missionaries: 1860–1905," *Jewish Social Studies* 49, no. 1 (Winter 1987); S. Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia* (New York: NYU Press, 1992); D. Kessler, *The Falashas* (London: Routledge, 1996); T. Parfitt and E.

Trevisan Semi, *Judaizing Movements: Studies in the Margins of Judaism* (London: Routledge, 2002); T. Parfitt and E. Trevisan Semi, eds., *The Beta Israel in Ethiopia and Israel: Studies on the Ethiopian Jews* (London: Curzon, 2000).

13. This was in part because two of the society's missionaries, Stern and Rosenthal, had been imprisoned by the Emperor Tewedros II, and a British Expeditionary Force of twelve thousand men under Sir Robert Napier was obliged to storm the imperial fortress at Amba Magdala in order to free them. This intervention saved the missionaries, drove the emperor to suicide, and plunged the country into civil war. Kaplan, *Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, 23.

14. E. Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 139.

15. Some of the theories produced elsewhere also surfaced here, such as those preserved in the book of the French Capuchin missionary Martial de Salviac, who concluded that the Gallas had an extraneous origin. M. de Salviac, *Un peuple antique au pays de Ménélik. Les Galla (dits d'origine gauloise). Grande nation africaine* (Paris: H. Oudin, 1902); E. Ficquet, "La fabrique des origines Oromo," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 18 (2002): 55–71.

16. H. A. Stern, *Wanderings among the Falashas in Abyssinia*, 2nd ed., with introduction by R. L. Hess (London: Frank Cass, 1968), xxiv; Kaplan, "Beta Israel (Falasha) Encounter with Protestant Missionaries," 29.

17. J. Abbink, "The Irrevocable Past: History and Image of the Beta Esra'el," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 34, no. 136 (1994): 693–700.

18. S. Gobat, *Journal of a Three Years Residence in Abyssinia* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1850), 33, 467.

19. D. Summerfield, *From Falashas to Ethiopian Jews: The External Influences for Change, c. 1860–1960* (London: Routledge, 2003), 7–17.

20. *Ibid.*

21. E. Trevisan Semi, *Jacques Faitlovitch and the Jews of Ethiopia* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007).

22. Summerfield, *From Falashas to Ethiopian Jews*, 44.

23. H. Salamon, "Blackness in Transition: Decoding Racial Constructs through Stories of Ethiopian Jews," *Journal of Folklore Research* 40, no. 1 (January–April 2003): 7; S. Kaplan, "The Invention of Ethiopian Jews: Three Models," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 132, nos. 33–34 (1993): 649.

24. Kaplan, "Invention of Ethiopian Jews," 649.

25. It is worthwhile noting that in only one of the medieval Jewish treatments of the Beta Israel was the question of their "blackness" mentioned at all. Their color or "race" was not considered to be important; M. Corinaldi, *Jewish Identity: The Case of Ethiopian Jewry* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 95–107.

26. S. Kaplan, "Can the Ethiopian Change His Skin? The Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) and Racial Discourse," *African Affairs* 98, no. 393 (October 1999): 546.

27. Letter from Nathan Shapiro, president of the AAEJ, November 27, 1985, cited in Kaplan, "Can the Ethiopian Change His Skin?" 547.

28. Kaplan, "Can the Ethiopian Change His Skin?" 535–50. In fact the genetic structure of the Beta Israel confirms quite conclusively that they are of African origin. D. Behar, B. Yunusbayev, M. Metspalu, E. Metspalu, S. Rosset, J. Parik, S. Rootsi, G. Chaubey, T. Parfitt, et al., "The Genome-wide Structure of the Jewish People," *Nature* 466 (July 8, 2010): 238–42; M. F. Hammer, A. J. Redd, E. T. Wood, M. R. Bonner, H. Jarjanazi, et al., "Jewish and Middle Eastern Non-Jewish Populations Share a Common Pool of Y-Chromosome Biallelic Haplotypes," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 97, no. 12 (June 6, 2000): 6769–74. Finally, it is perhaps worth making the point that by and large "negative" genetic results do not seem to have much impact. Results about the Beta Israel have been reported in the press but have not created any response. Upon the Ethiopian Jews themselves the reports made no discernible impact (private communications from Dr. Shalva Weil, Hebrew University, November 28, 2011).

29. S. Kaplan, "If There Are No Races How Can the Jews Be a Race?" *Modern Jewish Studies* 2, no. 1: 79–96.

30. Kaplan, "Invention of Ethiopian Jews," 654.

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32. On the Lemba see H. von Sicard, *Ngoma Lungundu: Eine Afrikanische Bundeslade*, *Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktrycker, 1952); A. A. Jaques, "Notes on the Lemba Tribe of the Northern Transvaal," *Anthropos* 26 (1931): 247; L. C. Thompson, "The Ba-Lemba of Southern Rhodesia," *NADA* 19 (1942): 77; N. J. Van Warmelo,

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47. C.E. Finlason, *A Nobody in Mashonaland* (facsimile reproduction of the 1893 edition) (Rhodesia Reprint Library: Louis Bolze, 1970) 129–30.

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51. M. Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 99, 119. The Johnson Act of 1924, Shain explains, introduced a quota system based on racial origins, which discouraged the immigration of alien or non-Nordic peoples.

52. Personal communication from Milton Shain, January 29, 2012.

53. Van Warmelo, *Copper Miners*, 63.

54. Parfitt and Egorova, *Genetics, Mass Media and Identity*; G. Pálsson, *Anthropology and the New Genetics*, vol. 4 of *New Departures in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 201.

55. One South African Lemba informant told me in 1987 that he had once been to Ethiopia (he had accompanied his white employer on some kind of business trip, or at least so he told me), had come across the Beta Israel, and felt quite at home in terms of their religious observance. Even though the story may not be true (and it appears unlikely), it shows that the Israeli operation to save the Beta Israel had had an impact upon the Lemba, who perceived the Ethiopian community as their kith and kin, and indeed in the 1980s this point was frequently made to me.

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58. A. Spurdle and T. Jenkins, "The Origin of the Lemba 'Black Jews' of Southern Africa; Evidence from p12F2 and Other Y-Chromosome Markers," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 59 (1996): 1126–33.

59. K. Skorecki, S. Selig, S. Blazer, R. Bradman, N. Bradman, P. J. Waburton, M. Ismajlowicz, and M. F. Hammer, "Y Chromosomes of Jewish Priests," *Nature* 385 (1997): 32.

60. M. G. Thomas, K. Skorecki, H. Ben-Ami, T. Parfitt, N. Bradman, and D. B. Goldstein, "Origins of Old Testament Priests," *Nature* 394 (1998).

61. When, in 2010, in Harare, I met Hon Perez Hamandishe—an opposition MP in the Zimbabwe parliament and a Lemba community leader—he brought with him a copy of *Journey to the Vanished City*. I have never seen such a well-thumbed book. The pages had achieved a kind of brown, greasy patina. He told me that he had read it twenty-two times. Indeed, he knew it by heart.

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64. Steve Olson's book includes a chapter titled "God's People," which devotes a couple of pages to the Lemba. "At this point," he affirms, "their Jewish ancestry on the male side seems assured." S. Olson, *Mapping Human History: Genes, Race, and Our Common Origins* (New York: Mariner Books, 2003), 114.

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Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. the director of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University, for having invited me to give the Huggins Lectures at Harvard University in 2011 upon which this book is based and also for his invitation to spend the Spring Term 2012 at the DuBois Institute, where the revisions of the final draft have been done. I am also thankful to the Spalding Trust, which generously supported some of the research, and to Professor Milton Shain of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, whose invitation to Cape Town provided the perfect place for the writing of the final draft. My editor Joyce Seltzer and her assistant Brian Distelberg of Harvard University Press were unfailingly helpful, erudite, and encouraging. I am also grateful to my son Sebastian for his involvement and forbearance, to my daughter Natasha, son-in-law Mark, my sister Gwenfil and brother-in-law Mike, and my parents, Vernon and Margaret, for their generous hospitality during the writing period when I was temporarily homeless, and to my partner Olivia who lived the writing process blow by blow with patience and love.

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