LEMBA IDENTITY AND THE SHIFTING CATEGORIES OF RACE AND RELIGION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Abstract

The Lemba are a self-identified ethnic group in Southern Africa. Their claim to Jewish ancestry and identity has led to several genetic studies which have brought them international attention. Drawing on the concept of "inventive tradition," this thesis explores how the Lemba's connection to Judaism has been depicted by others and by Lemba themselves. Although it is widely contested, for many Lemba people, Jewishness is a significant motif in their origin stories. It also acts as a marker of ethnic identity, especially in the context of their struggle for ethnic recognition during and after apartheid. Moreover, their relationship to Judaism has led to diverse relationships between Lemba people and different Jewish communities throughout Africa and the Western world. It is also important to clarify the Lemba's Jewish identity as an identity with a particular history, composed of vastly different perspectives about what it means to be recognized as a Lemba and as a Jew. Through a close reading of the scholarship on the Lemba, and of the Lemba themselves, I will trace how the Lemba have constructed a Jewish identity that challenges monolithic and essentialized notions of religion, race, and ethnicity.

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Introduction

The Lemba are a self-defined ethnic group in Southern Africa.[1] While the majority of the Lemba live in the Limpopo District in South Africa, there are also Lemba communities in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Botswana and Malawi. The Lemba's connection to ancient Israel, and therefore to Judaism as a religion, is often considered to be central to their historical identity as an ethnic group in Southern Africa. This thesis seeks to further clarify and understand the Lemba's connection to Judaism. This thesis is guided by two main research questions: What roles do Lemba actors play in the shifting narratives of race, identity, and religion in Southern Africa? How do the Lemba themselves imagine and construct their religious identities, especially in the contexts of globalization and modernization? I argue that Lemba constructions of religion and culture emerge from contextual spaces, wherein Lemba traditions and customs are creatively reinterpreted by Lemba actors through the discovery and use of certain raw materials. These materials act as powerful resources for their claims to identity and their efforts towards political recognition and nation building. Moreover, I claim that Judaism, as a tradition of reference, and as a major source of these raw materials, represents part of an inventive tradition among the Lemba, as they respond to different political and social circumstances, in order to maintain and preserve their culture, heritage, and collective identity, in a rapidly changing world.[2]

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[1] Noah Tamarkin, "Religion as Race, Recognition as Democracy: Lemba 'Black Jews' in South Africa," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 637, no. 1 (2011): 149.

[2] Eric Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition,* Canto edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer, *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Stefania Palmisano and Nicola. Pannofino, *Invention of Tradition and Syncretism in Contemporary Religions Sacred Creativity,* 1st ed. 2017. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017.

A Note on Methodology: Invention of Tradition as a Theoretical Framework

In order to think about the Lemba and their connection to Judaism as an *inventive tradition*, I draw on critical theory in religious studies that demonstrates how traditions might be considered inventive, as opposed to invented. The difference between these two terms is crucial for this thesis, since the latter implies a past based and factitious activity, whereas the former supposes a past, present and future based operation and adequately accounts for, and respectfully engages with religious traditions on their own terms. This distinction emerges in literature that both critiques and builds on previous theoretical work in this area.[3] This literature is based on Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's seminal book *The Invention of Tradition*, which sets out a framework through which to negotiate and consider what might be categorized as an invented tradition. In what follows, I will outline the parameters of this critique and discuss how scholars have problematized the category of invented tradition in order to distinguish the alternative concept inventive tradition, as proposed by Stefania Palmisano and Nicola Pannofino in their book *Invention of Tradition and Syncretism in Contemporary Religions Sacred Creativity*. I suggest that the category of inventive tradition represents an appropriately nuanced way of approaching the issues discussed throughout this thesis.

In the introduction to Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, the authors state that "'traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented."[4] For Hobsbawm and Ranger, this forms the premise of their book, which

[3] Palmisano and Pannofino, *Invention of Tradition and Syncretism in Contemporary Religions Sacred Creativity,* 2017; Stefania Palmisano and Nicola Pannofino, "Inventive Traditions: Sacred Creativity in the Spirituality of The Secret," *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 7 (1) 2016: 3–21; Byron Plant. 2008. Secret, Powerful and the Stuff of Legends: Revisiting Theories of Invented Tradition. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 28 (1): 175–194; Douglas Davies. 2007. The Invention of Sacred Tradition: Mormonism. In *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, eds. James Lewis, and Olav Hammer, 56–74. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[4] Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1.

points to the way in which invented traditions emerge as phenomena of the modern world. They are spuriously projected onto history as though they are ancient or timeless, but in reality, are products of recent historical circumstances. As the authors note, the idea of invented tradition is

> used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both 'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted, and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity.[5]

The authors list two examples that demonstrate their criteria: "the Royal Christmas Broadcast in England, is an example of the first; the appearances and development of the practices associated with Cup Final in British Association Football of the second."[6] For Hobsbawm and Ranger, their emphasis on the invention of tradition is conveyed through several key themes: creativity, innovation, and adaptation. As Hobsbawm and Ranger state, "it is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant, that makes the 'invention of tradition' so interesting for historians of the past two centuries."[7] The invention of tradition is a lens through which to understand the ways in which people adapt and respond to modernity, as it manifests as a source of constant social, cultural, political, and technological change in society. From this perspective, their analysis is necessarily dependent on a historicization of tradition, in which tradition, something much more recent, is contrasted with its supposed opposite, custom, as an object of practice that occurs in so-called traditional societies. For Hobsbawm and Ranger, while customs are recognized as part of an authentic past, invented traditions are understood as factitious. From their perspective, "they are responses to novel situations which take the form of

[5] Ibid., 1.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 2.

reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition."[8] As an illustration of the difference between custom and tradition, Hobsbawm and Ranger describe the difference in the court of law between a judge's apparel (the wig and robe, for example) versus the actual custom of the law.[9]

As observed by Palmisano and Pannofino, although the concept of invented tradition is framed by Hobsbawm and Ranger as factitious, the invention of tradition itself is an example of "the important role played by the creative function in the transmission process."[10] According to Palmisano and Pannofino, two important critiques emerge in response to Ranger and Hobsbawm's idea of invented tradition. One issue with their theory of invented tradition lies in the difficulty of historically documenting the tradition in question. As Plant writes,

> the main problem facing this approach is that such observation is impossible. Gaps and inadequacies in sources inevitably hinder a scholar's ability to trace a traditions' historical pedigree. Moreover, at some point societies disappear from source records, and with that, so does the scholar's ability to prove the immutability of a traditional practice over time.[11]

The second issue discussed by Palmisano and Pannofino is raised by Douglas J. Davies in an essay entitled, "The invention of sacred tradition: Mormonism," where Davies discusses the application of the category of invented tradition to the study of religious groups, especially as the category of invented tradition tends to devalue faith perspectives and privileges non-faith based academic analysis. As Davies writes, "for dedicated Mormons, the church is no 'invented tradition' but a divine 'Restoration.' … Indeed, the very notion of 'invented tradition' may even be offensive to faith, suggesting an attack on the sincere authenticity of the prophet, his

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 3.
[10] Palmisano and Pannofino, *Invention of Tradition and Syncretism in Contemporary Religions Sacred Creativity,* 14.
[11] Plant, 179.

successors, and today's believers." Moreover, since Hobsbawm and Ranger were primarily concerned with social, cultural, and political manifestations of invented traditions, Davies' critique presents a significant perspective, since an analysis of religion requires a more sensitive and flexible approach to the invention of tradition, especially in order to reconcile the opposition between the faith-based (religious) and non-faith-based (secular) perspectives at play. This is an important point in Palmisano and Pannofino's critique of Hobsbawm and Ranger since the term "inventive" implies a more respectful approach to the study of belief and religious identification.

Since both of these issues are important considerations for this thesis, and as I engage with the study of the Lemba and their claims to a Jewish identity, which necessarily involves a connection to Jewish people on the basis of belief and religious practices, I aim to adopt the notion of inventive tradition as employed by Palmisano and Pannofino. As they write,

> Many invented traditions, as understood by Hobsbawm and Ranger, may on closer examination be considered as 'inventive traditions', which is to say, not *ex novo* creations, but they rediscover and innovatively reformulate pre-existent material through which they establish plausible continuity in order to appear credible or legitimate.[12]

This is an important critique, as the Lemba's claims to a Jewish identity, of course, need to be contextualized in terms of their sense of place and history in relation to their identity politics in Southern Africa. These aspects of life are all continually shaped and conditioned by the forces of modernity and globalization.

The Lemba's claims to a Jewish identity emerge from a long history, often framed in relation to their oral history, traditions, and customs. In this thesis, I explore how these motifs of Lemba material culture represent pre-existing materials and are rediscovered and revitalized in ways that creatively produce new social and cultural imaginaries. Therefore, the methodological

[12] Palmisano and Pannofino, 14.

framework characterized by inventive tradition is a useful tool for this thesis, since the notion of inventive tradition captures the relationship between creativity and innovation and does so in a flexible way. Furthermore, it seems to be the case that the contemporary traditions and practices of the Lemba, as they are framed in Jewish terms, have been creatively adapted by the Lemba on their own terms as they respond to particular cultural and political circumstances in their communities, and as they adapt to the changes of the modern world. For the Lemba, it is clear that their traditions are contingent on historical circumstances and are necessarily in flux.[13] As I argue in this thesis, this observation points towards the importance of understanding Lemba traditions as inventive, and their claims to a Jewish identity as a modern innovation. I believe that this observation attests to the Lemba's creativity, their resourcefulness, and their ability to adapt and also to innovate as they respond to their social worlds.

Context of Study

In 2019, I began a two-year joint-master's degree program in Religion & Culture at the University of Manitoba. In my first semester, I studied with Professor Dawne McCance, whose course on theory and methodology in the study of religion introduced me to Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). Derrida, whose academic work spans the boundaries between traditional fields, including religion, philosophy, and social sciences, critiques Western philosophy as a phonocentric, and therefore, logocentric discourse.[14] The course material, covering a wide range of Derrida's texts, illuminated how his ideas might pose a particular challenge to the scholar of religion, whose field has often been problematized as part of a colonial and imperialistic project,

[13] Ibid., 13.
[14] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 43.

one that often privileges Eurocentric approaches, theories, and methodologies.[15] However, this problematization of the study of religion as a Western construct has been challenged by Rushain Abbasi in his recent article, “Islam and the Invention of Religion: A Study of Medieval Muslim Discourses on Dīn.” Abbasi shifts the frame, arguing that scholarship in religious studies has been preoccupied with the category of religion as a Western construct, neglecting the possibility that the concept of religion may have existed before its invention in the modern West.[16] As Abbasi argues, premodern Muslims were the first to create a concept “akin” to religion and developed an analytical discourse around the idea that played a formative role in Islamic history.[17] Scholars as diverse as Derrida and Abbasi challenge us to study a particular culture, society, and language, without the replication or the reproduction of predominantly Western, colonial, racist, or misogynistic narratives.[18] It is therefore important to question these narratives, and to deconstruct the binary oppositions that structure them.

In the context of this course, I read Derrida’s essay “Racism’s Last Word”, a powerful reflection on racism in South Africa. Throughout this essay, Derrida makes it clear that apartheid represents the last word of European racial and cultural supremacism.[19] At the end of the semester, I wrote a paper inspired by “Racism’s Last Word,” on the topic of religion in South

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[15] See Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005; Michael Bergunder. “What Is Religion?” *Method & theory in the study of religion* 26, no. 3 (2014): 274; Suzanne Owen, “The World Religions Paradigm Time for a Change,” *Arts and humanities in higher education* 10, no. 3 (2011): 254–256.
[16] Rushain Abbasi, "Islam and the Invention of Religion: A Study of Medieval Muslim Discourses on Dīn," *Studia Islamica* 116, no. 1 (2021): 1.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Dawne McCance, *Derrida on Religion: Thinker of Difference*, Taylor and Francis, 2014: 26.
[19] Jacques Derrida, “Racism’s Last Word,” translated by Peggy Kamuf. *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* Volume 1, editors Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Africa.[20] The aim of this paper was to arrive at a clearer idea of the history of colonialism in South Africa, and to understand how it influenced the establishment of apartheid in 1948. The second aim of this paper was to investigate the broader relationship between religion and society under apartheid. In this context, the language of religion was used as state propaganda to bolster political belonging and to justify the creation of segregationist laws and policies in South Africa.[21] Moreover, National Party legislation was inspired by the Dutch Reformed Church's interpretations of the Calvinist idea of predestination, which privileged the Boers as a chosen people destined to attain cultural and political control over South Africa and its native African inhabitants.[22]

It is important to note, however, that apartheid was a controversial issue even within the Dutch Reformed Church, as some white Afrikaners, including theologians Ben Marais (1909-1999) and B. B. Keet (1885-1974), did not support a theological justification for the National Party's agenda for a racially segregated white South Africa. For these theologians, it rather served solely as an interim arrangement for political and religious stability.[23] Moreover, the Christian Institute, supported by members of the Dutch Reformed Church, including Marais, denounced the activities of the National Party, calling for social justice and reform.[24] Furthermore, numerous cultural minorities in South Africa, including members of Muslim and Jewish communities, mobilized and spoke out against apartheid.[25] These examples indicate how

[20] In this context, I was inspired by a class discussion, when McCance encouraged her students to focus their intellectual energies on some of the most significant discussions of our time, including the Anthropocene, colonialism, racism and misogyny.
[21] Derrida, "Racism's Last Word," 296-297.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Edward A. Tiryakian "Apartheid and Religion," *Theology Today* 14.3 (1957): 397.
[24] Derrida, "Racism's Last Word," 297.
[25] Abdulkader Tayob, "Civil Religion for South African Muslims," *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 8.2 (1995): 23-25; Debra Orolowitz, "The Forgotten Anti-Apartheid Seders," *Jewish affairs* 72, no. 1 (2017): 41–42.

the category of religion is never separate from the political, and is deeply intertwined and reflected in political, social, and cultural life. In the context of South African apartheid politics, religion is not only the site of colonial injustice and racism, but also political mobilization, civil disobedience, and non-violent struggle.

While writing this research paper on the category of religion in South Africa, I read about the Lemba, and their struggle for ethnic recognition in South Africa. Noah Tamarkin, a Jewish American anthropologist, introduces these issues in depth in his article "Religion as Race, Recognition as Democracy." This article, as well as Tamarkin's 2020 book *Genetic Afterlives*, raise some of the most nuanced and critical perspectives on Lemba culture and religion that I have encountered in the literature. Tamarkin both summarizes and critiques the existing literature on the Lemba and provides important perspectives for thinking about contemporary political issues within the Lemba community, particularly in South Africa, where his field research was conducted. Tamarkin's ideas and perspectives play a central role in this thesis, as I negotiate and further contemplate the issues that he raises.

While I share Tamarkin's critical perspective on the legacy of colonialism in South Africa, his reflections on the work of genetics, his emphasis on Lemba agency, and his assertion that Lemba identity must be understood in relation to local politics and kinship processes, my thesis differs in several respects. In addition to my methodological approach described above, I make use of sources either not included, or briefly mentioned, in Tamarkin's book *Genetic Afterlives*, including M. E. R. Mathivha's PhD dissertation "A survey of the literary achievements in Venda: a descriptive study from the earliest beginnings up to 1970," Himla Soodyall's recent genetic study, "Lemba origins revisited: Tracing the ancestry of Y chromosomes in South African and Zimbabwean Lemba," Magdel le Roux's 2013 article, "Sing,

Eat, Pray: Transmission of Tradition in Lemba Communities in Southern Africa," Rabson Wuriga's 2012 book *Of Sacred Times, Rituals, and Customs: Oral Traditions of the Lemba Jews of Zimbabwe*, and Lior D. Shragg's 2020 PhD dissertation entitled "Belonging: The Music and Lives of Black Zimbabwean Jews."

Elements of my analysis that differ from Tamarkin's work include a comparative analysis of the treatment of the Lemba in South Africa and the experiences of Algerian Jewry during the colonial period; a discussion of the invention of tradition in relation to the activities and work of Lemba scholars, leaders, and activists; a close reading of the science behind the recent genetic testing on the Lemba that challenges the idea that the Lemba are genetic Jews; a reflection on the relationship between Christian missionaries and the Lemba in the colonial period, and how the Christian Bible, as a raw material, was creatively reinterpreted by Lemba leaders and intellectuals in their construction of the Lemba's Jewish identity; and a comparative analysis of Lemba Jewishness in South African and Zimbabwean Lemba communities in an effort to portray the diversity of contemporary Lemba voices. In addition to these discussions, I do not share Tamarkin's position that Lemba origin stories should be taken at face-value. Moreover, I am critical of his position that it is "obvious that the Lemba exist as black Jews."[26] Conversely, I have delved into the Lemba's history as part of a further respectful engagement with Lemba agency and creativity.

The Lemba have often thought of themselves as a separate and distinct group of people.[27] One of the ways in which the Lemba maintain this separate and distinct identity is through their

[26] Noah Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives: Black Jewish Indigeneity in South Africa*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2020, 9.
[27] Magdel le Roux, *The Lemba: A lost tribe of Israel in southern Africa*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2003: 33.

belief in an ancestral descent from ancient Israel, and that their ancestors migrated to Yemen after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE. According to their oral history, from Yemen the Lemba migrated into Southern Africa, where they live to this day. Although the Lemba speak the same languages as their surrounding neighbours, and share similar customs, practices, and traditions with them, their claim to an ancestral connection to ancient Israel helps to differentiate them and provides support for their claims. However, their claims to an origin in Judea appear to be a recent innovation, since they do not appear in older sources that reference their origins. As I suggest, their claims to an origin in ancient Israel emerge primarily as a result of European colonization. In particular, the activities of Christian missionaries, including the translation of the Bible into Venda, and the inclusion of the Lemba in Christian missions, created the conditions of possibility through which Lemba leaders began to define for themselves what they believe to be their connection and relationship to Judaism.

Though the vast majority of the Lemba identify as Christians[28], a minority among them as Muslims[29], and indeed, some, notably in Zimbabwe, as practicing Jews, Lemba leadership has for the most part stressed their Jewish identity. However, they often do not see their claims to a Jewish identity in contradiction to their affiliations with other religious traditions, with the exception of those among them who have converted to Islam.[30] Alternatively, among Lemba Muslims, there is an important counter-narrative that situates the Lemba not as descendants of

[28] As Muthivhi explains, during the colonial period in Venda, in the northern Transvaal (modern-day Limpopo Province), people who attended missionary schools were required to convert to Christianity and to abandon traditional beliefs. See Azwihangwisi Muthivhi, "Ploughing new fields of knowledge: culture and the rise of community schooling in Venda," *Journal of Education* 48, no. 1 (2010): 143.
[29] See Tudor Parfitt and Yulia Egorova, "Genetics, History, and Identity: The Case of the Bene Israel and the Lemba," *Culture, medicine and psychiatry* 29, no. 2 (2005): 202. For an important "counter-narrative" from Lemba Muslims about the origins of the Lemba, see "Muslims Court Varemba Community," *theherald.co.zw*, published July 29, 2016, https://www.herald.co.zw/muslims-court-varemba-community/.
[30] Ibid.

Jews, but of Arab traders, an idea that I briefly explore later in this thesis.[31] Nevertheless, Lemba who assert a Jewish identity are not necessarily willing or interested in giving up their culture in order to return or convert to Judaism. However, their identification as Jewish has been a point of interest in the attempts by their leadership to gain official recognition as an ethnic group from the South African government.[32] Overall, the Lemba desire their place in Southern Africa, and with that, particular rights and freedoms, and a defined sense of belonging.[33]

Literature Review

In the literature, the Lemba are often labeled an emerging Jewish group or one of the so-called African Judaising groups.[34] These terms have been used to describe various communities based on their self-descriptions as Jews, but in their usage assume a normative and fixed notion of Judaism through which to categorize these communities as "emerging" or "Judaising". It is important to note, however, that the ways in which Jewish people understand their Jewishness points to a complex, shifting, and at times contradictory category of social identity, one that has developed in different ways and in different historical periods and places. This idea reflects the inventiveness of Jewish people as they practice and reinterpret their traditions across time and place.[35] In relation to this observation, the terms "emerging" and "Judaising" have recently been challenged by the political scientist and Jewish studies scholar Marla Brettschneider, who instead employs the phrase "Jewish and Jewishly related phenomena" to critically discuss these groups

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives: Black Jewish Indigeneity in South Africa*, 95.
[33] This appears to be the case in different Lemba communities, not only in South Africa as described in Tamarkin's book *Genetic Afterlives*, but also in Zimbabwe as recounted by Shragg in his PhD dissertation, "Belonging: The Music and Lives of Black Zimbabwean Jews,".
[34] Tudor Parfitt and Netanel Fisher, *Becoming Jewish: New Jews and Emerging Jewish Communities in a Globalized World*, Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016: 18.
[35] Bethamie Horowitz, "Reframing the Study of Contemporary American Jewish Identity," *Contemporary Jewry*, no. 23 (2002): 14–34.

and their connections to Judaism.[36] At the same time, it is important not to underestimate the religious dimensions of Judaism, since there is clearly an understanding among scholars of Judaism as a normative tradition: a religious tradition with clearly defined structures, including "law, practice, and community".[37] In a recent article entitled, "Who is a Jew in (Africa)? Definitional and Ethical Considerations in the Study of Sub-Saharan Jewry and Judaism," William F. S. Miles comments that "some scholarly consensus regarding the legitimacy of wide-ranging claims to Jewish identity in Black Africa is critical to both the academic and ethical integrity of scholarly writing on sub-Saharan Jewry."[38] Presenting a clear and balanced understanding of the Lemba's Jewish identity in relation to these different aspects of Judaism is therefore an important scholarly contribution to these discussions.

According to the literature, in the last one hundred years, many Black African groups, including the Lemba, began to claim a Jewish identity.[39] This has led to a renewed investigation into their origins. For the Lemba, this investigation came in the form of two different genetic tests. The first of these tests, published by Amanda B. Spurdle and Trefor Jenkins in 1996, was based on DNA samples taken from forty-nine Lemba men.[40] In this study, Spurdle and Jenkins argue that while there is no specific genetic evidence for an ancestral link to Jewish people, it is evident that the Lemba share DNA characteristics with people of Semitic origins. A second test conducted by a team of researchers led by Tudor Parfitt, Professor of Jewish Studies at the

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[36] Marla Brettschneider, *The Jewish Phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Politics of Contradictory Discourses*, Place of publication not identified: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2015.
[37] S. J. Crasnow, "On Transition: Normative Judaism and Trans Innovation," *Journal of contemporary religion* 32, no. 3 (2017): 403–415.
[38] William FS Miles, "Who Is a Jew (in Africa)? Definitional and Ethical Considerations in the Study of Sub-Saharan Jewry and Judaism," *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 10, no. 1 (2019): 2.
[39] See Edith Bruder, *The Black Jews of Africa: History, Religion, Identity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012: 1.
[40] Amanda B. Spurdle and Trefor Jenkins, "The Origins of the Lemba Black Jews of Southern Africa: Evidence from p12F2 and Other Y-Chromosome Markers," *American journal of human genetics* 59, no. 5 (1996): 1126–1133.

School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, purported to prove, based on saliva samples of 136 Lemba males, that the Lemba present a higher frequency of the Cohen Modal Haplotype, a DNA variation that is thought to represent Jewish DNA, stemming directly from the "paternally inherited Jewish priesthood" in their Y chromosome.[41] This genetic ancestry suggests a link to the priestly caste associated with the Biblical figure of Aaron. This study, which was published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, defined the Lemba as genetic Jews and situated them as part of a broader narrative of a genetic Jewish diaspora based on a notion of biological determinism, a concept that differs markedly from both normative Halakhic definitions of Jewish identity, and from more fluid and critical conceptions of Jewish diaspora and peoplehood, concepts that oppose exclusive and hegemonic discourses of culture and identity.[42]

As a result of these tests, and their newly established genetic relationship to Jews around the world, the Lemba received significant international attention. For many people in the Western world, the Lemba and their DNA tests aroused a sense of curiosity and controversy.[43] The Lemba were featured on the front page of the New York Times and were also promoted in various documentaries and media publications, such as those produced by the Discovery Channel and BBC Nova, that drew attention to the Lemba as genetic Jews. In this context, the media cast the Lemba as one of the lost tribes of Israel, in which their customs, rituals, festivals and laws were framed as long-lost fragments of an ancient Jewish past in Africa. In addition to the media

[41] Mark G. Thomas, Tudor Parfitt, Deborah A Weiss, Karl Skorecki, James F Wilson, Magdel le Roux, Neil Bradman, and David B Goldstein, "Y Chromosomes Traveling South: The Cohen Modal Haplotype and the Origins of the Lemba—the 'Black Jews of Southern Africa,'" *American journal of human genetics* 66, no. 2 (2000): 674–686.
[42] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 84-85; Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity." *Critical inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993): 713.
[43] Tudor Parfitt and Yulia Egorova, "Genetics, History, and Identity: The Case of the Bene Israel and the Lemba," *Culture, medicine and psychiatry* 29, no. 2 (2005): 200.

coverage, North American Jewish organizations such as Kulanu and Be'chol Lashon reached out to Lemba people in an effort to help them return to Judaism. These organizations organized missions to the Lemba, provided funding for Jewish education, and promoted them through speaking tours throughout America.

For Lemba actors, including former LCA presidents M. E. R. Mathivha (1921-2002), Samuel Moeti (1933-2006), and M. J. Mungulwa (1928-2018), the promotion of the Lemba in these documentaries and other media sources presented an opportunity for Lemba people to speak openly about their identity as black Jews and to highlight their culture, traditions, and perspectives.[44] However, it is important to think about their perspectives in the context of their experiences during apartheid and postapartheid South Africa. During apartheid, the Lemba, along with the majority of black South Africans, were socially and economically displaced, required to live and work in remote ethnically defined homelands called Bantustans. The Lemba were incorporated into both the Venda and Lebowa homelands in the northern Transvaal (now the Limpopo Province).[45] According to Tamarkin, throughout apartheid, it was somewhat dangerous for the Lemba to speak about themselves publicly, as their identity as an ethnic group, to some extent, could be perceived as a challenge to the fundamental ideology of apartheid racial classifications, or on the other hand, their claims to ethnic difference could be interpreted as a further justification for apartheid, since they desired to be separate and to acquire their own ethnic homeland, conforming to the apartheid ideal of separate national development.[46] In any case, due to the oppressive nature of apartheid laws and policies, and their political and social

[44] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 80-82.
[45] Ibid., 8.
[46] Ibid., 46.

marginalization in the Venda homeland during apartheid, Lemba political activities and public events were sometimes subject to interference and government surveillance.[47]

Once apartheid had ended the social and political conditions improved, and Lemba people could represent themselves in public without fear of repercussion. However, issues surrounding their recognition as an ethnic group in South Africa remained. These included recognition of Lemba traditional leadership, as well as legal rights to land use and traditional customs, such as their circumcision ceremonies. As Tamarkin explains, these issues were the subject of numerous petitions from Kgoshi[48] Mpketsane, an unrecognized Lemba chief, on behalf of the Lemba, to the South African government to support their claims to officially recognized ethnic status, traditional leadership and land. However, as Tamarkin points out, Kgoshi Mpketsane never managed to achieve state recognition, and the Lemba's efforts to attain this status are ongoing.[49] Nevertheless, the genetic tests, and the resulting documentaries and publications provided the Lemba with a public arena through which they could both contest their claims to ethnicity, and openly discuss their identity and perspectives as black Jews. Therefore, the Lemba's claims to a Jewish identity to some extent was an important political avenue through which their leaders could further their agenda for legal recognition from the postapartheid government, as a distinct ethnic group with particular rights and freedoms.

In his discussion, Tamarkin builds on an article written in 1998 entitled, "Black Jews in the Northern Province: A Study of Ethnic Identity in South Africa," by Gina Buijs, a South African anthropologist whose work investigated the Lemba and their claims to a modern Jewish

[47] Ibid.
[48] As Tamarkin explains, the word Kgoshi means chief or king, as recognized by their people. See Tamarkin, 198.
[49] However, they did receive a limited form of ethnic recognition as "indigenous" through their participation in the Mapungubwe reburial process. See Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 182.

identity. In both Buijs' and Tamarkin's articles, the authors trace the history of the Lemba and their political activism, including the foundation of the Lemba Cultural Association by Lemba leader, scholar, and activist, M. M. Motenda (d. 1982).

From an initial reading of these articles, I reflected on how the history of the Lemba in South Africa, in some ways, intersects with the experiences of Jewish people historically. Through a brief study of Jacques Derrida's life in French Algeria in the context of McCance's course, I identified a parallel between the realities of Jewish life under French colonial rule in Algeria, and the struggle of the Lemba to articulate their identity as both black and Jewish in a hostile environment rooted in antisemitic and white supremacist politics.[50] In 1870, the French Algerian government signed the Crémieux Decree which granted conditional French citizenship to the Jews of Algeria. This was part of an assimilationist strategy to assert the power and legitimacy of colonial France. In this context, Jewish people were treated as a political experiment by the Algerian colonial government through their participation in municipal electoral processes.[51] Under the Nazi-allied Vichy government, however, this citizenship was revoked. This erasure of French citizenship resulted in the loss of their status and identity as French citizens of Algeria.[52] This deeply affected the Jews of French Algeria, who were now living as non-citizens in a country that they no longer belonged to, speaking in a language (French) that was never their own to begin with. And in addition to the wide-spread antisemitism of the French Vichy government, which galvanized Nazi sympathizers in Algeria, these

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[50] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin* Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998.
[51] Sophie B Roberts, "Jews Citizenship and Antisemitism In French Colonial Algeria, 1870-1943," *Utoronto.ca*.
[52] Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, 16-18.

conditions created hardships for Algerian Jews, many of whom emigrated to France after the Algerian war of independence.[53]

These examples of Jewish life in diasporic and colonial contexts, in one way, parallel with the Lemba's experience under apartheid, their legal erasure under the apartheid system, and their struggle for state recognition during and after apartheid. While this might appear to be an argument that claims the Lemba as essentially Jewish through comparison, it sets the stage for an analysis of the Lemba's claims to a Jewish identity, one that deals with the underlying themes of Eurocentrism, racism, privilege, and power. This parallel also points to the way in which a state might use the categories of race, religion, and identity to shape categories of belonging and citizenship. While the research paper I wrote briefly mentions the existence of the Lemba, their claims to Judaism, and their struggle for ethnic recognition, this thesis is dedicated to their story, which I believe is important, especially in order to think more clearly about their claims to a Jewish identity, but also to think through and beyond the binary and racialized oppositions which are often at work in Western thought.

Throughout these complex and overlapping narratives, Judaism emerges as an important narrative linking diverse ideas about the nature of race, ethnicity, and religion, in the lives of many Lemba people. However, the connection between the Lemba and Judaism requires a deeper analysis in order to gain a better perspective on the scholarly issues at play in the literature on Lemba politics and identity. From this perspective, it is important to pay attention to the ways in which the Lemba and their collective identity have been imagined and constructed in the interconnected contexts of colonialism, apartheid and postapartheid South Africa. I believe

[53] Reeva S. Simon, *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa: the Impact of World War II* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020: 245.

this will enable a clearer view of the Lemba as Jews, and the implications of this identity for the Lemba themselves.

The Lemba's connection to Judaism represents an important point of departure for this thesis. Although it is widely contested by many actors, this connection is nonetheless a salient aspect of their lived experiences, memories, culture, and identity. For many Lemba people, Jewishness is a significant motif in their origin stories. It also acts as a marker of ethnic identity, especially in the context of their struggle for ethnic recognition during and after apartheid. Moreover, their relationship to Judaism has led to diverse relationships between Lemba people and different Jewish communities throughout Africa and the Western world. However, it also important to clarify the Lemba's Jewish identity as an identity with a particular history, composed of vastly different perspectives about what it means to be recognized as a Lemba and as a Jew. This thesis attempts to weave together a narrative that helps explain this history, in order to contextualize these perspectives. Through a close reading of the scholarship on the Lemba, and of the Lemba themselves, I will trace how the Lemba have constructed a Jewish identity that challenges monolithic and essentialized notions of religion, race, and ethnicity. As discussed, I consider Lemba constructions of Jewish identity as important examples of Palmisano and Pannofino's notion of inventive tradition. Moreover, I examine these complex narratives in order to draw them out, and explore the overlapping histories and intersections between religion, race, and ethnicity in Southern Africa.

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Chapter Two: Colonialism in Southern Africa: The Construction of Lemba Origins as a Narrative of Colonization

The history of colonialism in Africa is an important context for this thesis which explores how Lemba identity is constructed, imagined, and theorized in the Western imagination, and to highlight the ways in which Lemba people have responded to this history. The first part of this chapter discusses how the Lemba were perceived in their interactions with early explorers and missionaries in South Africa from the sixteenth until the nineteenth centuries. This I hope, will illuminate the context in which the Lemba were first described as Semitic by missionaries and settler colonists in the early twentieth century, moving into the apartheid period in South Africa. It is important to note that the category of the "Semite" was often used to conflate Jewish and Arabic culture and language in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore, the references to the Lemba in relation to Judaism by colonial ethnologists might be better understood in terms of the broader social and racial category of the "Semite".[54] Later, I discuss the dialectical relationship between colonial ethnologists and the Lemba themselves, who contributed to the colonial literature in a way that challenged the predominant ideas pertaining to their identity. I highlight the invention of tradition in relation to Lemba intellectuals' descriptions of the contingent and fluid aspects of their own traditions. I suggest that this presents an important context for understanding the connection between the Lemba and Judaism from a historical perspective. From these perspectives, I wish to reflect on the broader issue of colonialism, and

[54] Noah Tamarkin "Religion as Race: Recognition as Democracy," 162. Also see Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008.

how this feature of modernity shaped Lemba identity politics as South Africa transitioned into the apartheid period.

Context

The story of the Lemba as the black Jews of Southern Africa has its origins in the context of European exploration, expansion, and colonialism. Early accounts of the Lemba by Europeans throughout these periods describe them in terms of racial, linguistic, cultural, and religious differences from other African groups living in close geographical proximity to each other. While a number of these descriptions concur with Lemba accounts of themselves as distinct and separate from other groups, based on their own understanding of what it means to be Lemba, for European missionaries and settlers these differences are often exaggerated as "completely separate and different" In these contexts, the Lemba are explicitly or implicitly framed as essentially Semitic in origin, character, and racialized appearances.

From the perspectives of these early missionaries, settler colonists, and ethnologists, the Lemba's Semitic characteristics, as well as their perceived resemblance to Jews, are framed in terms of the puzzle of Lemba origins.[55] As Tamarkin describes, this puzzle perplexed these thinkers partly because their ideas about African people reflected their beliefs that Africa and its inhabitants are ahistorical, timeless, and immutable.[56] I argue that these beliefs illustrate the illogic of colonialism, which deploys theories of difference to manage and govern the colonial subject.[57] These theories of Semitic or Jewish difference were later expanded on by ethnologists

[55] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 18-19.
[56] See Tamarkin, 36; V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988; V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
[57] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 16.

and anthropologists during apartheid in order to categorize and subjugate South Africa's Native African populations.

Colonial Discourses on the Lemba

One of the earliest references to the Lemba is mentioned in the Index to D. N. Beach's *The Shona in Zimbabwe 900-1850: An Outline of Shona History*.[58] Here, Beach notes, "for Lemba, see Muslims."[59] In this context, Beach explains that Portuguese explorers in Southern Africa described the traders they encountered as *mouros*, a cognate with "Moors" that has "often been translated as 'Arabs' or 'Swahili'."[60] As Beach explains, "to the Portuguese of that time *mouro* simply meant a Muslim, of whatever colour and language, who was distinguished by a Muslim name, a turban, and some degree of Islamic religion." In contrast to Beach, Josiah Blackmore writes that "the quality of being a moor–or Moorishness–can be determined by factors that are anything but stable or predetermined."[61] According to Blackmore, the term *mouro* then is not a fixed term, but a term in the Portuguese lexicon that underscores different meanings associated with African identity, usually in reference to stereotypical racial, religious or ethnic traits.[62] In what follows, I will discuss several examples of early Portuguese interactions with the people they encountered in the Zambezi region as *mouros*, whom scholars believe to be the Lemba.[63]

In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese explorer Duarte Barbosa (1480-1521) wrote, "these Moors of Sofala are black men, some olive, and use the tongue of the land which is that of

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[58] As cited in Buijs, "Black Jews in the Northern Province: a Study of Ethnic Identity in South Africa," 662; Also see D. N. Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe 900–1850: An Outline of Shona History*, London: Heinemann, 1980.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Josiah Blackmore, *Moorings: Portuguese Expansion and the Writing of Africa*, University of Minnesota Press, 2009: 2-4.
[62]Ibid.
[63] or Varemba in Zimbabwe.

the Gentiles. They speak some Arabic."[64] According to Le Roux, other Portuguese explorers, including the Dominican friar João dos Santos (d. 1622) and Senhor Ferão (c. 1810), identified Christian and Moorish people north of the Limpopo river in a town called Sena, and near the Zambezi river.[65] Ferão describes them as "merchants", and that "the woman (sic) manufactured earthenware, cultivated rice and distinguished themselves from the other inhabitants by refraining from eating pork and rejecting meat that was not killed by the hands of one of their sects."[66] In another place, Dos Santos describes these people as "barbarians":

> (They) (sic) are very fond of wine, and are only Moors in name and in the practice of circumcision, and neither know nor keep the creed of Mohammed that they profess. The principal observance, in which they are most exact, is celebrating, with great feasting, every new moon, upon which occasion they usually get intoxicated - although their creed forbids them to take wine.[67]

Dos Santos and Ferão's comments are similar to Barbosa's in the way that they frame the habits and customs of those they encounter in terms of Islamic cultural practices and beliefs, even though they do not see these practices and beliefs as being authentically Islamic. Their observations also represent some of the first instances of confusion among Europeans over the perceived contradictions of Lemba customs and practices, and therefore traces an important theme that runs throughout the majority of Western European scholarship on the Lemba: the "puzzle" of Lemba origins.

Although the Portuguese characterized the Lemba as an obscure Moorish group with a vague connection to Islam, there is substantial evidence to argue that the Lemba's traditional cultural practices reflect a possible Arabic influence. In his 2007 book, Tabona Shoko provides some important context that illuminates the Lemba's historical relationship with early Arabic

[64] Buijs, 662.
[65] Le Roux, *The Lemba: A Lost Tribe of Israel in Southern Africa?,* 38.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

traders, and accounts for their perceived Semitic habits and tendencies commented on by early Portuguese explorers. It is important to note that this research is used by contemporary Lemba Muslims to add credibility to their claims to Arabic ancestry.[68] As Shoko states,

> one group which arrived in Mberewenga and settled in the south was the Remba. Their totem is *Zhou* (elephant). These were allowed settlement by the Rozvi. Originally the Remba had established contact with the Arab traders in Sena and the Zambezi valley and they intermarried and adopted some of the Arabic cultural traits and names. They practice circumcision and ritual killing in which members of the group can only eat meat slaughtered by one of them. They entertain marriage within the group. They have adopted Arabic names like Hamisi, Hasani, Bakari, Sadiki. This shows tremendous influence from a Semitic culture. The Remba have established their own chieftainship in Mberengwa.[69]

While Shoko conflates the category of the Semite with Arabic culture, his comments privilege the Lemba (here, Remba, since there is no L sound in their spoken Shona language) as they encounter Arab traders and engage with their culture. In a way, this supports the idea of an inventive tradition among the Lemba, as they reinterpret and reconstruct their identity in relation to novel circumstances, in this case, through trade, intermarriage, and encounters with Arabic traders.

In terms of the new moon sighting, as described above by Portuguese explorers, available scholarship on traditional African star lore suggests that the celebration of the New Moon was a common occurrence among Sub-Saharan ethnic groups.[70] For the Kora KhoiKhoi people, for example, singing, dancing and other festivities marked the sighting of the New Moon, since they "considered the Moon as the Lord of Light and Life." However, scholars have often suggested that the New Moon ceremonies of the Lemba are consistent with ancient biblical customs, since

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[68] "Muslims Court Varemba Community," *theherald.co.zw*, published July 29, 2016, https://www.herald.co.zw/muslims-court-varemba-community/.
[69] Tabona Shoko, *Karanga indigenous religion in Zimbabwe: Health and well-being*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013: 8.
[70] Auke Slotegraaf, "African Star-Lore," *Monthly notes of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa* 72, no. 3_4 (2013): 63.

they appear to resemble aspects of ancient Israelite culture, such as the blowing of the ram's horn (*shofar*) during Rosh Hodesh.[71] As Le Roux states,

> just before the time of the new moon, a bowl is placed under a tree or in the shade of a hut. Then a day before the moon is visible, it reflects in the water in the bowl, usually around noon. The person who sees the moon before the others, shouts: 'Ha lea e bonala lapeng' ('you are not there when I came home'; [the moon] is not visible at the lapa) and runs to the chief to inform him. Then the chief sends his servants to the river to see if they can really see the moon in the dish. Marole says that if they confirm this, the chief will blow the horn and the 'indunas' (a Zulu word used by Marole) will follow suit, blowing the horns.[72]

While the sighting of the New Moon has been linked to ancient biblical practices, especially the blowing of the ram's horn, it is important to note that this is also a traditional practice associated with the sighting of the bright morning star, Achemar (also known as Tshinanga in the Venda language).[73] As Slotegraaf states, "in Venda tradition, the first person to see Nanga in the morning sky (in May, heralding winter) would climb a hill and blow the phalaphala (black sable antelope horn) and he would receive a cow as a prize."[74] For the Lemba, the traditional practices associated with the sighting of the New Moon, discussed above, have precedence in other closely connected traditional practices among different ethnic groups in Southern Africa. Therefore, it is not particularly obvious that this is a continuation of ancient biblical customs. Rather, the interpretation of traditional Lemba customs in a way that reflects biblical traditions, is a significant example of an inventive tradition among them, as the Lemba contemplate the possible origins of their traditions.

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[71] Rabson Wuriga, *Of Sacred Times, Rituals, and Customs: Oral Traditions of the Lemba Jews of Zimbabwe*, New York: Kulanu inc. (2012), 921; Shragg, 85; Magdel Le Roux, "African light on the New Moon ceremony," *Old Testament Essays* 18, no. 2 (2005), 293.
[72] Le Roux, 292.
[73] Slotegraaf, 65.
[74] Ibid.

In any case, the Portuguese commentary on the *mouros* is echoed by Dutch and British traders, missionaries and ethnologists, especially in their descriptions of people they describe as Islamic Kafirs and Semites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[75] Moreover, it was not until the arrival of Dutch traders that the Lemba were first identified by name. As Le Roux states,

> The earliest mention of the Lemba name, the 'Walembers,' is most probably in 1721 and 1726, in the Dutch East India Company's reports on the conditions in the interior. This constitutes the first reference in modem times to the presence of this people south of the Limpopo.[76]

A later report was drafted in 1728 by Mahumane, an informant from the chiefdom of Mpfumo near the Dutch Trading factory in Delagoa Bay who "visited the Venda 'king' in 1727/28".[77] This report describes various African traders who frequented the Dutch settlement. The report reads as follows,

> These traders were from 'Sanguano' (Hlanganu area), 'Inthowelle, Paraotte, Machicosje, Whlembe and Chiremandelle'.... The Walembers, who are always coming here with those of Inthowelle,... are a nation which lives on top [north] of the country of Inthowelle .... The aforementioned Walembe was said to be rich in gold too, and this nation was also doing trade with the Portuguese in the direction of the aforementioned Sena and Manica.[78]

It seems this report is significant because it distinguishes the Lemba in terms of their economic status among different African ethnic groups, and not in terms of their perceived religious or cultural differences from other Africans.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Dutch, and British merchants, including William Bolts (1738–1808), Thomas Baines (1820-1875) and Flygare (c. 1899), had written extensively about the Lemba, especially in relation to their historical connection with the ancient city of

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[75] Ephraim Mandivenga, "The History and 'Re-conversion' of the Varemba of Zimbabwe*," Journal of Religion in Africa*, 19 (2): 98.
[76]Le Roux, The Lemba: A Lost Tribe of Israel in Southern Africa?, 45.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

Zimbabwe.[79] They also discuss their activities as traders, gold miners and smiths in the region. Baines and Flygare, for example, both briefly describe the Lemba in terms of their separateness and "Semitically related practices and appearance."[80] As Flygare observes,

> The Balemba, a small despised tribe, lived among the Bawenda. They completely differed in appearance and language, customs and religion. Their history and origins remain a secret.... One finds their settlements mainly in the North and Northeast. They kept themselves completely separate from the Bawenda and had completely different religious customs, which indicate in some way connections and relatedness with the Semitic nations.[81]

Here and in previous passages, the Portuguese, Dutch and British invocations of Semitic religious customs, and their projection of these perceived racial, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences onto the Lemba, provides an early context in which the Lemba were identified in terms of essential and racial differences, and subjected to colonial markers of identity, which as I will discuss, in some ways, created the conditions for their struggle for ethnic recognition during apartheid. Moreover, it also appears that this context provides initial evidence for an inventive tradition among the Lemba, as they encounter, trade, and interact with Arab traders from the north.

Early Ethnological Perspectives on the Lemba

There is considerable continuity between the observations of early European explorers mentioned in the previous section and later ethnological studies on the Lemba by colonial missionaries and anthropologists in the early twentieth century. In this section I will compare four different accounts of the Lemba by missionaries and ethnologists, including Henri Junod (1863-1934), Hugh Stayt (1899-1964), Rev. Alexander A. Jaques (c. 1931), and Nicolas J. Van

[79] Ibid., 46.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid. 46-47. Translated by Magdel le Roux.

Warmelo (1904-1989), to think more clearly about the connection between the Lemba and Judaism in their writing. How did these colonial authors describe the Lemba? Moreover, how did Lemba intellectuals respond to their categorizations?

In 1910, the Swiss missionary Henri Junod published "The Balemba of the Zoutpansberg," an article which provides one of the first comparative studies on the Lemba.[82] It is often used as a reference point for later studies that attempt to theorize Lemba origins. Throughout the article, Junod discusses various aspects of Lemba history and culture, including Lemba migration patterns throughout southern Africa, language, dialect, economic activities, social and religious practices. Writing in a missionary context, Junod argues that while the Lemba are a South African Bantu tribe, their appearances, as well as their cultural, and religious practices, bear a strong resemblance to Semitic peoples. Junod focuses on several of these aspects of Lemba culture, including dietary habits and circumcision. Junod frames his argument in terms of his belief that these "cultural" and "religious practices" are a product of Lemba interactions with Islamic peoples. As Junod argues,

> It shows what a wonderful grasp Mahommedanism has on the native mind. Consider these people knowing nothing of Allah, having forgotten entirely all higher religious teaching, if they ever received any, and notwithstanding this sticking for generations to some queer rites, the meaning of which they do not understand! This is the way Islam wins adepts, not in bringing to them light and spiritual principles, but in enslaving them by a number of external habits which it makes them adopt.[83]

For Junod, their Semitic qualities are thought to be a product of their exposure to, or an adoption of Islam into their local African culture, traditions, and customs.[84] In this passage, the missionary agenda becomes clear, as Junod locates the Lemba, and the purported influence of Islam on their

[82] Henri A. Junod, "The Balemba of the Zoutpansberg (Transvaal)," *Folklore*, 19, 3, 1908.
[83] Ibid., 286-287.
[84] Ibid.

culture, customs, and traditions, at the confluence of two opposing forces in the colonial period: Islam and Christianity. As Junod writes,

> Nowadays the African soul is ready to part with its childish animistic representations. But it is solicited by two opposite influences, Mahommedanism and Christianity. Mahommedanism is making tremendous progress. The case of the Balemba shows that the fight between these two influences is bound to be very serious indeed, and that in the interest of the native tribes no effort must be spared to prevent the religion of the letter and of slavery from prevailing over the religion of the spirit and of liberty![85]

This passage demonstrates multiple layers of the colonial narrative in Southern Africa: Christian anxieties over the perceived threat of Islam on the "native population"; the colonial logic of Christianity as an assimilationist and civilizing ideology; the mobilization of Christian missionaries in the ideological fight against Islam as a rival religion. These appear to be several of the stakes at play in this study on the Lemba.

Another important aspect of Junod's account of the Lemba is that it presents one of the first accounts of the Lemba as they are described directly in relation to Jews. In the introduction Junod writes,

> If the soil of Zoutpansberg is rich in mineral deposits, its native population abounds also in interesting ethnographical phenomena. The strangest of these phenomena is the presence of the Balemba in the Spelonken and Selati districts: a bantu tribe scattered amongst the Basuto and Bathonga of those parts, exactly as the Jews among European nations, a tribe having no chief, keeping with a great pertinacity habits totally different from those of the masters of the country, living and thriving by means of industry, moreover, bearing strong Semitic characteristics, is it not enough to awake the interest of the ethnologist and to puzzle him greatly?[86]

In a way, this passage demonstrates how missionaries and ethnologists began to theorize African identity according to broad European notions of cultural difference and otherness.[87] In this case, Junod uses Judaism as a parallel concept for his analysis of the Lemba. It is important to note,

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[85] Ibid., 287.
[86] Ibid., 276.
[87] Yolande Jansen and Nasar Meer, "Genealogies of 'Jews' and 'Muslims': Social Imaginaries in the Race-Religion Nexus," *Patterns of prejudice* 54, no. 1-2 (2020): 6-7.

however, that Junod does not consider the Lemba to be Jewish (at least, not in a genetic sense), as later writers will claim. For Junod, they are described in relation to Jews in so far as he perceives their practices, customs, and traditions in relation to those of Semitic peoples (conceived of in this context as a conflation of both Arab and Jewish characteristics), in addition to the parallel between the dispersion of the Lemba throughout Southern Africa and the diasporic circumstances of Jews in Europe.

In 1931, two subsequent articles were published about the Lemba: Jaques' "Notes of the Lemba Tribes of the Northern Transvaal", and Stayt's "Notes on the Balemba". Building on Junod's research, Stayt and Jaques continue along a similar trajectory of colonial thought, as they consider the question of the Lemba, their relation to Semitic peoples and the problem of their origins. Jaques states, "it may be said that the facts set out above strongly confirm Junod's conjecture that the Lemba are a South African Bantu tribe which shows traces of considerable Semitic influence."[88] Citing Junod, Stayt further argues,

> With family names like Hadzhi, Suleman and Sadiki, with the stories about Sena and the River Zambesi, and the strange mixture of Semitic, Mohammedan and Bantu customs there can be no doubt that the BaLemba are indeed the descendants of these Arab traders who took wives from the races among whom they traded and then attempted to maintain their intellectual supremacy and cultural identity by emphasizing the importance of endogamy.[89]

For these authors, the Semitic aspects of Lemba culture played an important role in their success in maintaining their cultural identity, especially in the context of colonialism. Moreover, the decline of their language (an older Shona dialect, maintained only in their traditional practices at this time), suggests the importance of preserving these aspects of culture for the Lemba. As Jacques notes,

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[88] A. A. Jaques, "Notes on the Lemba Tribe of the Northern Transvaal," Anthropos 26, no. 1-2 (1931): 245.
[89] H. A. Stayt, "Notes on the Balemba," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 61, (1931): 238.

> Although the Lemba seem to have succeeded in preserving their tribal individuality in the past, they are now rapidly losing this and are being absorbed by the surrounding population. Their language is understood and used by a few old people only, the remainder having already abandoned it in favour of the speech of their neighbours, Venda, Sotho or Thonga.[90]

The rest of the article is framed around this argument, especially in order to document and archive the history of the Lemba before their culture was expected to fade away. Although Stayt is more optimistic on this point than Jaques, Stayt nonetheless shares a similar attitude, however, he emphasizes their adaptability and superiority as a culture that had so far withstood the tide of European colonialism.[91] It is interesting to note, however, that Stayt's speculations about the Arabic ancestry of the Lemba are confirmed almost a century later by Shoko, who does not cite Junod, Stayt, or Jaques, but arrives at similar conclusions through a more nuanced and detailed history of the Lemba through the broader lens of Karanga Indigenous religions in Zimbabwe.

In any case, Jaques organizes his analysis into eight different categories: dietary habits; physical characteristics; clothing; beliefs and customs; crafts, industries, and commerce; religion and religious ceremonies; Lemba clans and families. These correspond to the similar categories used in Stayt's research on the Lemba, which include geography and location, the new moon, history, social organization, circumcision, crafts and trade, and origins. These categories provide a framework through which these authors negotiate the ethnic and religious differences between the Lemba and other ethnic groups in Southern Africa, as they endeavour to solve the perceived problem of Lemba origins. However, why is the question of origins problematic in this context? What does it reveal about the underlying ideological perspectives of these writers? In what

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[90] A. A. Jaques, "Notes on the Lemba Tribe of the Northern Transvaal," 245.
[91] Stayt, "Notes on the Balemba," 238.

follows, I discuss the important point raised by Tamarkin, wherein the question of Lemba origins is linked to the ideology of race science.[92]

One important point about the categorical analysis discussed above, one that differs completely from Shoko's recent historical work on the Lemba, is the way in which both Jaques and Stayt frame the physical appearance of the Lemba as evidence of a Semitic origin. Jaques, for instance, writes, "one does occasionally meet with Lemba who possess strikingly Semitic features. One of my informants, old Mosheh, even had what might be termed a typical Jewish nose, a rare occurrence among real Bantu."[93] Moreover, Stayt notes that, "the typical MuLemba has a distinctly Armenoid cast of feature. The face is longer and thinner than that of the average Bantu, the lips are thinner the nose longer and more aquiline, the eyes small, dark and deep-set, and the ears large."[94] While these quotations are clearly examples of the racist trope of the Jewish nose[95], they also reflect the broader construction of racialized categories in the colonial imaginary, especially as ethnologists sought to differentiate between races based on physical appearances: the category of the Semite (Muslim/Jew), for example, is defined as essentially different from the category of the Negroid (black African).[96]

Since the Lemba did not conform to either of these imagined categories, the subject of their origins is conceived as a puzzle, and ultimately, as a problem waiting to be solved by future researchers. As Tamarkin states, "the puzzle of Lemba origins then, in both its early and late twentieth-century iterations, is less a historical question and more an artifact of nineteenth-century race science."[97] For the Lemba, the issue of race science, far from being an obscure

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[92] Tamarkin, Genetic Afterlives, 19.
[93] A. A. Jacques, "Notes on the Lemba Tribe of the Northern Transvaal," 245.
[94] Stayt, "Notes on the Balemba," 231-232.
[95] Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, New York: Routledge, 1991: 189.
[96] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 18.
[97] Ibid., 19.

academic question about ethnic origins, would have real consequences for their community, as the South African state moved into the apartheid era, and began to implement segregation policies on the basis of official languages, chieftaincy and numbers.[98]

Van Warmelo, an ethnologist employed by the South African government to conduct research on tribal groups throughout South Africa, wrote about the Lemba at length in several of his reports. His research served a particular goal for the South African government: to classify tribal groups in South Africa according to geographical location, language, political structure, and numbers.[99] Van Warmelo's research on the Lemba built on the previous information provided by missionary ethnologists and their writings on the Lemba, highlighting their Semitic characteristics, separateness, and distinctiveness. As Tamarkin explains, the difference between Van Warmelo's research and previous studies on the Lemba, however, lies in the way in which his reports would create the structural conditions for the Lemba and their legal treatment under apartheid.[100] For Warmelo, the Lemba did not constitute a significant ethnic group because they did not have a recognizable chief, nor did they speak their own language, and did not have the numbers to qualify.[101]

How did Lemba intellectuals respond to the colonial and ethnographic research that defined them? In what ways did they challenge or confirm this research? In 1936, Manesseh N. Mphelo published "The Balemba of the Northern Transvaal," the first publication about the Lemba by a Lemba author.[102] According to Tamarkin, Mphelo writes in response to the accounts of the Lemba written by missionaries and ethnologists, such as Junod, Jacques and Stayt. As

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[98] Ibid., 36-37.
[99] N. J. Van Warmelo, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa,* Pretoria SA: Government Printer, 5.
[100] Tamarkin, 36.
[101] Ibid., 36; Van Warmelo, 122.
[102] Manneseh N. Mphelo, "The Balemba of the Northern Transvaal," *Native Teachers' Journal* 16, no. 1 (1936):35-44.

Tamarkin states, “Mphelo endeavored to correct others’ mistakes, socially situate informants who had elsewhere been decontextualized, and, through his own role as author and his inclusion of other authors’ direct quotations from the Lemba people, amplify Lemba knowledge production.”[103] In this context, Lemba knowledge production emerges as a form of social, cultural and political empowerment, as Lemba people, through their own writing, began to critically consider their identity and culture, as well as the issues that concern them and their community.

According to Tamarkin, on the question of the racial and religious origins of the Lemba, Mphelo stresses “both Lemba Africanness and their Jewishness.”[104] In order to justify his interpretation, Tamarkin quotes Mphelo:

> Like the Jews the Balemba are wanderers . . . they are just like the other Bantu of South Africa in appearance. . . but one can easily distinguish a Mulemba by his straight nose. . . . The Rev. A. A. Jacques, of the Swiss Mission, describes the writer’s grandfather Maphangwa as having what may be termed a typical Jewish nose.[105]

As Tamarkin explains, “he then detailed what he felt should be known about the Lemba, reframing most of what Schlomann, Junod and Jacques noted as religious practices as instead aspects of material culture, kinship and customs.”[106] However, in these passages it is clear that Mphelo is not claiming the Lemba as religiously Jewish, only that they are “like the Jews”. From Mphelo’s perspective, although he might affirm their “Jewishness” in this passage, he does this only to highlight the distinctiveness of Lemba people, based on racial and cultural, rather than religious characteristics.

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[103] Tamarkin, 33.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

In addition to this commentary, Mphelo voices several of his own concerns for the Lemba in relation to the increasing "loss of land" to white farm owners in rural areas, and the "bureaucratization of identity" by colonial authorities, such as Van Warmelo.[107] As Mphelo states,

> Thirty or forty years ago they practiced all their customs freely, 'but now' most of the young men feel very much ashamed to be members of this tribe, and consequently when their nationality is inquired into in the Native Affairs document offices, pronounce themselves Bavenda or Bapedi.[108]

In this context, Mphelo, "encouraged Lemba young people to claim themselves as such, and he called on all Lemba young people to buy land so that they might live on it together."[109] While these passages speak to growing anxiety among Lemba people over the loss of their culture, and the increasingly difficult nature of their circumstances, it also highlights growing optimism among their leaders.

In addition to Mphelo's article, M. M. Motenda, wrote two influential essays on the history of the Lemba in the Northern Transvaal: "The History of the Western Venda and of the Lemba" and "The Lemba Tribe".[110] As Tamarkin explains, in one way, Motenda's writing figures as a response to Van Warmelo's rigid classifications and assumptions about Lemba people, their customs and culture. For Motenda, there is certainly an emphasis on Lemba distinctiveness, but not in the way that Van Warmelo and others imagine. Indeed, while Motenda considers the Lemba to be unique, they are not thought to be fundamentally different from other tribal groups, (including their Venda neighbours with whom the Lemba have co-existed for

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[107] Ibid. Also see, Buijs, "Black Jews of the Northern Transvaal," 671-672.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] M. M. Motenda, "History of the Western Venda and of the Lemba," in *The Copper Miners of Mussina and the Early History of the Zoutansberg*, edited by N. J. Van Warmelo, Pretoria SA: Government Printer (1940): 51-70; M. M. Motenda, "The Lemba Tribe," *Bantu* 2 (1958): 61-65.

generations), as Van Warmelo and others believed. According to Motenda, Lemba culture, language, practices, and traditions have been shaped by the lived experiences of Lemba people in Southern Africa as their histories intersect and overlap with the histories of others, such as the Venda, in a fluid, contingent, and contextual manner.[111] For example as Tamarkin notes, Motenda "explains that it was the Lemba chief Nkalahonye who, travelling with only a few people, arrived at Mbelengwa in what is now Zimbabwe, subjected all others, and there became known as Mulemba—but on defeat by Mulozwi, the great grandfather of Thoho-ya-Ndou, 'they became one tribe and afterward emigrated together and came to Venda'."[112]

For Motenda, the issues at stake for the Lemba lay in the fundamentally deeper problems with Van Warmelo's research that defined them in terms of essential features and origins, that would later create the conditions for their status and treatment under apartheid.[113] To shape future publications, policy, and research, Motenda stressed the historical evidence of Lemba chieftaincies (noted above), the contingency of their traditions and practices (including endogamy, a practice that Motenda explains is a "recent innovation tied to the defeat of a Lemba chieftaincy in what is now Zimbabwe that had led to their migration south"[114]), as well as the fluctuation of regional languages (Motenda writes that "in course of time the Tshikaranga language disappeared and only Tshivenda survived. Today we are all Venda"[115]), as evidence against the simplistic binary oppositions and racial tropes that characterized the Lemba as essentially separate and distinct in Van Warmelo's research.[116] According to Tamarkin, while Motenda's essays did not influence Van Warmelo's final reports on the Lemba published several

[111] Tamarkin, 35.
[112] Ibid., 35. As cited in M. M. Motenda, "History of the Western Venda and of the Lemba," 52.
[113] Ibid., 36-37.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid. As cited in Motenda, 54.
[116] Ibid.

years later, they did however set the stage for early Lemba intellectual and political organization and activism in the struggle against apartheid.[117]

The observations and representations of the Lemba by European explorers and missionary ethnologists documented here, can be understood, in a broader way, as examples of nineteenth century race science, and ultimately, the illogic of colonialism. In these contexts, African difference, of course, is racialized, and subject to the authorizing discourses of colonial authorities, such as Van Warmelo. While the missionary and ethnological discourse in the colonial period of South Africa privileges Lemba identity as Semitic, Lemba intellectuals such Mphelo and M. M. Motenda stress the contingent and historical factors that created the social, political, linguistic, and cultural conditions for the Lemba, and their own understanding of their culture and identity, and as they challenged the issues pertaining to their understanding of race, place, and identity.

[117] Ibid.

Chapter Three: Lemba Experiences Under Apartheid:

Lemba Voices and Political Organization

The intersection of race, religion, and ethnicity, in the history of apartheid South Africa, represents a complex and extensive topic. In this chapter, I will briefly examine this history through several narratives through which these categories were negotiated, imagined, and contested, in different ways by Lemba actors. The narratives that I focus on here emerge in the literature that frames the significance of Judaism among Lemba people, as they navigate their identity politics in an era marked by inequalities and turbulent political circumstances. In this chapter, I discuss the question of how Judaism figures in the lived experiences of Lemba people during apartheid.

The first part of this chapter outlines the history of the Lemba during apartheid and focuses on the organization of the Lemba Cultural Association (LCA). The second part of this chapter reflects on the question of Jewishness as a feature of Lemba identity politics in South Africa, as Lemba actors seek a defined sense of political belonging and hope for their future. I engage with these themes in order to think about the Lemba's struggle to be recognized by the South African government during apartheid as a distinct ethnic group, and what this implies for the Lemba and their efforts to assert their political autonomy. I will then briefly introduce the issue of genetic testing on the Lemba, as Lemba leaders sought recognition through appeals to genetic difference. In this context, I argue that Lemba claims to Jewishness emerge as part of an inventive tradition among their leaders that aligns with broader political claims to group cohesiveness and ethnicity, especially during these periods of instability and uncertainty.

In order to address these issues, I draw on Noah Tamarkin's extensive ethnographic research, especially in his article, "Religion as Race: Recognition as Democracy," later

recounted as part of two distinct chapters in his book *Genetic Afterlives: Black Jewish Indigeneity in South Africa*. Tamarkin, informed by a deep legacy of Lemba political activism, suggests that to understand Lemba identity politics in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to address the experiences of Lemba people under apartheid, and to highlight the way in which these experiences affect the Lemba and their identity politics in the present.[118]

It is important to note the significance of Tamarkin's article. First, in comparison to the colonial accounts of the Lemba examined in chapter one, it represents a more informed account of Lemba history based on ethnographic research with Lemba people, and privileges in-depth interviews and archival information from Lemba individuals, including Lucas Thobakgale, M. J. Mungulwa, and Chaplain William Masala Mhani. Second, the way in which Tamarkin discusses Lemba history casts doubt on the idea, perpetuated by scholars and the media, that what really concerns Lemba people about their culture and identity is whether they are accepted as authentically Jewish or received as part of a Jewish Diaspora, whereas "what was actually at stake was citizenship and belonging in South Africa."[119] This presents a significant perspective in the literature since most of the scholarship on the Lemba is oriented towards the question of solving their origins and negotiating the authenticity of their Jewish identity, but often without a consideration of local history or politics.

Of course, this is not to deride previous scholarship on the Lemba, but simply to highlight how this presents an empirical challenge to scholars who are interested in examining Lemba culture and religion as *sui generis*, or as categories that have been defined as unique and apolitical.[120] One example of this kind of approach exists as part of the narrative of the lost tribes

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[118] Tamarkin et. al, "Religion as Race: Recognition as Democracy," 148.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Russell T. McCutcheon, "A Default of Critical Intelligence? The Scholar of Religion as Public Intellectual," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 2 (1997): 445–446.

of Israel, a form of genetic diaspora that today is implicitly connected with the politics of Zionism. The study of the political, i.e., the history of religion, race, and ethnicity in South Africa challenges assumptions about Lemba people generated by scholars and the media. In what follows, I will briefly trace the history of the LCA through apartheid, and the legacies of LCA leadership during this period, in order to think about the broader context for their engagement with geneticists and scholars interested in their Jewish identity. It is important to note that while I draw primarily from Tamarkin's scholarship, his work provides a historical lens through which to understand contemporary issues in Lemba communities in South Africa.

A Brief History of the Lemba Cultural Association: 1930's-1980's

During the 1930's, 40's and 50's, under the leadership of leader, scholar, and activist M. M. Motenda, the Lemba community formed the Lemba Cultural Association (LCA).[121] The LCA brought together Lemba families, elders, and relatives in an effort to celebrate and preserve their cultural identity, empower Lemba people in society, and improve life for Lemba people more generally. Due to the fact that Lemba people had difficulty securing work in what was the Venda Homeland during apartheid (present-day Limpopo Province), Lemba people often had to find employment elsewhere. The LCA was therefore established into separate branches throughout South Africa, including chapters in Johannesburg and Soweto, where Lemba people found employment. The LCA was internally funded through members of their organization.[122] The central location for LCA political and cultural activity was, and still is, Sweetwaters, a rural site in the Limpopo Province, where Lemba people, and invited guests, gather each year for an annual conference.

[121] Tamarkin, "Religion as Race: Recognition as Democracy," 151; Tamarkin, Genetic Afterlives, 36; Buijs, 671-672.
[122] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 38.

According to Buijs, the initial formation of the LCA was an organized response to the scarcity of social and economic resources in the northern Transvaal in the early twentieth century, as white Europeans laid claim to land held previously by black farmers, and they in turn had to find other sources of stability and income.[123] This, of course, is a direct reference to the Native Land Act enacted by the South African parliament in 1913, that privileged white ownership of land, and restricted black South African rights to land, and also the degree to which they could live on farms owned by white people. Furthermore, the establishment of the LCA was also the result of increasing social and political activism during apartheid, especially among a young generation of Lemba leaders, as they sought to define themselves, and assert their own identity as an ethnic group, in a repressive and antagonistic environment.[124]

In this context, it seems that the invention of tradition figures prominently. As Buijs contends, the competition for land, economic resources, and employment opportunities among various ethnic groups in the northern Transvaal, especially during apartheid, resulted in the creation of a new ethnic consciousness among the Lemba as Jewish. As Buijs argues,

> While the Lemba were aware of their distinct cultural heritage before colonization, it was only when ethnic identity became important in apartheid terms that the construction of a present day Jewish heritage was built up through the medium of the LCA. The main aim of the association appears to have been to promote the economic success of Lembas in present day South Africa, by appealing to a distant non-African past which could be associated with a particularly successful white community in South Africa, and one which was clearly allied with resistance to apartheid.[125]

This argument, however, has been subject to two important critiques by scholars. First by Magdel le Roux, who writes in response,

> This might be true, but some Lemba informants told me that during the years of the black liberation struggle in South Africa, they kept up their culture but many were not willing

[123] Buijs, 671.
[124] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 30.
[125] Buijs, 671.?

> to be associated with a non-African (white) race. Precisely for this reason they preferred not to disclose their identity during census recordings and other occasions.[126]

Another important critique figures as a footnote in Tamarkin's book *Genetic Afterlives*, where he writes,

> Buijs is suggesting that identifying themselves as Jews allowed them to align with whiteness in a way that was also aligned with anti-apartheid sentiment. I am not convinced that the LCA emphasis on Lemba Jewish ancestry was this instrumentalist, or that among Lemba people who identified in the 1940's-1980's with a Jewish past there was a sense that white South African Jews were more aligned with anti-apartheid sentiment than other white South Africans.[127]

Indeed, while I agree that Buijs' argument represents an overly rigid, indeed, historically inaccurate account of Lemba political, cultural, and ideological commitments during apartheid, and their claims to a modern Jewish identity, Buijs nonetheless presents fascinating details that illustrate the creative process for the Lemba as they began to incorporate Judaism into their culture. As Buijs writes,

> Myths concerning the alleged Jewish origins of the Lemba were generally well known among whites in the northern Transvaal and seem to have been accepted as possibly true. The Lemba themselves do not seem at this time to have been conscious of specifically Jewish connections, not surprisingly, since there were only two Jewish families, that of a Dr. and Mrs. Cohen, that Mutendwa Bulengwa spent some time working for, prior to his founding of the Lemba cultural association (LCA). Here, in Mrs. Cohen's Kosher kitchen, it is said, he had ample opportunity to observe Jewish dietary ritual and similarities to Lemba traditional customs.[128]

In order to substantiate these details, Buijs' draws on the work of Tudor Parfitt in his 1987 book *The Thirteenth Gate: Travels Among the Lost Tribes of Israel*, where Parfitt interviews an elderly Jewish man in Louis Trichardt. In this context Buijs relates how this man

> told him that a neighbour of his, an orthodox Jew, 'used to employ a number of Lemba servants. Years and years ago. Long before the war. He had Magen Davids all over the house. It happened that a fellow called Mtenda, one of his servants, was a founder of the

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[126] Le Roux, *The Lemba: A Lost Tribe of Israel In Southern Africa?*, 27,
[127] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 206
[128] Buijs, 673.

> Lemba cultural association. It was Mtenda who designed the logo of the association – an elephant inside the Star of David.[129]

In addition to this, Buijs cites Parfitt, who "notes that the Star of David had only become a Jewish symbol in the late Middle Ages, so 'it could hardly be the vestige of some ancient Jewish migration.'"[130]

It appears that these passages provide evidence for an inventive tradition among the Lemba that places emphasis on a Jewish identity and some kind of connection to Judaism. The foundation of the LCA was, in this way, a product of a creative process of social and cultural identification, as Motenda merged Jewish religious symbolism into his own ideas about what constituted a distinct Lemba cultural identity, through the creation of the LCA logo, for example. Although there is little evidence in these passages to suggest an identification with religious aspects of Jewish culture for the Lemba, except for the brief references to Jewish dietary laws and the star of David, in the context of Motenda's time working at the Cohen's household, these passages, nonetheless, attest to his creativity, especially in order to distinguish the Lemba as a distinct cultural group during apartheid.

In any case, the initial organization of the LCA was met with a positive reception from the Lemba community.[131] However, this response was "motivated" by "fears about the loss of a distinct cultural identity through an increased participation in mission education and labour migration."[132] According to Tamarkin, these fears were amplified for the LCA during apartheid, when National Party policies and laws failed to acknowledge the Lemba's existence as an ethnic group.[133] However, it is not clear whether the Lemba, as a collective, were as threatened by

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[129] Ibid.,
[130] Ibid.
[131] Tamarkin, "Religion as Race: Recognition as Democracy," 151.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

apartheid as Tamarkin describes. As Le Roux recalls during her fieldwork, she did not get the impression that the Lemba felt threatened by apartheid.[134] Le Roux maintains that the primary issue that concerned, and still concerns the Lemba today, is cultural dilution (or cultural homogenization): the loss of their culture, as a result of a variety of historical, social, and political factors, including the broader forces of modernity and globalization, and their assimilation into the dominant culture.[135] In this context, their claims to a distinct and separate cultural identity can be understood as a way of maintaining their culture and addressing these issues in their communities.

In any case, whether or not some of the Lemba felt more threatened by apartheid than others, five laws introduced by the National Party had particular consequences for the Lemba as a collective: The 1950 Group Areas Act, which segregated black South Africans into defined residential and economic districts, as well as distinct territories; The 1951 Bantu Authorities Act which granted "new duties and powers to chiefs, increasing their numbers"[136]; The 1952 Pass Laws, laws which had existed during the colonial period, but were enforced by the National Party for the purposes of restricting the movement of black South Africans and enforcing ethnic and racial segregation throughout South Africa; The 1958 Promotion of Black Self Government Act that "legally divided South Africans not only in terms of race but also in terms of ethnicity, their designated 'national units'."[137]; The National States Citizenship Act, "formally stripped all black South Africans" of South African citizenship, and conferred citizenship of "the homeland that corresponded to their ethnicity, which was determined by the language they spoke."[138] These

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[134] Le Roux, *The Lemba: A Lost Tribe of Israel in Southern Africa?*, 42.
[135] Ibid., 27.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Tamarkin, Religion as Race: Recognition as Democracy," 153.

laws acted as fundamental tools for white supremacists, as the National Party controlled and manipulated access to political, social, and economic resources in South Africa for the benefit and prosperity of white people.[139]

According to Tamarkin, in each of these laws, the political and cultural survival of the Lemba and their identity were at stake. In terms of the Promotion of Black Self Government Act, for example, the government only recognized eight ethnic groups, each granted rights under the aforementioned laws: North-Sotho, South-Sotho, Swazi, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, and Zulu.[140] As Tamarkin explains, "the omission of the Lemba from that list greatly increased LCA fears that they were being written out of existence and set the terms of Lemba organizing for decades to come, especially as the homeland system ossified the already increasingly rigid ethnic categories."[141] It is important to note, however, that the Lemba were one among many other minority ethnic groups in South Africa who were marginalized as a result of the apartheid government's Bantustan policy, a policy that created the conditions for the displacement of black South Africans into ethnically defined homelands.[142]

The reasons for the government's failure to include the Lemba, among other minority ethnic groups, as an official ethnic group stem partly from Van Warmelo's published reports. These reports, as discussed in the previous chapter, played an instrumental role in the creation of the Bantustan policy of separate national development. According to Van Warmelo, the Lemba did not meet the criteria for this policy, which consisted of three requirements: a distinct language, a recognized chieftaincy, and sufficient numbers to attain status as a officially

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[139] Keith Shear, "At War With The Pass Laws? Reform And The Policing Of White Supremacy In 1940s South Africa," *The Historical journal* 56, no. 1 (2013): 205–07.
[140] Ibid, 152.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Yonatan Tesfaye Fessha, *Ethnic Diversity and Federalism Constitution Making in South Africa and Ethiopia,* Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010:70.; Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 36-37. Also see Laura Evens, *Survival in the "Dumping Grounds": a Social History of Apartheid Relocation* Leiden: Brill, 2019.

recognized ethnic group.[143] As Le Roux discusses, however, there was likely not enough census material for the government to determine the actual numbers of the Lemba, due to the fact the Lemba were often secretive about their identity and did not wish to disclose their identity on census reports.[144] In an 1994 interview with M. E. R. Mathivha (former President of the LCA) on the subject, Le Roux writes,

> Mathivha explained that previously they did not want to make their identity known as they were participating in the struggle against apartheid (1948-1994). Therefore, even during a census, they would not reveal their identity because they did not want to be considered as outsiders (by the people of South Africa). As a result, very few people knew about their existence and traditions of origin.

This statement is consistent with the literature on the political attitudes of black South Africans during apartheid. As Yonatan Fessha states, "sociological research and public opinion surveys revealed a widespread opposition to the homelands and to the underlying principle of making ethnicity as a basis for political activity. The majority of black Africans did not consider themselves as 'ethnic subjects'." Therefore, it is important to note that although Van Warmelo created the conditions for the Lemba's marginalization under apartheid, it seems that the fact that the Lemba did not reveal their identity on census records also contributed to their lack of recognition from the government.[145] The secrecy of the Lemba at this time reflects an important narrative of political resistance to apartheid: the activism of a common resistance front, especially as anti-apartheid activists, including Steve Biko, as well as all of the major African political movements at the time (the ANC, the Pan-Africanist Congress, and the Black

[143] N. J. Van Warmelo, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa*, 122.
[144] Magdel le Roux. "Sing, Eat, Pray: Transmission of Tradition in Lemba Communities in Southern Africa," *African and black diaspora* 11, no. 2 (2018): 112.
[145] Ibid.

Consciousness Movement) rejected the National Party's legal entrenchment of ethnic differences.[146]

In any case, the exclusion of the Lemba (as well as other minority ethnic groups) from the category of separate national development meant that "no matter where they lived, they were forced to be citizens of homelands that were defined by ethnic identities they did not claim and were forced to carry passbooks that overwrote the ethnic identity they did claim."[147] For Lemba intellectuals, including Motenda, however, there was substantial evidence to suggest that the Lemba could in fact be recognized as an official ethnic group based on the legal categories described above. However, their claims to legitimacy and their appeals to be recognized on the basis of these categories in official government documents were largely ignored by Van Warmelo, who instead reinforced the idea that the Lemba did not have a language of their own, did not possess a legitimate chieftaincy, and did not have the numbers to be claimed as one of the greater Southern African ethnic groupings encompassing the Bantu.[148] They were instead, listed as a fifth grouping, consisting of "Lemba and Others". As Tamarkin explains, although Motenda's published essays were recognized as official government documents, "neither caried the same weight of scientific authority that Van Warmelo's classifications did."[149]

In this context, the Lemba were incorporated into the ethnic jurisdiction of the Venda, whose government was often opposed to them, and closely monitored the activities of their leaders throughout apartheid.[150] According to Buijs, under the Venda government, life was particularly repressive, as the Lemba, alongside others who opposed the Venda government were

[146] Fessha, 71.
[147] Tamarkin, "Religion as Race: Recognition as Democracy," 162.
[148] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 36-37.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 206; Buijs, 677-678.

subject to the potential perils of arrest, torture, imprisonment, and even death. Buij's account of this situation draws on the writing of Pat Sidley, a South African journalist, whose work appeared in a left-wing journal entitled *Work in Progress*. Sidley, describing Venda as South Africa's "Banana Republic", wrote,

> Active resistance barely exists in Venda. With isolated exceptions, little of the conflict South African and other Bantustans have encountered reached Venda. It was nipped in the bud so fiercely that a tangible air of terror pervades and all but the bravest – and the clergy – are silent and fearful. . . .The official opposition no longer exists, having been jailed before independence in 1979.[151]

In Tamarkin's article, "Race as Religion: Recognition as Democracy," he argues that the omission of the Lemba in official government legislation, and their forced inclusion in the Venda homeland represents an example of the symbolic "violence of non-recognition", i.e., the legal erasure of the Lemba by the South African government during apartheid, and the efforts by Lemba people to be recognized in this system.[152] Tamarkin indicates that when the LCA petitioned to the government for ethnic recognition, they received a letter from the director of the Bantu Reference Bureau acknowledging their existence as an ethnic group. This acknowledgement, however, proved to be superficial, inasmuch as their recognition did not help the LCA to achieve their goals for land, in the form of an ethnically defined homeland, and only reinforced the dominant ideological narrative that encouraged the separate development of black people.

Symbolic violence can be read in numerous ways, but in this context, it is possible to understand this argument in relation to a theory developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) who argues that "the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often

[151] Buijs, 676.
[152] Ibid., 156.

be perceived as acceptable and even natural."[153] Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as a "gentle violence, imperceptible, and invisible to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling."[154] Tamarkin's claim, in this respect, revolves around the idea that the Lemba were forced to identify with other ethnic groups during apartheid. Indeed, later during the postapartheid era, the LCA's petitions for Lemba ethnic recognition were also, to an extent, ignored by the government. From this perspective, Tamarkin writes, "it is important not to underestimate the symbolic violence" of non-recognition that the Lemba "collectively experienced", and to think about how this symbolic violence shaped and continues to shape their efforts for recognition.[155] However, it is important to note that this use of symbolic violence privileges the circumstances of the Lemba as unique in the history of apartheid, in contrast to those of other minority ethnic groups who were also discriminated against in relatively similar ways.[156]

Furthermore, not all Lemba people desired their ethnic recognition during apartheid. Indeed, as discussed above, the majority of Lemba people during apartheid did not wish to disclose their identity in government censuses, and instead wished to "keep their identity secret" and chose to "identify with their hosts."[157] Le Roux comments that "this is in contradiction to what is recorded by Tamarkin many years later (and after many elders had passed away)," namely that "the state did not acknowledge the Lemba's ethnic existence."[158] From Le Roux's

[153] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Masculine Domination*, Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001: 1-2.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Tamarkin *et. al*., "Race as Religion: Recognition as Democracy," 162.
[156] This commentary reflects Professor Eliakim Sibanda's feedback on this thesis, who notes that it was not unusual for smaller ethnic groups, such as the Lemba to be subsumed under larger ones, such as the Venda during South Africa's apartheid era. Also, see Fessha, 70.
[157] Le Roux, "Sing, Eat, Pray: Transmission of Tradition in Lemba Communities in Southern Africa," 112.
[158] Ibid.

perspective, this indicates a historical shift in the political attitudes of the Lemba community. This commentary aligns with the literature on the political motivations of black South African leaders during apartheid. As Fessha notes,

> scholars identified two types of homeland leaders. These were leaders that accepted the homelands as the practical tool to fight apartheid, on the one hand, and those that used the homeland to forge ethnic unity, on the other, with the latter, knowingly or unknowingly, contributing to the realization of the objectives of the homeland policy.[159]

The attitudes of younger Lemba leaders who advocated for their ethnic unity, and also for their own homeland, appear to belong to the second type of homeland leaders described in the literature. As Le Roux comments, "I am not surprised that they are taking this stance as I have noticed the younger, more politically orientated Lemba leaders had a different approach towards their history and identity after some of the elderly people had passed away."[160] Hence, this contradiction between Le Roux and Tamarkin's research, not only speaks to the multiplicity of Lemba voices, and the diversity of their perspectives, opinions, and beliefs, especially from a historical perspective; it is also a reflection of the particular political motivations of different Lemba leaders. This provokes two questions: whose history is being recorded? Do certain approaches to history, negate or bracket the stories of others? Tamarkin's research clearly reflects, and also privileges, the voices of a younger generation of Lemba leaders, whose particular approach to Lemba politics and history shaped the outcomes and discursive construction of his research.

In any case, following Le Roux's commentary, since the majority of Lemba chose not to identify themselves as Lemba on government censuses during apartheid, it follows that there is little proof to suggest that the Lemba were, in fact, forced to identify with other ethnic groups,

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[159] Fessha, 69.
[160] Ibid.

even though the systematic implementation of apartheid legislation, in the end, forced them to be political subjects of the Venda and Lebowa homeland governments. On the contrary, this reading suggests that the Lemba likely had the option to identify with their own ethnic group for the purposes of government census material but chose not to in order to keep their identity a secret, since they wanted to stand in solidarity with other black South Africans during apartheid.

This lack of census material likely contributed to the government's inability to recognize the Lemba as an official ethnic group in the same way as larger ethnic groups, because they "were never properly counted", and were therefore denied separate national development in the form of an ethnically defined homeland. These observations do not appear to support the idea that the government forced them to identify with others, rather this reflects different attitudes among the Lemba during apartheid towards their recognition as an ethnic group.

In what follows, I will describe one example of a situation where the passbooks acted as an informal tool for the categorization of ethnic identity. I highlight this in order to suggest that, in contrast with Tamarkin's claims about the Lemba's collective experience of the violence of non-recognition, the history of Lemba activism during apartheid, as recounted by certain Lemba individuals, reflects the difference in political attitudes among Lemba people, as they attempt to solidify their ethnic status.

Lemba Resilience During Apartheid

It is in the context of state repression and subjugation that certain Lemba people stood in solidarity with each other, as they sought their inclusion in government legal frameworks, and advocated for state recognition as a legally recognized ethnic group. As Tamarkin notes, the LCA, under the leadership of Motenda, organized three projects during the early years of apartheid: to engage and "enlist as many Lemba people as possible across Venda and Pedi

districts so they could demonstrate that they were one people, divided only by others' borders"; to assist Lemba chiefs in the recognition of their chieftaincy; to appeal to the government to allow Lemba people to identify as Lemba on passbooks, and also to encourage Lemba people to write down Lemba as their tribe on their passbooks.[161]

The LCA's first constitution reflected these broader aims, especially in order to "facilitate Lemba cultural survival."[162] It advocated three objectives:

1. To foster and maintain the culture of the Balemba tribe
2. To encourage and facilitate the commercial and educational pursuits among members of the tribe as well as general progress of the people
3. To assist and render reliefs among members of the tribe, educationally, legally, and otherwise, on all cases recommended by the executive Committee and approved by the Lemba Cultural Association.[163]

According to Tamarkin, this both represents a "multifaceted plan for Lemba survival" and figures as a response to the social, cultural, legal, and political injustices of apartheid.[164]

As mentioned above, Motenda encouraged Lemba people to stand in solidarity with each other, and demand that the name Lemba be written on their passbooks by government authorities. Tamarkin recounts one important story that attests to Motenda's determination and commitment to the Lemba's recognition in this regard. In this context, France Masala Mhani, Chaplain William Masala's eldest brother, is one of the recipients of a letter from Motenda in which he instructs them to "gather Lemba people and together demand to be identified in their reference books as Lemba."[165] Tamarkin writes,

> When France got the letter, he was afraid. Because he was a headman, he showed it to the chief, who shared his fear and suggested the two of them take it to the native commissioner. Upon seeing the letter, the commissioner ordered the police to bring in Motenda. Then, in front of the police, the chief, and Motenda, the commissioner

[161] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 37.
[162] Ibid., 38.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., 39.

> demanded that France explain the letter and what it instructed him to do. Upset by France's lack of solidarity, Motenda yelled at him, "You are not Lemba? Tell me you are not Lemba!" Finally, the commissioner asked France directly, "Are you a Lemba?" Even with the police present, he answered "Yes." Motenda's fervor and France's eventual bravery won the day: the commissioner took France's pass, wrote "Lemba" on it, and said, "Here. You are a Lemba. Take it." This small victory further motivated Motenda and captivated William Masala.[166]

This passage reflects the overall weakness of the National Party's influence on local political authority during apartheid. It also paints a picture of the obstacles faced by Lemba leaders as they fought for political recognition on the ground. Moreover, this passage demonstrates the power of civil disobedience and grass-roots activism, as a young generation of Lemba people began to assert their own voices, and challenge state power structures through their political agency. Furthermore, this represents an important moment for young Lemba activists, such as France and William Masala, as they felt empowered and compelled to pursue social justice on behalf of Lemba people.

In the retelling of this story, Tamarkin mentions the figure of William Masala (1925-2013), a spiritual chaplain of the Lemba, and prominent LCA leader. Masala was deeply inspired and influenced by Motenda and shared in his political and intellectual mission of Lemba activism and resistance to the apartheid government's Bantustan policy. In the first chapter of Tamarkin's book *Genetic Afterlives*, entitled "Producing Lemba Archives, Becoming Genetic Jews," as Tamarkin reflects on the deep relationship between these two important thinkers, and what they both held as sacred for the Lemba community.

Tamarkin begins with a reflection on a critical moment in the history of the LCA: the final days of M. M. Motenda, and the succession of LCA leadership. In May 1982, Motenda was

[166] Ibid.

on his deathbed with Masala present. Here, Motenda "imparted his final lessons," as Tamarkin writes,

> Handing Masala a small stack of documents that he had written about their people, Motenda told him, 'Masala, pray for the Lemba. Don't speak many words. Just say God our Father, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, do you leave this nation to die away?' Masala telling me this story in 2006 at his home in Sinthimule went on: 'he said only those words: . . . Ask the Lord, is he leaving the Lemba people to die?'[167]

In this passage, it is clear that the political is intertwined with the spiritual, as the legal erasure of the Lemba under apartheid equates with a deeper existential anxiety about the very survival of the Lemba people. However, it is also important to reflect on the positivity of Motenda's words, as Masala is tasked with the responsibility to guide the Lemba, and to engage with the spiritual life of the Lemba community during a turbulent and uncertain moment in their history.

This provides an important context to think about the underlying theme of Jewishness for the Lemba, as a tradition that they began to identify with and understand as their own, as early as the 1940's, when they began to describe themselves as Jews in their published material. In this context, their Jewish identity emerges out of a complex process of social identification that reflects their experiences during the colonial era, when many of them, including Motenda and Masala, received a Christian mission education, and also during apartheid, and when they actively resisted apartheid legislation. Motenda's references to "God our father, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob", and to the "Lord" in this passage indicates a strong Christian influence on their spiritual beliefs, and also reflects the way in which they understood their culture as Jewish, as they read and interpreted scripture in light of their own culture.

In any case, Masala's activity during apartheid, in a similar way as Motenda's, centered around the issue of Lemba cultural survival. As Tamarkin discusses, this issue is conveyed in

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[167] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 29.

three different artistic illustrations that Masala created to address the Lemba's situation and their treatment during apartheid. It is important to note that these illustrations represent important examples of Lemba material culture. The first of these illustrations, Masala's "apartheid map", entitled "Where do we stand?", depicts a group of faceless Lemba people underneath a fruit tree.[168] Within the branches of this tree is a collection of African faces, underlined by their associated ethnic labels. This is a representation of the ethnic groups who had secured a status as an independent state during apartheid. Among these ethnic groups include, Xhosa, Venda, Zulu, Tswana, Swazis, Basotho and Shangaans. Between the Lemba and the tree is a ladder with a head, underlined by Ndebele climbing the ladder, "a reference to the Ndebele's ambiguous status" at the time. As Tamarkin explains,

> Those who would bear fruit and flourish had been singled out by the government as nations that would develop–separately and slowly–in their own homelands. Needless to say, fruitful and flourishing was not how most South Africans viewed the homeland system. But as Masala's image depicted, his belief in the homelands as essential for Lemba prosperity was not about the relative possession or thriving of individuals but about the recognition and thriving of an ethnic identity.[169]

In this way, Masala's apartheid map reflects his thoughts about the exclusion of the Lemba from the system of apartheid, as a people without a face, or indeed, a future, outside of the system, and in a state of anxiety over their erasure. It is important to note that Masala's perspective on the homeland system, reflects Le Roux's critique of the "younger generation" of Lemba political activists during apartheid.

A second illustration depicts a burial image, wherein the Lemba, represented by hands and feet emerging from a grave, are gasping for life at the feet of a man ("a representation of Venda", and likely the Venda Chief Minister Mphephu), clearly in danger of being buried alive,

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[168] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 43.
[169] Ibid., 42.

a reference to their treatment in Venda during apartheid.[170] Meanwhile, a third image[171] depicts Margaret Nabarro (d. 1997), a South African Jewish ethnomusicologist and friend of Masala's, "pulling them out of the grave," with a headline from Ezekiel 37:11-14 titled "Can these bones live again?". These illustrations feature prominently in Tamarkin's book *Genetic Afterlives*, as they capture Masala's sense of the gravity of the Lemba's circumstances during apartheid.

In the third illustration, Nabarro is depicted as a white Jewish ally in the Lemba's struggle during apartheid. Nabarro was first introduced to the Lemba in the 1950's, through her study of Portuguese Converso music in Mozambique's Inhambane province. According to Tamarkin, through a comparative study of Yemeni, Converso and Lemba music, Nabarro "became convinced that the Lemba were Jews, as they said, and that other's theories of Lemba origins were incorrect."[172] Nabarro attended the LCA's annual conference "as an invited guest, occasionally sharing her research as well as more general information about comparative Jewish music and culture."[173] Nabarro's connection to the Lemba is framed in a positive light: not only was Nabarro one of Masala's trusted friends, but she also held a strong belief in the Lemba's claims to a Jewish heritage, and brought attention to them to her colleagues, including her husband Frank Nabarro (1916-2006), as well as geneticist Trefor Jenkins, at the University of Witwatersrand, who later pioneered the initial genetic test on the Lemba. According to Tamarkin, "this was the intellectual and political context that President M. E. R. Mathivha entered into when he became the LCA president after Motenda's death," when he began to develop relationships with the broader scholarly community, including geneticists and Jewish

[170] Ibid., 44.
[171] Ibid., 47.
[172] Ibid., 44.
[173] Ibid.

studies scholars, and world Jewry.[174] I will discuss this context in more detail in chapter four, however, for now, I wish to briefly highlight the political continuities for the Lemba between the periods of apartheid and postapartheid, in order to discuss the challenges that remain for the Lemba in South Africa as they continue to address the difficult legacies left by the apartheid government.

Postapartheid Justice – Lemba Struggle for State Recognition

In 1985, Jacques Derrida published his essay, “Racism’s Last Word”. Here, Derrida articulates a brief, yet powerful, discussion of apartheid in South Africa. Derrida frames his discussion in terms of ‘remains’: “Apartheid–may that *remain* the name from now on, the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world, the last of many.”[175] In 1994, apartheid had officially ended, and South Africa emerged as a reformed democratic country with new hopes and aspirations for its political future. Yet, despite the new government’s commitment to an ideal of democratic inclusion and multiculturalism, the residual effects of apartheid were evident in the ways in which the new government addressed issues of postapartheid justice. Indeed, numerous issues that existed before and during apartheid carried over into the new era of political governance. Among these issues is the much-contested notion of traditional leadership, especially as it exists in relation to its defining characteristic, ethnicity, a broader social category that, in this context, refers to the way in which South African ethnic groups, and their political structures, were categorized and organized by the apartheid government.

As Tamarkin notes, traditional leadership was perceived either as a “fundamentally undemocratic institution” that perpetuated the imposed system of chieftaincies in apartheid South

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[174] Ibid., 48.
[175] Derrida, “Racism’s Last Word,” 291.

Africa[176], or "as a necessary part of decolonization," wherein traditional leadership might be understood as more aligned to democratic values such as "conflict resolution" and "justice".[177] Nevertheless, the African National Congress (ANC), enacted a number of legal instruments to address the issue of traditional leadership, in order to both "honour" and "advance" the "place of African tradition in government policy".[178] In this section, I will briefly discuss the issue of traditional leadership for the Lemba, as it unfolds within the South African government's efforts towards postapartheid justice.

What does ethnic recognition entail in this context? In what ways does ethnic recognition benefit the Lemba in the new South Africa? As discussed above, the transition into postapartheid South Africa was characterized by profound changes to the social, political, and cultural landscape of South Africa, as black people regained their citizenship, as well as their right to vote. Despite these positive changes, the Lemba continued to be at a political disadvantage, since they were not recognized as an official ethnic group by the new South African government. The central issue here, of course, concerns the ideology of the South African constitution, which conflates language with ethnicity.[179]

The constitution officially recognizes eleven distinct languages corresponding to major ethnic groups in South Africa.[180] Language, therefore, forms the basis of what it means to be recognized as an ethnic group in contemporary South Africa. However, through the recognition of ethnicity based on language, the constitution solidified the ethnic statuses of ethnic groups

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[177] Ineke Van Kessel and Barbara Oomen, "'One Chief, One Vote': The Revival Of Traditional Authorities In Post-Apartheid South Africa," *African affairs (London)* 96, no. 385 (1997): 585.
[178] Tamarkin, 88.
[179] Jochen S. Arndt "Struggles of Land, Language, and Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Case of the Hlubi," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 9, no. 1 (2018): 1.
[180] "The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa," *justice.gov.za*, Last accessed June 16, 20218, https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/saconstitution-web-eng.pdf

recognized during apartheid in the postapartheid era. In terms of the governments' commitment to postapartheid reform and social justice, the conflation of ethnicity with language presented old problems in new ways, especially as unrecognized traditional leaders advocated for their claims to land and territory.[181]

Among these unrecognized leaders is Kgoshi Mpketsane, a Lemba chief, who resides in Indie village in South Africa's Limpopo Province. For scholars of the Lemba, such as Tudor Parfitt, Magdel le Roux and Noah Tamarkin, Kgoshi Mpketsane appears to be influential, especially as an individual who supported their research on the history of the Lemba. For Tamarkin, Kgoshi Mpketsane's story is especially important, as his ethnographic research revolves around the social and political relevance of Kgoshi Mpketsane's identification of the Lemba as black Jews.

Kgoshi Mpketsane's stakes in these claims have significant political import, since he struggled for political recognition on behalf of the Lemba as an official ethnic group.[182] Kgoshi Mpketsane's claims to ethnic recognition translated into legal rights to practice his traditional customs, including the rite of circumcision[183], as well as rights to land and territory that was previously dispossessed due to the Natives Land Act of 1913 and subsequent apartheid legislation.[184] Ethnic recognition, therefore, remains a necessary condition for his right to exercise his traditional leadership, a status denied to his family, despite their claims to chieftaincy for generations.[185]

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[181] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 88-99; Jochen S. Arndt, 1.
[182] Tamarkin, 88.
[183] For detailed information about the Lemba's circumcision ritual, see Shoko, 23. For initiation rituals for Lemba girls see, Shoko, 24.
[184] Ibid., 99.
[185] Ibid., 90-91.

In any case, from the early years of postapartheid governance onwards, Kgoshi Mpketsane has advanced his claims for traditional leadership. In order to do this, he has appealed to three successive commissions: the Ralushai commission, the Land Claims Commission, and the Nhaplo Commission, commissions that, while different in scope and practice, acted as legal instruments created in an effort to pursue the broader social objectives pursued by the ANC government. In doing so, Kgoshi Mpketsane emphasized Lemba difference, a difference that on the one hand reflected local political tensions in Indie village where he lives, (between himself and his political rival Kgoshi Maesaela, the recognized traditional leader of the Venda), and on the other hand, broader Lemba claims to their identity as black Jews, and their purported migratory history from Judea via Yemen into South Africa. However, his petitions to the government were largely unsuccessful, not simply because of his own efforts to prove the Lemba's ethnic difference, but also due to the limited capacity, narrow scope, and institutional shortcomings of these commissions to provide any kind of meaningful support.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is worthwhile to highlight the ways in which Kgoshi Mpketsane used the results of the genetic tests, as well as the work of scholars such as Le Roux and Parfitt, to buttress his claims to ethnic difference. This is particularly evident in his application to the Nhlapo Commission, though it is also apparent in his petition to both the Ralushai commission and the Land Claims Commission. In a way, Kgoshi Mpketsane's applications to these commissions present a case study on the inventive nature of his claims to Lemba ethnic difference as black Jews. I suggest that this lends support to the broader argument in this thesis, that the Lemba's claims to a Jewish identity are suggestive of an inventive tradition among their leaders as they reinterpret and reformulate their pre-existing materials (whether it be

their origins stories, migratory histories, rites, or customs, and so on) as Jewish, in order to appear credible.

As Tamarkin discusses, the Ralushai commission was a provincial government initiative in the Limpopo Province that dealt with the interrelated issues of traditional leadership and legal recognition. The commission "aimed to determine who had been properly deposed or appointed, and who should have been recognized and was not, because of the degree of their cooperation with or opposition to Bantu Authorities laws and the apartheid state."[186] As Tamarkin notes, "at his hearing" Kgoshi Mpketsane "emphasized two things: Balepa migratory histories and the longevity of his chieftaincy."[187] These were framed in relation to the Lemba's broader claims to an ancestral descent from ancient Israel, and to their identity as black Jews as a potentially useful category that could benefit the outcome of the commission's decision of whether or not to determine the legitimacy of Kgoshi Mpketsane's traditional leadership. To substantiate his claims, Kgoshi Mpketsane confirmed that his chieftaincy was legitimately recognized by Chief Sekhukhune, the head of the Pedi royal family (the Pedi or Northern Soho are one of the Lemba's neighbouring ethnic groups). However, Kgoshi Mpketsane's claims were met with suspicion among certain members of the commission, including Professor Ralushai himself, and was ultimately dismissed. According to Tamarkin, although the representatives of the commission expressed disbelief in the claim that the Lemba were the "true black Jews", (since Kgoshi Mpketsane did not mention a connection to the Falashas of Ethiopia, whom they regarded as the "true black Jews"), the reason for the dismissal was that Kgoshi Mpketsane's claim to chieftaincy was outside of the commission's mandate.[188] They argued that the majority

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[186] Ibid., 94.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid., 95.

of Kgoshi Mpketsane's supporters were not "Lepa" (Lemba) people, but actually Sekhukhune people, who already owned, and therefore occupied, the land in question.

Nevertheless, despite this initial setback, Kgoshi Mpketsane persevered, and later applied to other government led commissions committed to enacting postapartheid justice: The Land Claims Commission and the Nhlapo Commission. As Tamarkin notes, whereas the Ralushai commission was a provincial initiative, both of these newer commissions reflected a shift towards a more national approach to postapartheid justice, as they expanded the scope of their inquiry to account for a wider range of claims to land and traditional leadership from unrecognized traditional leaders.[189]

However, both of these commissions faced numerous structural and financial challenges, and in the end did not affect the desired change for Kgoshi Mpketsane and other unrecognized traditional leaders.[190] In his application to the Lands Claim Commission, Kgoshi Mpketsane highlighted the history of his chieftaincy, as well as a Lemba migration history beginning in Judea and ending in Southern Africa, where they made their home as one of the "first nations" to settle at Indie. As Tamarkin points out, Kgoshi Mpketsane's references to their early settlement as a "first nation", and his statements about their personal relationship to the land, through the naming of sacred rivers and mountains, reflect emerging concepts of indigeneity in postapartheid South Africa, which would later be used by the Lemba to assert their claims to traditional leadership as an indigenous people in South Africa.[191]

As Tamarkin notes, the previous failure of his application to the Ralushai commission reaffirmed for Kgoshi Mpketsane that in order to be successful he needed to prove Lemba

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[189] Ibid.,
[190] Ibid., 108-119.
[191] Ibid., 97.

difference.[192] In his application to Nhlapo commission, Kgoshi Mpketsane highlighted his claims to traditional territory in relation to his claims to ethnic difference. As Kgoshi Mpketsane stated,

> We have been the existing tribe, independently from other tribes, but were marginalized when others were recognized because of our resistance to apartheid…. Our neighbours, Kgoshi Maesela, claims the sole ownership of the farm, because of his recognition by the apartheid government…. Our tribe has been residing on the farm before the said tribe.[193]

In his supplementary evidence, Kgoshi Mpketsane presented the results of Spurdle and Jenkins' genetic tests as evidence that provided scientific proof of the Lemba's claims to a distant Jewish non-African past, and therefore to ethnic difference. Moreover, Kgoshi Mpketsane provided evidence of ethnic difference through examples found in Magdel le Roux's scholarship, including her book, *The Lemba: A Lost Tribe of Israel in Southern Africa*, in which Le Roux repeatedly discusses and frames the Lemba as a separate and distinct religious, tribal, and ethnic group, as well as a possible lost tribe of Israel.

As Tamarkin explains, the important point about the use of Le Roux's book was that it included an explanation about the genetic tests conducted by Parfitt said to prove that the Lemba are black Jews, and that it also includes a picture of Kgoshi Mpketsane, with the subtitle "Chief Mpketsane of Sekhukhuneland," indicating that his chieftaincy was indeed recognized.[194] The book also makes a reference to the river "Mohlotloane", a sacred site for the Lemba where they conducted rain ceremonies and circumcision rituals.[195] As Tamarkin notes, "together this was the evidence that Kgoshi Mpketsane felt certain would be transformative."[196] Although Kgoshi Mpketsane's application to the Nhlapo Commission was rejected, the government's failure to accept his claims to traditional leadership must not be seen as a reflection of his personal efforts,

[192] Ibid., 105-106.
[193] Ibid., 105-106.
[194] Ibid., 106.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid., 107.

but rather a manifestation of the underlying structural issues and lack of resources that led to the government's inability to deal with the number of claimants and applications, an indicator of the failure of the postapartheid government to enact democratic justice for unrecognized traditional leaders, such as Kgoshi Mpketsane. Moreover, these points reflect the complexity of the issue of traditional leadership, the shifting circumstances under which this issue is played out in postapartheid South Africa, as well as the creative and inventive ways in which Kgoshi Mpketsane attempted to negotiate the complex pathways to the recognition of his traditional leadership.

In this chapter, I have explored the historical context of Lemba political activism during apartheid and postapartheid, in an effort to explore how contemporary Lemba claims to their identity as black Jews figure as part of their responses to the challenges they faced during the transition from apartheid to postapartheid South Africa. Overall, it is clear that an understanding of the experiences of Lemba people during and after apartheid provides an important analytical perspective from which to understand their particular claims to Judaism, especially as a religious tradition that they reinterpreted and reformulated on their own terms. From Tamarkin's perspective, the experience of the Lemba during apartheid is an example of the symbolic "violence of nonrecognition". According to Tamarkin, this symbolic violence remains a "feature" of postapartheid South Africa, one that affects the Lemba to this day as they struggle to be recognized as a legitimate ethnic group. However, it is a problematic assumption, since not only does this presuppose that all Lemba people desired or continue to desire recognition in this way, but it also privileges the Lemba's treatment as a minority group as distinct from others during apartheid. From this perspective, the choice of the Lemba not to be identified by the government on census reports challenges Tamarkin's argument, and instead points towards a

shift in the way in which a younger generation of Lemba activists approached their politics of recognition. This appears to be particularly evident in Kgoshi Mpketsane's approach to traditional leadership and political representation. Nevertheless, in order to understand the realities of Lemba culture and politics in the contemporary world, it is important to make these connections, and understand the broader historical, social, and political context, in which the Lemba position their claims to Judaism, so as not to obscure them.

Chapter Four: Genetic Jews? Contested Science and the Shifting Categories of Identity

In the previous chapters, I briefly examined Lemba political and intellectual histories during the eras of colonialism, apartheid and postapartheid South Africa in an effort to understand the historical background behind the Lemba's claims to Judaism and different approaches to their Jewish identity by their leadership. These examples provide a lens to analyze how scholars and the media have approached and theorized the genetic evidence that purported to prove Lemba origins. This chapter asks two questions: How has Lemba identity and culture been framed in the contemporary academic literature, as well as in the media? In what ways did the Lemba respond to these scholarly studies and media productions? I argue that while both the academic literature and the media have contributed to misconceptions about Lemba history, identity, and culture, they have also created the conditions for the Lemba's own self-understanding, especially in terms of what it means for the Lemba to self-identify as black Jews.[197] The point of this chapter, then, is to illustrate, not only the social power of modern genetic testing, but also how these connections to Judaism have been rediscovered and reinterpreted by Lemba actors in different ways.[198]

Contemporary Academic Interest in the Lemba

At the end of the twentieth century, scholarship on the Lemba shifted from studies that reflect the agendas of colonial and missionary writers in South Africa, towards a wider variety of anthropological, ethnographic, and scientific studies. According to Tamarkin, this shift followed

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[197] Noah Tamarkin, "Genetic Diaspora: Producing Knowledge of Genes and Jews in Rural South Africa," *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (August 2014), 553.
[198] Ibid., 545.

a "call" by the late Lemba scholar, and former LCA president, Professor M. E. R. Mathivha, to promote the pursuit of objective scientific research on the Lemba.[199] In 1987, Mathivha wrote an essay entitled "The Lemba Characteristics," for a conference of the same year titled "Minorities: Self-Determination and Integration."[200] As Mathivha writes, "this paper aims at drawing attention to academics, researchers, anthropologists, congress delegates and all interested people to the fact that the Lembas exist as a tribe and that there is need to study this tribe extensively and objectively."[201] In this context, Mathivha comments that,

> many writers today who are objective are beginning to come nearer to the truth about the origin and characteristics of the Lemba as a distinct group. They are beginning to discover some false or unscientific statements that the Lemba are a handful and that they do not or never had their own political organization. It is essential to undertake more research to establish facts without any doubt.[202]

Mathivha's commentary echoes previous statements by Lemba scholars, such as Motenda and Mphelo, especially in order to account for their legitimacy and existence as a tribal group and also to acknowledge their political organization, the LCA. According to Tamarkin, the presentation of Mathivha's paper occurred at the same time as the LCA executive committee agreed to participate in the first genetic test by researchers at the University of Witwatersrand.[203] Mathivha's call for research, therefore, generated wider academic interest on the Lemba and played a central role in the growth of contemporary scholarship on the Lemba and their ancestral origins.

Subsequent studies on the Lemba ranged from phenomenological and ethnographic methodologies to social scientific tests and data collection. The majority of this scholarship deals

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[199] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 49.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid., 49.
[202] Ibid. Also see M. E. R. Mathivha, "The Lemba Characteristics," in *Minorities: Self-Determination and Integration*, Conference 2-6 November 1987, Missak Centre, 1-6, Bryanston South Africa: International Freedom Centre.
[203] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 49.

with the Lemba's purported connection to ancient Israel, and their perceived Jewish heritage. This scholarship, in a way, acts a response to the scholarly and genealogical efforts of M.E.R. Mathivha whose book *The Basena/Vamwenye/Balemba*, published in 1992, directly refers to the Lemba as descendants of ancient Israelites.[204] Though there is certainly a shared continuity with nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial writers in the way that these studies aim to solve the question of Lemba origins, contemporary scholarship tends to approach these questions from different perspectives, research agendas, and goals, than those shared by their predecessors. In what follows, I will examine the significance of the genetic tests on the Lemba, in order to explore how these studies shaped the media coverage of the Lemba as a lost tribe of Israel.

Genetic Testing on the Lemba

Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, the Lemba were subject to two different, but important, DNA tests. While these tests represent different stages in the contemporary study of genetics, both of these studies clearly had long-lasting effects on Lemba people, and the way in which they internalized and made sense of the data. The first of these tests was performed by Amanda B. Spurdle and Trefor Jenkins in 1987 at the University of Witwatersrand. As mentioned in chapter three, Jenkins was introduced to the Lemba through his colleague Frank Nabarro and his wife Margaret Nabarro, who had compared Lemba traditional music with Converso and Yemeni music. According to Tamarkin, Jenkins' interest in the Lemba, and his desire to study them, was motivated not only by his passion for the study of human genetics, but also by his own personal struggle with the apartheid state.[205] As Tamarkin notes,

> Jenkins was known not only as a pioneer in the study of genetic polymorphisms and genetic diseases but also as an ethicist opposed to apartheid. He was one of six doctors who successfully petitioned the South African Supreme Court to force the South African

[204] M.E.R. Mathivha, *The Basena/Vamwenye/Balemba*, 1

[205] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 50.

> Medical Board to conduct a new inquiry into the ethical conduct of doctors who failed to treat Steve Biko, the founder of black consciousness movement, after he was beaten by security police in 1977; the same doctors who had falsified records leading up to and after Biko's death.[206]

In a recent interview with Jenkins in 2013, Tamarkin questioned Jenkins about why he chose to conduct research on the Lemba. As Tamarkin comments, for Jenkins,

> the Lemba study served two purposes: it gave him a chance to be in the field, to collect samples from (and thus interact with) black South Africans at a time when such interracial contact was regulated therefore difficult, and it allowed him and his students to use new technologies of DNA analysis to contribute to long-standing Lemba efforts to substantiate their oral history. For him, this was an exercise in antiracism, both interpersonally in facilitating black-white interactions, and in terms of lending scientific authority to an unrecognized ethnic groups' oral history.[207]

From this perspective, Jenkins' research is an example of scientific knowledge with a political purpose, especially in a way that aligned with the Lemba and their own interests in genetic testing. Throughout this study, Jenkins implicitly questions apartheid racial classifications through his use of contrasting racial categorizations, such as "Negroid" and "Caucasoid", to describe the "mixedness" of Lemba paternal ancestry and does so in order to cast the ideology of apartheid, which privileged the idea of complete racial separation, into question.

In addition to this political subtext, the main scientific priority, of course, was to attempt to "establish the genetic affinities and origins of the Lemba."[208] The test was based on forty-nine blood samples of self-identified Lemba men who, through the medium of the LCA, collectively agreed to participate in the study.[209] Moreover, Spurdle and Jenkins' study formed the basis for all further scientific inquiry on the origins of the Lemba.

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[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Amanda B Spurdle and Trefor Jenkins, "The Origins of the Lemba 'Black Jews' of Southern Africa: Evidence from p12F2 and Other Y-Chromosome Markers," 1126.
[209] Ibid.; Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 49-50.

It is worthwhile to note that the basic category used in genetic studies, such as this, to compare populations based on their genetic affinities is defined as a haplotype. According to the National Human Genome Research Institute, a haplotype is a "set of DNA variations, or polymorphisms, that tend to be inherited together. A haplotype can refer to a combination of alleles or to a set of single nucleotide polymorphisms."[210] Spurdle and Jenkins' study was based on the "49a/Taql", a "two-allele polymorphic system."[211] The authors identified nine different haplotypes in the Lemba Y chromosomes and based their analysis on blood samples collected from six different "control groups": Lemba, SA Jewish, SA European, SA Indian, Negroid, and Koisan.[212] Their study was cross-referenced with data collected from control groups in other published studies.

According to Spurdle and Jenkins, the haplotypes associated with 53% of the Lemba Y chromosomes also appear in Jewish populations from South Africa, Europe, and Yemen, as well as South African Asiatic Indian populations.[213] These same haplotypes also appear in a "Lebanese sample", an indicator that suggests a genetic link to Semitic people, more generally. The absence of the haplotype "Ht 13" associated with the Indian population from the Lemba's Y chromosome, however, leads Spurdle and Jenkins to suggest a specific genetic link between the Lemba and Semitic populations.

According to Soodyall, Spurdle and Jenkins could not differentiate between Semitic and specifically Jewish Y chromosomes on "the basis of Y specific data", due to their level of haplotype resolution.[214] They conclude that "roughly 50% of the Lemba Y chromosomes are

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[210] "Haplotype," *genome.gov*, last accessed June 16, 2021, https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/haplotype.
[211] Spurdle and Jenkins, 1126.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Himla Soodyall, "Lemba Origins Revisited: Tracing the Ancestry of Y Chromosomes in South African and Zimbabwean Lemba," *South African medical journal* 103, no. 12 Suppl 1 (2013): 1009.

Semitic in origin and 40% Negroid, and the ancestry of the remainder cannot be resolved."[215] Overall, this study provided initial scientific evidence to support Lemba origin stories, especially as they were articulated by M. E. R. Mathivha, that claim an ancestral origin outside of Africa. It is also, to some extent, an implicit challenge to the idea of racial segregation, through the assertion that at a fundamental level there is no real racial purity that distinguishes between black and white, and therefore, represents a subtle shift in scientific thinking in the twentieth century, as scientists question the arbitrariness of racial thinking. However, Spurdle and Jenkins did not provide conclusive evidence to suggest a definitive genetic link to Jewish people.

The Lemba as Cohens: The Second Genetic Test and The Lost Tribes of Israel

Renewed academic interest into the possible origins of the Lemba, and subsequently as a lost tribe of Israel surfaced in the 1980's, when Tudor Parfitt, a Jewish studies scholar, first introduced himself to Lemba people at the end of a lecture he presented at, on the subject of the "Falashas" of Ethiopia, in South Africa.[216] As Parfitt recounts,

> I wanted to know where they were from. They said that they were Jews and that they'd come from the Middle East centuries if not millennia before. I found this rather intriguing but very difficult to believe. They didn't look Jewish, and nobody at that time knew that there was any sort of Jewish penetration into black Africa. It seemed absolutely mythic.[217]

In response "they said, 'You don't seem to believe what we're saying. Why don't you come spend a weekend with us? We'll show you our fellow Jews and introduce you to our elders, so you'll see that what we're saying is true.'"[218] Parfitt then, on behalf of their invitation, travelled to Venda to meet the Lemba. In Venda, Parfitt was introduced to Mathivha, who requested Parfitt

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[215] Ibid., 1126.
[216] "Tudor Parfitt's Remarkable Journey," *pbs.org*, last accessed June 16, 2021, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/israel/parfitt.html
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.

to find the "lost city of Sena", where he believed they had emigrated from originally.[219] Parfitt then travelled to Yemen, in search of the lost city of Sena. At first, Parfitt thought that the ancient city of Sena was likely the modern-day capital of Yemen, Sana'a. However, during a conversation between Parfitt and an "Imam from the holy town of Terim", the Imam informed Parfitt that "there's actually a place at the end of Wadi Masilah that is called Sena to this day."[220] It was there that Parfitt speculated about the existence of an ancient Lemba site, where they may have left their mark, and crossed the Pusela (or Phusela), in the eastern Hadhramaut, to Africa. Later, Parfitt, in collaboration with a transnational group of scholars and geneticists, approached the Lemba about conducting another genetic study in order to further substantiate their claims to Jewish ancestry. Due to their positive experiences with the first genetic tests, the Lemba welcomed Parfitt and his team of geneticists, and Parfitt later travelled back to Venda to begin work on the next genetic tests.[221]

Hence, in the late 1990's, a second genetic test was designed and implemented by Tudor Parfitt and a multidisciplinary team of scholars and geneticists, including Mark G. Thomas, Deborah A. Weiss, Karl Skorecki, James F. Wilson, Magdel le Roux, Neil Bradman, and David B. Goldstein. The purpose of this study was to "provide a more detailed picture of the Lemba paternal genetic heritage."[222] The broader agenda behind this study, in contrast to the study published by Spurdle and Jenkins, had different motivations. As noted above, Parfitt was interested in the Lemba as a kind of cultural (indeed, racial) curiosity, and his interests in the Lemba as a potential "lost tribe of Israel" intersected with the broader ambitions of his fellow

[219] "Tudor Parfitt's Remarkable Journey," *pbs.org*, last accessed June 16, 2021, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/israel/parfitt2.html
[220] Ibid.
[221] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 49.
[222] Thomas *et al*. "Y Chromosomes Traveling South: The Cohen Modal Haplotype and the Origins of the Lemba—the 'Black Jews of Southern Africa,'" 674–686.

researchers, since their interests in the Lemba were a smaller part of their project to trace the genetic lineage of the Cohanim, members of the Jewish priestly caste said to be paternally descended from the Biblical figure of Aaron, among present-day Jews.[223] The study was based on saliva samples taken from 136 self-identified Lemba men. The system used to determine haplotype variations during this study was based on "a combination of 6 short tandem repeat (STR) markers in conjunction with 6 bi-allelic markers."[224] These markers determined the frequency of haplotypes appearing on related Y chromosomes among population clusters at a greater resolution than what was previously recorded by Spurdle and Jenkins several years earlier.

The importance of this study, as noted above, is that it highlights the prevalence of the Cohen Modal Haplotype (CMH) among Jewish populations and distinguishes between Arab (construed as Palestinian) and Jewish haplotypes, more specifically. According to Thomas *et al*. the CMH occurs at a higher frequency among Jewish groups and is therefore considered to be a "a potential signature haplotype of Jewish origin".[225] For example, in a previous study, the CMH was observed among Ashkenazi and Sephardic groups at frequencies of 44.9% in Ashkenazi and 56.1% in Sephardic Cohanim.[226] Based on these earlier assessments, the test results on the Lemba show a higher frequency of the CMH in the Lemba Y chromosome (accounting specifically for male ancestry), "occurring at a rate of 8.8% in the entire population."[227] The study concludes that,

[223] Nicholas Wade, "DNA Backs a Tribe's Tradition Of Early Descent From the Jews," *nytimes.com*, last accessed June 16, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/09/us/dna-backs-a-tribe-s-tradition-of-early-descent-from-the-jews.html.
[224] Soodyall, 1009–1013.
[225] Thomas *et al*.,
[226] Mark G. Thomas, Skorecki K, Ben-Ami H, Parfitt T, Bradman N, Goldstein DB. Origins of Old Testament priests. *Nature* 1998; 394:138-140.
[227] Thomas et al. chromosomes travelling south

> the genetic evidence in this study is consistent with both a Lemba history involving an origin outside Africa and male-mediated gene flow from other Semitic immigrants and with admixture from Bantu neighbours; all three groups are likely to have been contributors to the Lemba gene pool, and there is no need to present an Arab versus a Judaic contribution to that gene pool, since contributions from both are likely to have occurred. The CMH present in the Lemba could have an exclusively Judaic origin.[228]

In this way, Thomas *et al*.'s research appears to provide conclusive scientific evidence for the *possibility* of the Lemba's claims to an ancestral connection to ancient Israel, on the basis of the CMH distribution in the Lemba Y chromosomes. Nonetheless, regardless of whether the science behind these tests was true or accurate (indeed, it was neither), it is clear that these tests resonated with the Lemba community, as the DNA tests at least presented the Lemba with another affirmation of their oral history, and finally strong scientific evidence for their ancestral connection to ancient Israel, and their identity as black Jews.[229]

However, the use of the CMH to define Jewish populations has been contested, and subsequently "rejected" in later studies.[230] The CMH hypothesis was later accepted by geneticists through a more refined system: the use of a 12-STR marker system which entailed an *extended* CMH, analyzing the genetic specificity of Jewish populations.[231] According to Sahakyan *et al*. the *extended* CMH repertoire is thus a more credible way of ascertaining the genetic origins of ancient Jewish populations that ultimately originate in the Levant.[232]

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[228] Ibid.
[229] Wuriga, 81.
[230] Hovhannes Sahakyan, Ashot Margaryan, Lauri Saag, Monika Karmin, Rodrigo Flores, Marc Haber, Alena Kushniarevich, et al. "Origin and Diffusion of Human Y Chromosome Haplogroup J1-M267," *Scientific reports* 11, no. 1 (2021): 6659–6659; Sergio Tofanelli, Gianmarco Ferri, Cesare Rapone, Giovanni Beduschi, Donata Luiselli, Alicia M Cadenas, Khalid Dafaalah Awadelkarim, et al. "J1-M267 Y Lineage Marks Climate-Driven Pre-Historical Human Displacements," *European journal of human genetics : EJHG* 17, no. 11 (2009): 1520–1524.
[231] Sahakyan et al.; also see Michael F Hammer, Doron M Behar, Tatiana M Karafet, Fernando L Mendez, Brian Hallmark, Tamar Erez, Lev A Zhivotovsky, Saharon Rosset, and Karl Skorecki. "Extended Y Chromosome Haplotypes Resolve Multiple and Unique Lineages of the Jewish Priesthood," *Human genetics* 126, no. 5 (2009): 707–717.
[232] Ibid.

In 2013, a study conducted by Himla Soodyall (a former PhD student of Trefor Jenkins), revisited the question of whether the Lemba can, in fact, trace their genetic lineage to Jewish people.[233] In this study, Soodyall also sought to determine the genetic affinities between the Lemba and Remba–who consider themselves to be the same ethnic group, simply pronouncing their ethnonym differently in local languages.[234] This is the first time that the Remba in Zimbabwe have been genetically tested, since the previous tests were conducted on the basis of samples taken from the Lemba in South Africa. The study was based on blood samples collected from 261 "healthy, unrelated adult volunteers with their informed consent and approval from the Ethics Committee for research on human subjects at the University of Witwatersrand."[235] The test subjects include "76 Lemba, 54 Remba, 43 Venda, 88 SA Jews."[236]

In order to address the question of genetic Jewish heritage, Soodyall uses the updated haplotype category defined by Hammer *et al.* as the *extended* CMH. The *extended* CMH further clarifies the independent paternal lineages that encompass the Cohanim.[237] According to Soodyall, the difference between the original CMH and the *extended* CMH refers to the addition of six STR markers into a 12 STR marker system, which gives a "higher level of resolution at both the haplogroup and haplotype level."[238] In a discussion of the *extended* CMH, Soodyall notes that the application of the 12 STR marker system had a "much more restrictive distribution", among control groups, of the CMH. As Soodyall notes, for example, "Hammer et al. showed that while haplogroup J-P58* occurred among both Jewish (18.8%) and non-Jewish (15.5%) populations, the extended CMH was restricted to only the Jewish groups from across the

[233] Himla Soodyall, 1009–1013.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Hammer *et al.*
[238] Soodyall.

range of the Jewish diaspora."[239] Since, the extended CMH functions at a more refined capacity for resolving haplotype distribution, Soodyall applied the 12 STR marker system in order to resolve the genetic lineage of the Lemba and the Remba. The original 6 STR marker system was also used during the study in order to compare the distribution rate of the CMH with the results generated by the 12-STR marker system.

The results of Soodyall's study present fascinating, and indeed, challenging conclusions about the genetic ancestry of the Lemba and of the Remba, and the genetic affinities between them. The results conclude that the "majority of Y chromosomes found in the Lemba (73.7%) and Remba (79.6%) were traced to non-African origins."[240] However, the study shows that haplogroups commonly found in Oceanic and Asian populations "did not contribute to the Y chromosomes found in the Lemba/Remba sample."[241] Interestingly, this is consistent with the two previous studies. Discussing the issue of the CMH, Soodyall states that "haplogroup J was the most common haplogroup in the Lemba/Remba (51.7%), and it was on the background of haplogroup J-12f2a that the original haplotype designation of the CMH based on 6-STR system was found at frequencies of 9.6% in the Lemba and 15.9% in SA Jews, but not in the Remba."[242] However, "when the higher resolution of haplogroup J* in combination with the 12-STR system was used, the extended CMH was only found in one individual of SA Jewish descent (1.1%) and not at all in the Lemba."[243] Therefore, "this finding argues against the claims made previously about possible connections between the Lemba and the Cohanim."[244] As Soodyall writes,

> Overall, this study has shown that Y chromosomes typically linked with Jewish ancestry were not detected by the higher resolution analysis conducted in the present study. It

239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid.
243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.

> seems more likely that Arab traders, who are known to have established long-distance trade networks involving some thousands of kilometres along the western rim of the Indian Ocean, from Sofala in the south to the Red Sea in the north and beyond to the Hadramut, India and even China from about 900 AD, are more likely linked with the ancestry of the non-African founding males of the Lemba/Remba.[245]

In a way, each of these genetic studies, at least, provide evidence for non-African sources of paternally inherited Lemba ancestry, and therefore, confirm their oral history claiming a descent outside-of-Africa. The conclusions of this last study also provides compelling evidence for Shoko's historical study on the possible intercultural relations between Arabic traders and the Remba. Nevertheless, the conclusions of the first two studies in relation to this last study illustrate the contested nature of genetic testing among scientists as this field has emerged in the last several decades, and as scientists develop more refined technology to map out the genetic ancestry of human populations. The conclusions of the last test, of course, show that there is significant evidence to argue against a scientifically verifiable proof that the Lemba are genetic Jews, and this hypothesis is supported by a recent scientific study conducted by Sahakyan *et al*. This is a notable point for this thesis. I argue that it is important to recognize that, in contrast to those who would frame the Lemba's identity as black Jews based on their possible ancestral connection to ancient Israel, or through self-descriptions and claims to Judaism, as incontrovertible facts, their claims have a particular history, and many of these claims, at least in the context of South Africa, are less about Judaism as a religion, than about defining for themselves what they see as a meaningful and socially situated identity.

In any case, for the purposes of this study, I believe it is worthwhile to briefly consider the ways in which geneticists problematize the categories of genetically defined Jewishness. For example, Tofanelli *et al.* questions the use of genetic markers, such as the CMH and *extended*

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[245] Ibid.

CMH, to distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish populations.[246] Their results "stress the limitations of using the above haplotype motifs as reliable Jewish ancestry predicators and show its inadequacy for forensic or genealogical purposes."[247] Without simplifying their argument, the limitations of these haplotype motifs derive from the sheer amount of genetic variation among populations, and also the frequency of novel mutations in genetic sequences, and the "unpredictability" of their mutation rate within a given time-period.

As Tofanelli *et al*. state, "haplotypes defined by 6 or 12 STRs, such as the CMH and LMH or the eCMH and eLMH, enable deeper temporal resolution, but with an increased error due to recurrent mutations."[248] In a sense, this inability to rely on "many-Y-STR loci" leads to the suggestion by the authors that "the use of non-recombinant haplotype motifs as diagnostic markers of Jewish ancestry was shown to be strongly misleading when not supported by knowledge at more informative regions or whole sequences."[249] While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to present a critique of Soodyall's study on the basis of these conclusions, it is important to note that the concepts used by geneticists to determine the genetic verifiability of a particular population based on identity are constantly subject to scientific debate, and are therefore, subject to possible changes and different outcomes. While Soodyall's study provides evidence against the previous claims by Thomas *et al.*, the conclusions drawn by Tofanelli *et al*. show the limitations of these claims more generally.

In any case, the broader connection between the genetic tests and the Lemba is the way in which genetic Jewishness was appropriated and subsequently promoted through the media, as the

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[246] Tofanelli, Sergio, Luca Taglioli, Stefania Bertoncini, Paolo Francalacci, Anatole Klyosov, and Luca Pagani. "Mitochondrial and Y Chromosome Haplotype Motifs as Diagnostic Markers of Jewish Ancestry: a Reconsideration." *Frontiers in genetics* 5 (2014): 384–384.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid., 4.
[249] Ibid., 7.

Lemba were beginning to be claimed by a wider global audience as genetic Jews, and also a possible lost Tribe of Israel. In what follows, I will discuss several examples of the media exposure of the Lemba as a lost tribe, in order to think more deeply about the responses of Lemba people to these representations.

The Lemba in the Media

In the late 1990's, scholarly and scientific inquiry into the origins of the Lemba converged with an emerging media archive on the Lemba as genetic Jews. Due to the results of the DNA tests conducted by Thomas *et al*. apparently proving genetic affinities between the Lemba, contemporary Jewish people, and ancient Israelites, the Lemba rose to international fame and attention. The Lemba were featured on the front page of the September edition of the New York Times magazine in 1999. In addition to this initial media coverage, the Lemba were publicized in a variety of documentaries produced by PBS's Nova, the History Channel, and the BBC. These documentaries featured Lemba religious and cultural leaders, as well as geneticists and scholars from the first and second genetic tests discussing the Lemba's oral history.[250] Throughout these documentaries and newspaper articles, the Lemba's claims to Judaism merge with a discourse that privileges an understanding of the Lemba as a lost tribe of Israel.

In his article, "Genetic Diaspora," Tamarkin highlights several of these media representations, including an excerpt from a 2008 History Channel documentary hosted by Tudor Parfitt,

> The Lemba were convinced that they were a lost tribe of Israel. The problem was that no one believed them. They appeared to be completely African. But I discovered a number of mysterious legends and customs that were very un-African. Men from other tribes were not allowed to marry into the Lemba, they refused to eat pigs . . . they practiced the ritual slaughter of animals with a special knife, and they circumcised their male children at an early age. I had become convinced that the Lemba claim that they were of Jewish

[250] Tamarkin, "Genetic Diaspora", 557.

> origin could be true . . . but final proof only came when the science of genetics was applied to Lemba oral history.[251]

As Tamarkin comments, “Parfitt conflates the Lemba DNA with oral history (‘they were convinced they were a lost tribe of Israel’), South African racial categories, (‘they appeared to be completely African’), and Jewish essentialism (genetics provided final proof that they were of Jewish origins).” In some ways, however, this dialogue contrasts with Parfitt’s story highlighted elsewhere, where he simply recalls the Lemba as “self-describing Jews” who thought of themselves as distant relatives of the Falashas from Ethiopia, and not as a lost tribe. Perhaps this commentary was more influenced by the show’s creator, or scriptwriters, than Parfitt himself, whose own writing clearly shows a more intricate approach to the idea of the Lemba as black Jews, even though he does in fact use the rhetoric of the lost tribes of Israel in his publications. In any case, these are examples of the kind of sensationalist material promoted by the media, and by academics such as Parfitt, about the Lemba, that tends to obscure the complex realities of cultural and religious life in Southern Africa.

Nevertheless as Tamarkin notes, “here and in other documentaries, two images exist in tension: on the one hand, the Lemba are already shown as practicing Jews, while on the other, they are represented as genetic Jews whose knowledge of Judaism is of the past rather than the present.”[252] Of course, the second motif, from Tamarkin’s perspective, reflects the rhetorical power of the lost tribes of Israel, a problematic notion linking the Lemba to the ancient tribes of lost Jews who were deported after the conquest of the independent northern Kingdom of Israel, and eventually vanished from history. From this perspective, Lemba identity and culture is

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[251] Ibid., 557.
[252] Ibid., 598.

portrayed as a thing of the past, or as something that needs to be reclaimed or returned to global Jewry.[253]

This latter approach was adopted by two different American Jewish organizations, Kulanu and Be'chol Lashon, working in different capacities, and for different reasons with the Lemba, especially in order to "return" them to normative Judaism. However, through their work with the Lemba, both of these organizations have perpetuated the essentialist idea proposed by Thomas *et al*. that the Lemba are genetic Jews. Of course, while the science of genetics has clearly progressed since these tests were conducted, the influence of these tests on the way in which these organizations continue to perceive the Lemba as genetic Jews is an example of the epistemological power of genetic testing. As a result, both of these organizations have promoted the Lemba as either genetically verified Jews or simply as an "indigenous people who have practiced Judaism for centuries".[254] These organizations have sponsored speaking tours for visiting Lemba people in America, and have provided opportunities for funding, including travel opportunities to Israel, funds for the construction of a synagogue in rural Zimbabwe, as well as resources for Jewish education in Lemba communities throughout Southern Africa. More recently some Lemba people have developed a relationship with an American organization called "The Jewish Voice", an organization committed to the spread of a form of Christian messianism among the so-called lost tribes of Israel.[255]

A critical perspective here, however, is the implicit relationship between ideas of the Lemba as a lost tribe of Israel or as genetic Jews, and the contemporary politics of Zionism in

[253] Ibid.
[254] Kulanu inc., "Lemba," *kulanu.org*, last accessed June 15, 2021, https://kulanu.org/communities/lemba/; "Counting Jews," *globaljews.org*, last accessed June 15, 2021, https://globaljews.org/resources/research/counting-jews/
[255] "Zimbabwe," *jewishvoice.org*, last accessed June 15, 2021, https://www.jewishvoice.org/go/medical-outreaches/zimbabwe

Israel, as this relationship connects to the work of all of these organizations, as well as the media archive on the Lemba as a lost tribe of Israel. This critique features prominently in both Tamarkin's discussion of the broader relationship between the Lemba and Kulanu, as well as how they were framed in various documentaries, such as the History Channel's "Digging for the Truth" hosted by Josh Bernstein, in particular. I suggest that the connection between the idea of the Lemba as a lost tribe of Israel and the contemporary politics of Zionism is an example of the misleading notion perpetuated by scholars and the media, that the Lemba claims to Jewishness, framed in terms of the rhetoric of the lost tribes of Israel, can be understood as *sui generis*. From this perspective, the Lemba's claims to Judaism appear to be presented as unique, and therefore apolitical, inasmuch as the rhetoric of the lost tribes of Israel frames their claims to Judaism as "mythic" or "legendary", rather than as historically and socially situated claims relating to local politics, culture, and identity.

However, as Tamarkin discusses, the important point to consider is not so much the claim that the Lemba are a lost tribe, but rather what this discourse communicates to Jews around the world who desire a connection to the lost tribes of Israel (the global community of Jewish exiles), as well as how this connection ought to be realized. From this perspective, the state of Israel acts as a reference point for a connection between Jews of a global Jewish diaspora and people who are presumed to be a part of this diaspora. The lost tribes of Israel, imagined as part of an ancient Jewish diaspora, are now mapped onto this emerging global Jewish diaspora, in which genetics plays a crucial role in determining who is, or who is not, a Jew. However, these issues have both political and practical consequences, especially as they concern the chief officials in the state of Israel, as they consider the legitimacy of "neo-Judaising groups" that seek

to immigrate to Israel.[256] These issues also play into the matter of illegal settlement in Palestine, as Jews of colour, through the cooperation of Kulanu with far-right organizations Amishav and Shavei Israel, are resettled onto Palestinian territory.[257] Of course, these examples reflect the ideological power of genetic difference, as concepts of Jewish identity are articulated in terms of genetic or biological identification. In short, the differences between studies of the Lemba as ancient Israelites or as genetic Jews lend to different ideological narratives at play among academics, Jewish communities interested in returning the Lemba to Judaism, and in the media, especially as the lost tribes discourse is framed around the central position of the state of Israel as the legitimate point of reference for Jewish belonging.

Lemba Responses To the Media Coverage

In what ways did the Lemba respond to the results of the genetic tests and the ensuing media coverage? This question is discussed at length in Tudor Parfitt and Yulia Egorova's 2006 book *Genetics, Mass Media and Identity: A Case Study of the genetic research on the Lemba and Bene Israel*, where the authors present a qualitative analysis of two dozen in-depth interviews and one hundred questionnaires filled out by Lemba respondents.[258] Although the study is limited by the number of participants, and does not adequately represent all Lemba people, this study provides an informed perspective about the varied responses of the Lemba to the genetic tests and the media coverage. Moreover, Parfitt and Egorova's study includes interviews with

[256] Nathan P. Devir, "Israel's Immigration Policies and the Promotion of Genetic Testing: Empiricizing Definitional Criteria, Bolstering State Demographic Security, or Hastening the Messianic Era?" *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 11, no. 1 (2020): 65–85.
[257] Nadia Abu El-Haj, *The Genealogical Science the Search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012: 217.
[258] Tudor Parfitt, and Yulia Egorova, *Genetics, Mass Media and Identity: A Case Study of the Genetic Research on the Lemba*, Taylor and Francis, 2006.

Rhudo Mathivha, the daughter of M.E.R. Mathivha, F. C. Raulinga (1930-2012) and Chaplain Masala.

Overall, the responses of the interviewees and the questionnaires suggest that the genetic studies had a relatively positive impact on their lives and did in fact lead to a considerable change in their religious practices, especially as the Lemba began to associate themselves with a more visible Jewish identity. Parfitt and Egorova note the broader significance of these tests for the Lemba, as they provided the Lemba with scientific evidence to support what they knew about their origins from their oral history, as well as their claims to ethnic difference. From this perspective, the results of the genetic tests, as well as the media publications, were well-received by Lemba leaders, including Mathivha, Raulinga, Masala and others. The subtext of many of their responses, however, reflects the local political issues discussed in chapter three, since the genetic tests and the media publications confirmed Lemba difference, an ethnic difference that becomes important in relation to broader South African political struggles, and local political struggles with the Venda in the Limpopo Province.

Another important aspect of the test results appears to be that the media coverage made the Lemba more visible among other black South Africans, who for the most part, were unaware of their existence. Other themes in their responses include an emphasis on DNA as a factor contributing to group cohesivity, and ultimately more awareness among themselves, and other Jews throughout the world, about their "Jewish roots". The responses also reveal historical tensions between themselves and other Jewish people, particularly in South Africa, who often do not accept their claims to Judaism as legitimate. However, Rhudo Mathivha, in particular, balances this with a discussion of the many positive relationships the Lemba have made with American Jews in recent years, who have begun to accept them on their own terms.

For some Lemba people, including Mathivha, Hamisi, and Masala, though the religious dimensions of Judaism appear to be important, Jewish religion is framed as secondary to Lemba culture, which for them is ultimately a question of "birth" and "blood". In this context, Lemba culture is framed as "a way of life", and not simply a matter of religious belief or practice. For example, as both Raulinga and Masala discuss, although the majority of the Lemba are Christians, they prefer to think about themselves as Jewish Christians, since they believe in the Messiah, in addition to what they perceive as their Jewish heritage. However, for them, these aspects of Lemba identity, whether they perceive themselves as Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, are not fixed: they are assigned value depending on how they are perceived by the community. Parfitt and Egorova, reflecting on this last observation state,

> We asked them whether the religious identity of the Lemba has changed since the publication of the results of the tests. Frederick felt that only very few of the Lemba started practicing Judaism and even those who did so did not know very much about it. Our informants were both Christian and argued that their beliefs had not changed. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah and insisted that they were Jewish Christians. When we pointed out that this may generate questions from the Jews they said that despite the long history of Christian persecution of the Jews, animosity could be transcended and the two religions could co-exist. They founded these views on precise passages from the New Testament. In other words, they created for themselves a theology which enable them to consider themselves both Jewish and Christian, but at the same time, it seemed to us that the discussion of Christianity was somewhat painful for them.[259]

In one way, their theological justification for themselves as Jews reflects the creativity of the Lemba as they construct their claims to both a Christian and Jewish identity based on their novel interpretations of the New Testament. However, as Parfitt and Egorova point out, their claim to themselves as Jewish Christians also speaks to pertinent issues within the Lemba Cultural Association, as Raulinga and Masala mentioned that, in the past, references to Jesus as the Messiah were deemed offensive by certain members in the LCA.[260] Hence, they have

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[259] Ibid., 70.
[260] Ibid.

specifically avoided the use of Christological references during their public gatherings, in favour of a “middle-way” that stresses the importance of the Old Testament, as opposed to the New Testament. However, as Raulinga mentions, a wholesale movement away from Christianity is “not possible” due to a “total absence of information about Judaism” among them.[261]

All of this to suggest, that for Parfitt and Egorova, as well as the Lemba interviewees, religion appears to be secondary to Lemba culture. As Parfitt and Egorova state, “Lemba culture is simply what Lemba people do, and it significant that their one communal organization, the LCA, stresses in its name this particular reading of what the word culture might mean.”[262] It seems then, that for the Lemba, religious identity, beliefs, and practices, need to be flexible, and this flexibility is necessary for the Lemba community and their way of life, as they strive for solidarity and cohesivity in communities of people with vastly different perspectives, opinions, and beliefs. Whereas Lemba culture is the binding force that brings people together and connects people to each other, religion provides additional, but not binding, support.

Conversely, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, it is clear that the renovation of religious identity, including Lemba culture (a motif that both Parfitt and Egorova describe as fixed “simply what Lemba people do”), is a constant factor in the history of the Lemba, and therefore seems to be contingent on historical, social, and political circumstances. Overall, it is clear, in both the interviews and the questionnaires, that the results of the genetic tests had a significant influence on the way in which the Lemba began to identify with Judaism and practice it as a religion after the genetic tests. From this perspective, Parfitt and Egorova describe how the LCA’s shift towards a more easily recognizable Jewish identity, especially during their annual conferences, was a direct result of the genetic tests.

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[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.

To what extent do the Lemba accept or challenge the idea of themselves as a lost tribe of Israel? Towards the end of the documentary hosted by Josh Bernstein, "Digging for the Truth," the episode features the annual conference of the Lemba Cultural Association at Sweetwaters, the sacred site of the Lemba community, wherein M. J. Mungulwa, the president of the LCA, is filmed giving a presentation about Lemba culture to his "Lemba brothers and sisters."[263] As Tamarkin notes, "in the final scene of the episode, he says to the crowd, microphone in hand, 'brothers and sisters, we are here. We are not lost; we are scattered. We are original Hebrews.'"[264] Throughout Tamarkin's book *Genetic Afterlives* the idea that the Lemba exist as a lost tribe of Israel is often rejected by Lemba people as meaningless, since it decontextualizes what they see as a profound and vibrant history of trading, networking, and travelling in Southern Africa, as well as a deeper spiritual, religious, and intellectual nexus of cross-cultural development.[265] Their diaspora, therefore, is not an ancient Jewish diaspora made up of lost tribes, since this has been clearly refuted by both recent genetic studies and by the Lemba themselves, many of whom reject this discourse, but a diaspora of Lemba people scattered in southern Africa.

[263] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 82.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid., 56.

Chapter 5: An Examination of the Jewish Themes and Motifs in Lemba Oral Traditions

In this chapter, I discuss the use of Jewish religious themes, myths, and motifs as they appear in contemporary Lemba oral traditions. I argue that the Lemba's connection to Judaism, as it emerges in their contemporary oral traditions, is a distinctly modern development, and therefore, represents an "inventive tradition" among them. In an article entitled "Ethnogenesis as an Arena: Were The Lemba Jews Black?", Jan G. Platvoet also discusses the Lemba's claims to their identity as black Jews as an invention of tradition. [266] However, while his research frames the Lemba Cultural Association's claims to Jewish identity as a "recent, highly pragmatic and political group identity construction," my research stresses a more integral approach, one that I believe shows the spiritual implications of the inventive process for the Lemba, in addition to the political, which seems to be overemphasized by Platvoet through a rigid application of the concept of invented tradition as proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger, to the study of the Lemba.

Another important use of invented tradition, as applied to the contemporary traditions of the Lemba, appears in a doctoral dissertation written by Lior D. Shragg. Shragg focuses his research on the novel adaptations to Lemba music in the context of the Lemba Jewish community in Harare, Zimbabwe. As Shragg suggests, "Lemba Jews in my research believe that their newly adopted practices are in fact a rediscovery and continuation of ancient biblical and Lemba customs. To them, their practice is not constructed tradition, but rather a rejuvenation of a tradition which was lost during British colonization."[267] While this might be the case, my

[266] Jan G. Platvoet "Ethnogenesis as an arena: were the Lemba black Jews," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* (2007): 130.
[267] Lior D. Shragg, *Belonging: The Music and Lives of Black Zimbabwean Jews*, A Dissertation presented to the faculty of fine arts Chicago University, 2020: 79.

argument here is different, inasmuch as I do not emphasize the rediscovery and continuation of ancient biblical customs, but a rediscovery and continuation of Lemba customs by Lemba leaders in different contexts where certain raw materials were introduced to Lemba leadership by outsiders. In addition to this, I further draw on Shragg's dissertation in order to show the creativity and resourcefulness of contemporary Lemba individuals, particularly in Zimbabwe, where Shragg's research was conducted, as they construct and imagine their identity in a rapidly changing world.

Lemba Oral Traditions

Lemba oral traditions represent diverse ways of articulating culture, history, and identity. How do we define oral traditions in this context? According to Le Roux, these can be defined as "that which includes all songs, recitations, prayers, sayings, praises and any historical or cultural statements from the past, transmitted from one generation to another."[268] The interesting aspect of this definition, however, is not so much the emphasis on the past, but the second part, which refers to the ways in which these raaspects of oral tradition are transmitted from generation to generation. In this way, the transmission process acts as a marker for the relationship between continuity and change in a community. As time passes, and as individuals and communities face new situations and challenges to their culture, ways of life, languages, and identity, it becomes important, even necessary, to adapt and innovate in order to respond to these new circumstances.[269] Although I have touched on the Lemba's oral traditions in previous chapters, in this chapter I focus more specifically on how their traditions have changed over time.

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[268] Le Roux, "Sing, Eat, Pray: Transmission of Tradition in Lemba Communities in Southern Africa," 114.
[269] Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2.

The invention of tradition, an idea that I addressed at the beginning of thesis, is a conceptual framework through which to analyze the ways in which people construct, invent, and create traditions to appear credible and plausible, or respond to novel situations. However, on this point, I believe that it is more useful to use the term inventive tradition, as opposed to invented tradition, especially as a way to think about contemporary Lemba oral traditions as they unfold in history, since these motifs are certainly not *ex novo* but emerge from a rich and layered history of culture and identity.[270] Indeed, there is a deep well-spring of traditional knowledge among the Lemba, and this informs their day-to-day lives, practices, beliefs, and traditions, as well as their sense of what it means to belong to a place and to know themselves. However, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, the ways in which they negotiate their practices, beliefs, and traditions, and make sense of them in relation to their own identity, have been conditioned by particular moments in history; moments that are at once interconnected and complex.

From this perspective, in order to show the inventive nature of their oral traditions, it is important to highlight the changes that have taken place in light of the transmission process. In what follows, I will highlight several of the Lemba's origin stories and founding myths as they appear in older sources, in order to compare and contrast these with more contemporary versions of their oral traditions. These examples, I believe, show how Lemba intellectuals have thought through their own claims to tradition, culture, and identity, and also illustrates their creativity, adaptability, and imaginative capacities as religious leaders. In doing-so I hope to shed more light on the inventive nature of Lemba oral history and traditions, as they appear in the contemporary world.

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[270] Palmisano and Pannofino, 33.

The oral traditions of the Lemba, as they appear in written texts, have been recorded primarily by missionaries and ethnologists during the colonial period who were concerned with the documentation of Lemba culture, as they believed that it would soon disappear. According to Mathivha, the main priority for them was to extend their mission work to the “pagans”.[271] For our purposes, however, this documentation proves to be useful from a comparative perspective, as I use it to further explore and highlight the development of an inventive tradition among the Lemba.

In Henri A. Junod’s 1910 article “Notes on the Balemba”, he presents what is possibly the first Lemba origin story recorded by Europeans. As Junod writes,

> Some old Balemba of the both the Spelonken and the Modjadji country told my informant the following legend: ‘We have come from a very remote place, on the other side of the sea. We were on a big boat. A terrible storm nearly destroyed us all. The boat was broken into two pieces. One half of us reached the shores of this country; the others were taken away with the second half of the boat, and we do not know where they are now. We climbed the mountains and arrived among the Banyai. There we settled, and after a time we moved southwards to the Transvaal; but we are not the Banyai.[272]

This oral history is conveyed through the recollected memories of several Lemba people, as these were recounted by an informant to Junod, who then transcribed them in this article. While this passage places amn emphasis on Lemba difference (we are not the Banyai), the perspective, here, more-so reflects the loss of memory in relation to the unfortunate circumstances of their people on a possible oceanic voyage. This, as highlighted in chapter four, is a distinct possibility, since the results of all the genetic tests affirm the idea that their ancestry likely includes Arabic traders who travelled throughout the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the eastern coast of Africa.

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[271] Matshaya Edward Razwimisani Mathivha, "A survey of the literary achievements in Venda: a descriptive study from the earliest beginnings up to 1970," PhD diss., University of Limpopo, 1972: 1-3.
[272] Junod, 277.

Indeed, this position finds support in the historical evidence provided in Shoko's book, *Karanga indigenous religion in Zimbabwe: Health and well-being*.[273]

In a group interview with Lemba people, conducted by Le Roux in 1997 in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, Le Roux highlights that,

> The Lemba did, however, keep themselves separate from the native peoples, considering them foreign or different. Then, according to their songs and traditions, something bad happened in their country of origin – a war broke out and they (the savis or traders) could not return. They had not brought their wives with them and now had to take wives from among the 'gentiles' (vhasendzhi: the local peoples) – the Rozwi, Karanga, Zezuru, and Govera tribes.[274]

Of course, the historical events in this passage are compatible with the first narrative, especially as the Lemba consider themselves both separate and distinct (a point well-demonstrated by Le Roux in her extensive scholarship on the Lemba), and also reflect their status as traders. This passage also refers to a country of origin, possibly a place in connection to the first narrative. In both of these narratives, the Lemba were displaced and separated from their original homeland. These stories, however, reveal little about the Lemba's claims to themselves as ancient Israelites, or as descendants of Jewish people, in particular.

According to Le Roux, the Lemba's claims to a Jewish heritage can be traced to several of their oral traditions, including statements about their dietary laws, and also in their prayers.[275] Le Roux provides examples of this material culture, based on her recent fieldwork with the Bubha clan, the Lemba clan with the highest reported frequency of the Cohen Modal Haplotype. In the section on Lemba prayers, Le Roux notes several examples that she believes to affirm the Lemba's claims to a Jewish heritage. Referring to A. A. Jaques' 1931 article, "Notes on the

[273] Shoko, 8.
[274] Le Roux, 114.
[275] Ibid. 123.

Lemba", Le Roux highlights a memory recounted by Jaques' informant, "old Mosheh" who recalls his childhood experience at a Lemba funeral ceremony. As Le Roux summarizes,

> In short only men were present and one of the men took the lead and girded his loins with a sekgwele (a cotton cloth), probably with ceremonial importance. A spotless beast, sheep or goat, was slaughtered and some blood was drunk by the men and the rest was sprinkled over the worshippers. They all knelt down and prayed 'xo ndziye' (meaning not known). The priest prayed to their ancestors and called them by name. Some of the words in the prayer were: 'a sasa sa e se a bona, Mose a vuye popa munhu umbi mutsa mbona kwava ku fa, wa enda' freely translated as: Let Moses return to us again. Man is evil. We'll not see a man like him again. Death is a journey. This prayer was also ended with 'amin'. Then the meat was eaten and they went to sleep in the river.[276]

Despite the invocation of the name Moses, the proclamation that "man is evil", and the closing of the prayer with the word *amin*, there is little in this passage to suggest a clear connection between their funeral ceremonies and a Jewish heritage, especially if one was to compare this passage with the Halakhic requirements of traditional Jewish funerals, which often includes a recitation of psalms, a eulogy, and the recitation of the *Kaddish*, a doxology praising God.[277] Moreover, there is certainly no evidence in the Torah that Jewish people were required to drink blood, in fact, according to the Book of Leviticus, drinking blood is forbidden.[278] Of course, for Le Roux, the claim is not that the Lemba share commonalities with modern Judaism, but what she perceives as practices that derive from the worldview of ancient Israelites. However, there does not appear to be obvious evidence to support her claim, in this regard. On the contrary, it appears that the example given above more-so reflects the possible influence of placArabic culture, in addition to the work of Christian missions on the Lemba's customs and traditional

[276] Ibid.
[277] Rifat Sonsino. *Modern Judaism: An Introduction to the Beliefs and Practices of Contemporary Judaism*, San Diego, CA: Cognella, Inc, 2013: 115.
[278] Lev. 17:13-14.

practices, especially since these missions were active in the region around the same time as the informant recounted this information to Jaques.[279]

Another example, that Le Roux refers to is an "old Lemba song" that lists traditional dietary restrictions for Lemba people:

> The Jew does not eat a pig; even the Mu-Lemba does not.
> The Jew does not eat a hare; even the Mu-Lemba does not.
> The Jew does not eat a rock rabbit; even the Mu-Lemba does not.
> The Jew does not eat an owl; even the Mu-Lemba does not.
> The Jew does not eat an eagle; even the Mu-Lemba does not.
> The Jew does not each an ostrich; even the Mu-Lemba does not.
> The Jew does not eat the crow; even the Mu-Lemba does not.[280]

It is evident that the allusion to Jewish culture, here, acts as a reference to support the particular significance of Lemba dietary laws. However, it is not clear that the author of the song is claiming that the Lemba are Jewish by referring to Jewish dietary laws, but rather simply implying that Lemba dietary laws share a parallel with Jewish dietary laws, as they were likely conveyed to the Lemba by Christian missionaries.

Other examples that Le Roux lists also refer to the Lemba's adherence to a "kosher diet". As Le Roux writes, "some Lemba explain, without giving reference to a specific Biblical text, that they do not mix meat and milk in their foods. They argue that they find the code for this behaviour in the book of Leviticus. Milk is drunk separately from meat dishes."[281] Interestingly, however, this last example seems to point to a contradiction in Le Roux's writing, since in the first sentence, Le Roux is claiming that the Lemba do not give reference to a specific biblical text, but then in the next, clearly states that the Lemba provide support for their arguments on the basis of the book of Leviticus. This contradiction provokes two questions: When did the Lemba

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[279] Muthivhi, "Ploughing New Fields of Knowledge: Culture and the Rise of community schooling in Venda," 138-139.
[280] Le Roux, 121.
[281] Ibid.

begin to see themselves in relation to Jewish people, culture, and beliefs? Is it possible to historicize their claims to a Jewish identity?

Much has been written about the social, economic, and political influence of the Christian missions on the Lemba in the early part of the twentieth century, during the colonial era, but little has been written about the way in which these Christian missions shaped their claims to Judaism. As briefly discussed in chapter three, a significant part of their story is the role of the Christian missions in shaping their understanding of scripture. This appears to be an important context for the way in which the Lemba began to connect with the idea of themselves as Jewish. I suggest that the translation of the Bible into the Venda language by Christian missionaries in the early twentieth century created the material conditions for the Lemba's claims to a Jewish heritage. From this perspective, the Lemba's claims to Judaism might be better understood as a direct result of the translation and dissemination of the Bible among the Lemba and Venda. Therefore, the Lemba's claims to Judaism, as a meaningful tradition of reference, emerge in a context in which they read scripture in their own language, in light of their own culture and ways of life, as well as their social and political aspirations.

M. E. R. Mathivha's doctoral dissertation, "A survey of the literary achievements in Venda," provides a fascinating social and intellectual context for the analysis of the role of Christian missionary activity for both the Venda and the Lemba in the area of the northern Transvaal in the early-to-mid twentieth century.[282] In his dissertation, Mathivha discusses the context in which the Bible was first translated into Venda by the Christian missionaries from the Berlin Lutheran Church Missionary in the northern Transvaal. Here, Mathivha notes the role of C. F. Beuster in the creation of a written system of the Venda (a Bantu language). Once Beuster

[282] Mathivha, 39.

had an adequate understanding of the language, he began to collaborate with local people to translate the Bible into Venda. In addition to Beuster's initial foray into the translation of the Bible into Venda, Mathivha notes that the Schwellnus brothers later compiled a book of Venda verbs, entitled "Die Verba Des Tsivenda" in 1904: the first "Venda-German" dictionary. As Mathivha notes, the work of the Schwellnus brothers reflects a shift away from Beuster's earlier work, in as much as Beuster's translations were more influenced by the Pedi language (a language belonging to the broader Sotho language family)[283], to a clearer Venda translation of the Bible.[284]

In 1937, P. E. Schwellnus published a complete translation of the Bible in Venda. According to Mathivha, the translation of the Bible into the Venda language was the greatest contribution to Venda literature, since Schwellnus was careful to use local idioms and expressions to express the poetic and metaphorical language of the Bible. As Mathivha states, "the Venda used in this Bible exerted a great influence on the development of Venda literature. It became the book of every Venda Christian family, its words and expressions were used daily in every Venda family."[285] From Mathivha's perspective the Venda Bible provided an important resource for Venda speaking peoples (including the Lemba) as they approached life. As Mathivha states, "the social aspect of Hebrew life also affected the social aspect of Venda life. In certain tribes, it confirmed their practices as good. For instance, the Lembas who did not eat pork and dead animals were encouraged when they read the related prescriptions in the Bible."[286] For Mathivha, the significance of the Bible written in the Venda language was that it provided the

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[283] See Yonatan Tesfaye Fessha, *Ethnic Diversity and Federalism Constitution Making in South Africa and Ethiopia,* Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010: 61.
[284] Ibid., 20.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.

Lemba with an ontological basis for the moral goods of their culture. As Mathivha states, "the translation of the Bible indicates the highest stage of development of the Venda language. The Bible stabilized the philosophy of the Venda and therefore their form of expression."[287] From Mathivha's perspective, the use of the Venda language to communicate biblical narratives had a profound effect on how local people responded to and interpreted these narratives, especially in light of their own oral traditions. Therefore, the emergence of an inventive tradition among the Lemba, through the transmission of their oral traditions in a way that emphasizes a connection to Jewish customs and culture as perceived through the Bible, exists in reference to this particular context, when the Bible was first translated into the Venda language by Christian missionaries.

One traditional Lemba story that has been interpreted through a Biblical lens is the legend of the Ngoma-Lungunda (the drum that thunders), a mythical story about a sacred drum "around which all the vicissitudes of the Vasenzhi and Vhalemba are woven."[288] According to Mathivha, the drum "brought great affliction whenever it was sounded," and was carried by the Lemba from place to place across the country.[289] The story begins with a Lemba man named Tshilume, who was given instructions by his father to carry the Ngoma-Lungunda on behalf of the Lemba. Tshilume later died and passed on the Ngoma Lungunda to his successors, who eventually made their way to the northern Transvaal. They continued onwards, but the further south they went, the less magical the drum had become. They travelled back towards the north and returned to Vendaland where the "fame of the sacred drum grew" and "became a fearful instrument in the hands of the Vhasendzi".[290] At the end of the story, the sacred drum disappears. For our purposes

[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid., 100.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid.

here, however, it is important to draw attention to the character of Tshimule, whom Mathivha compares to the biblical story of Moses. As Mathivha comments,

> He is an attentive son who obeys his father's instructions. He is liked by the gods and the people from both tribes of the Vhasendzi and the Vhalemba; they support him… He is a brave man. He did not disappoint the gods in the hope to please the appetites of his followers. He is as cruel as we see in the massacre of the people at Chibi. He wiped out a whole army leaving no one to tell the tale. He has however, human short-comings and therefore he was told that he would no longer see the promised land. This is akin to Moses' story in the Bible.[291]

In this way, it might be argued that the stories of the Bible contributed to the perception among Lemba people that their culture is fundamentally connected to Judaism through the scriptures, which they interpreted through the use of their own language and idiom. In this way, the invention of tradition is represented here as a rediscovery and reformulation of Lemba oral traditions through the lens of the newly translated Venda Bible. Therefore, it is important to note that the Lemba's claims to a Jewish identity, at least from a material-historical perspective, are inextricably linked to the activities of Christian missionaries and the influence they had on the development of Venda literature, in the region of the northern Transvaal, at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Contemporary Lemba Claims to Judaism

Contemporary Lemba claims to Judaism in their oral traditions are often framed by scholars in terms of the belief among them that the Lemba's oral traditions are a continuation of ancient biblical customs, and that they have rediscovered these customs in their own traditions.[292] However, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, I believe that Lemba claims to Judaism emerge as part of an inventive tradition among them that reflects a rediscovery and

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[291] Ibid.
[292] Shragg, 79; Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 15; Wuriga, 16.

reformulation of Lemba customs based on a creative reinterpretation of certain raw materials, such as the Venda Bible described in the previous section. This is clear, for example, in M. E. R. Mathivha's doctoral dissertation, particularly in his discussion on the translation of the Bible and its significance in the development of Venda literature. As I will discuss, contemporary Lemba oral traditions reflect Mathivha's early written material on the significance of the Bible in Lemba culture, especially in a way that emphasizes similarities with Jewish religion. In addition to this, I suggest that contemporary Lemba claims to a Jewish heritage are also a creative outcome of his later work that describes an ancestral descent of the Lemba from the ancient Israelites of the southern kingdom of Judea (not the northern kingdom, where the lost tribes of Israel are said to have disappeared from).[293] As discussed in the previous chapter, the results of the genetic tests, as well as the emerging scholarship on Lemba origins by scholars such as Parfitt and Le Roux, also had a significant impact on how the Lemba began to account for their origins, as well as their purported biological connection to modern Jews.[294]

Consider an origin story recounted by former LCA president and Lemba elder F. C. Raulinga to Tamarkin in his book *Genetic Afterlives*, where Raulinga states "before they were called Lembas. . . they were known as Senas, after the city Sena (named after Senaa in Judea) that they built in Yemen following the destruction of the second temple in 586 B.C.E."[295] The reference to Senah occurs in two Biblical passages: Ezra 2:35; Nehemiah 7:38, and these passages could be read as a confirmation of their oral history of their origins in "Sena". However, it is important to note that before Parfitt's research in Yemen, Mathivha did not know the exact location of the original "Sena". Elsewhere, M. M. Motenda wrote that the "the Lemba

[293] M.E.R. Mathivha, *The Basena/Vamwenye/Balemba*, 1.
[294] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 16; Also see, Magdel le Roux, "The Lemba - 'angel-Stars', Ngoma Lungundu and Ancestors," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 102, no. 102 (1) (2021).
[295] Tamarkin, 37.

people seem not to know where they came from, although they are strongly suspected to be Semitic or Black Jews of Africa…. The original home of the Lemba is "SENA" near Blantyre in Nyasaland [Malawi]. They call themselves Vha-SENA or Ba-SENA."[296] Raulinga and others' claim to an origin in Judea as described above, can be understood as a recent addition to their origin stories, because the Lemba have not always claimed a connection between "Sena" in Africa and the "Senaa" in Judea, nor have they ascribed a particular date to their places of origin.[297] Though this might contradict Raulinga and other's claims to an ancestral descent from Judea, it is important to note that to be Lemba is always a "matter of becoming", since their claims to culture, identity, and origins are subject to a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, the movement of history, as well as a creative reinterpretation of their history. As Tamarkin comments,

> In Raulinga's Lemba oral history, then, origins were multiple, movements were multidirectional, interactions with others was constant, the past was organized around places of settlement and which clans were leaders in each place and "Lemba" was a matter of becoming, over time, through these processes and places.[298]

Therefore, Raulinga's claims to a Jewish past highlight one of the central themes inherent to the idea of inventive tradition: the creation of new symbolisms and social cultural imaginaries.[299] Tamarkin's use of "becoming" is an important way of framing this inventive process, since it leaves space for the creativity of Lemba people in articulating the fluid and sacred dimensions of social and cultural life.

Overall, the Lemba's contemporary claims to their identity as black Jews derive their historical significance from the intellectual and political legacies of Lemba people such as

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[296] Ibid.
[297] Shragg, 47.
[298] Ibid.,16.
[299] Palmisano and Pannofino, *Invention of Tradition and Syncretism in Contemporary Religions*, 33; Shragg, 56.

Manneseh N. Mphelo, M. M. Motenda, W. M. D. Phophi, M. E. R. Mathivha, and others. In many ways, their legacies were shaped by their experiences with Christian missionaries and missionary schools, as well as their experiences during apartheid and postapartheid. Hence, their experiences were conditioned by the forces of colonialism and modernity, forces that created the conditions for their ideas and beliefs. However, the raw materials of these forces, such as the Venda Bible, the writing of colonial ethnologists, the introduction of Jewish symbolism, as well as the results of the genetic tests in recent times, have been creatively reinterpreted by these thinkers as they create a tradition among them that resonates with who they are, and what they believe about themselves. In what follows, I will highlight several more examples of Lemba contemporary oral traditions, in order to further explore the inventive nature of their claims.

In his book *Of Sacred Times, Rituals and Customs* Lemba philosopher and writer Rabson Wuriga, a leader of the Lemba community in Mapakomere,[300] a small town located in Zimbabwe's Masvingo Province, examines Lemba origin stories as they are discussed by contemporary Lemba people in Zimbabwe.[301] This presents important contextual information about Lemba communities in Zimbabwe and their claims to a diasporic Jewish identity. In order to read this extensive text, it is important to pay attention to the tone, context and intended audience of his writing. This book was sponsored by members of Be'chol Lashon, an American Jewish organization that has played a significant role in facilitating discussions around the inclusion of black Jews into Judaism. The book, which was published by Kulanu in 2012, provides a detailed history of the Lemba, their culture, values, and traditions, from the perspective of Lemba people in Zimbabwe.

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[300] Shragg, 71.
[301]Rabson Wuriga, *Of Sacred Times, Rituals, and Customs: Oral Traditions of the Lemba Jews of Zimbabwe*, New York: Kulanu inc. (2012).

From Wuriga's perspective, Lemba oral traditions serve different social, cultural, and religious purposes in the Lemba community: primarily to reengage Lemba people, especially Lemba youth, and encourage them to hold onto their identity and origin stories in a rapidly changing and globalized environment.[302] For Wuriga, his book also acts as a call for Lemba people to think critically about who they as Lembas. In this way, Wuriga's perspective echoes the work of former presidents and leaders of the LCA in South Africa, who advocated for the study of Lemba history, community development, as well as an understanding of their importance of their identity as black Jews.

In particular, Wuriga's work on Lemba oral traditions follows a similar trajectory as M. E. R. Mathivha in his book *The Basena/Vamwenye/Balemba*, wherein Mathivha suggests that the Lemba are descendants of Jewish traders who migrated from 'the North' to Yemen in the 7th century BCE, and later crossed over into Southern Africa to further their trading networks and explore new lands and opportunities.[303] Wuriga also discusses a common motif among Lemba people: the loss of their "book of Laws", a book that Wuriga associates with the Torah.[304] However, it is interesting to note, as discussed in Shragg's dissertation, that the Torah is not included as part of Lemba traditions, which have been handed down through the generations. As Wuriga recounts to Shragg, "we have songs that we sing, we have prayers that our forefathers had before we lost the Torah."[305] In any case, Wuriga elaborates on these points and claims that the Lemba had been cut off from the development of Rabbinic Judaism through their migratory history.[306] In order to substantiate these claims, Wuriga draws on previous scholarship on the

[302] Ibid.
[303] M. E. R. Mathivha, *The Basena/Vamwenye/Balemba*, 1
[304] Wuriga., 1395.
[305] Shragg, 74.
[306] Wuriga, 815.

Lemba developed by Le Roux, Parfitt, and others, as well as multiple works by scholars in Jewish studies to discuss the parallels he sees between the Lemba and Jewish people.

Wuriga lists several examples of Lemba origin stories in order to explore his claims to a "hidden Lemba Jewish identity".[307] For example, Wuriga discusses the name Lemba, and an ancient city named Lemba near the Dead Sea that "existed in the time of Alexander Janneus (107-101 BCE) in Judea." However, it is important to note that this is not accounted for in Lemba oral history, but by Le Roux in her 2003 book, *The Lemba: A Lost Tribe of Israel in Southern Africa*, where she explains that a colleague pointed out that this city existed on an old biblical map.[308] Nevertheless, Wuriga writes, "the place also appears in Flavius Josephus' book, Antiquities of the Jews (Book XIII, Chapter 15), among the towns that the Jews possessed during the time of Alexander." However, a closer reading of Josephus indicates that these cities previously belonged to the Syrians, Idumeans and Phoenicians.[309] This implies that the city of "Lemba" was not originally a Jewish settlement, but rather a place that was home to a wide variety of people and cultures. Furthermore, a closer examination of the Biblical map reveals that the city of Lemba was not located in Judea, but across the border in the land of Moab.[310]

According to Wuriga, another version of their oral history states that a "man named Buba (most probably a corrupt transliteration of the name Juda) led the Lemba out of Judea to Sena in Yemen."[311] This also documented by Le Roux in her book where she states that "experts among the Falasha in Ethiopia aver, according to M. E. R. Mathivha, that 'Buba' is an aberration of the

[307] Wuriga, 1325.
[308] Le Roux, *The Lemba: A Lost Tribe of Israel in Southern Africa?*, 223.
[309] Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, *gutenberg.org*, last accessed June 15, 2021: Book XIII, Chapter 15, paragraph 4, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm#link132HCH0015
[310] Le Roux, xii.
[311] Wuriga,

name ‘Juda’.”[312] While this might appear to be a possibility, if this was correct the experts among the Falasha would have to justify centuries of linguistic changes between diverse language families in order to account for a simple change in consonants between “Buba” and the English cognate for the Hebrew Y’huda, “Juda”. In any case, the important point here is that while M. E. R. Mathivha’s observation is rooted in his desire for cultural continuity with what he perceived in scripture as a justification for the good found in Lemba culture, Le Roux’s claims are justified through the genetic tests, which as discussed in chapter four, have been both contested and disproven by geneticists.[313]

Another version that Wuriga describes “connects the Lemba with the Biblical story of the Babylonian exile.”[314] This is a perspective shared in an interview between Wuriga and a Lemba elder, Edmore Maramwidze Hamandishe, who subscribes to the idea that the Lemba are implicated in the biblical narratives of Nehemiah and Ezra. As Wuriga writes,

> Prophets Nehemiah and Ezra state that Senaah returned from Babylon to Judea with over 3000 of the children of Senaah to help rebuild Judea and Jerusalem. Hamandishe stated that the Lemba are descendants of Senaah, but they did not return to Judah. Hamandishe said that instead of returning to Judah the Senaah moved southward because they did not want to part ways with their Babylonian wives and children as was demanded by the prophets – Nehemiah and Ezra, especially the latter. So, they later moved south of Judea and finally went into the Arabian Peninsula.[315]

Although there appears to be little historical proof to verify this story, the point is not to debate whether these origin stories ought to be proven or disproven, but rather, that it is more important to reflect on what these narratives reveal about Lemba culture and identity.[316] For Wuriga, these references to an ancestral origin in Judea appear to be significant genealogical points of ancestral

[312] Le Roux, 56.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Wuriga,
[315] Ibid.
[316] This is also a theme that is reflected in Shragg’s dissertation through his reflection on the issue of proof phenomena. See Shragg, 110.

connection for the Lemba, as he reflects on what he knows about their heritage, and also as he thinks through the possibilities of Lemba origins. Moreover, for both Wuriga and Hamandishe, this last narrative also appears to imply something about the nature of Lemba kinship. From this perspective, Hamandishe's oral history speaks to the solidarity of Lemba people, as a people who do not abandon their families, even in the face of difficult decisions and circumstances.

While Wuriga's book represents an important example of an inventive tradition among the Lemba, especially as he points to multiple articulations of Lemba culture and identity, his work, however, might be too easily appropriated or misinterpreted by others who mistakenly essentialize the Lemba as part of a genetic Jewish diaspora. One example of this is found in Shragg's doctoral dissertation, wherein Shragg draws on Wuriga's ideas about a Jewish past, and finds support for them in scholarly work that uses biblical references to claim historical trading activities of King Solomon in the Red Sea region, as well as the Sanaite Jewish legend "that states their ancestors settled in Yemen forty-two years before the destruction of the first temple, in 629 BCE."[317] In addition to these examples, Shragg mentions the legend of the Jews of Habban in Yemen, who claim that they are descendants of ancient Israelites who settled in Yemen before the destruction of the second temple.[318] As a result, Shragg conflates thousands of years of history with references from biblical texts and various legends attributed to different cultures in order to suggest some kind of historical continuity between the origin stories found in Wuriga's book, and broader Lemba claims to their identity as black Jews. However, how does Shragg's conflation of distinct histories and legends connect to the idea of genetic diaspora?

Here, the concept of genetic Jewish diaspora is subtly introduced through a reflection of the current state of the Lemba community in Harare. As Shragg states, "while the biggest

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[317] Shragg, 49.
[318] Ibid.

question of the diasporic identity of the Lemba Jews might be 'where are they from?' I propose that instead we ask instead 'where are they now?'" Shragg's use of the word diaspora, in this regard, connects to Samir Dayal's theory of "diasporic double consciousness", which Shragg defines as a separation of identity into multiple facets that "allows for the emergence of different meanings of belonging," and Bobby Sinha's idea of home-binding.[319] As Shragg states,

> For diasporic communities, the recreation of home-binding signifies the development of cultural belonging by exchanging symbolic or material meanings. The work of the collective memory in constructing the imagined homeland closely connects to concrete materialization of objects, traditions, and rituals.[320]

While Shragg's conceptualization of the Lemba community in Zimbabwe as a diasporic Jewish community is framed as both constructive and imaginative, especially in a way that emphasizes their resilience and resourcefulness as a community, Shragg's framing needs to be understood as a relatively recent way of thinking about Lemba Jewish identity, one that was only introduced in reference to their unfolding status as genetic Jews, and one that not all Lemba people clearly identify with.[321] On the one hand, this presents a problematic assumption of the Lemba as a diasporic Jewish community, but on the other, can be read as a commentary on their imaginative and indeed inventive capacities, as Lemba people articulate different forms of belonging.

Shragg's articulation of the Lemba as part of a Jewish diaspora, therefore, might be read in terms of the problematic notion of genetic diaspora, especially since he appears to unproblematically subscribe to the idea of a Lemba diaspora from Israel. According to Tamarkin, this reflects a particular narrative of genetic diaspora that "demands both their difference and their assimilation."[322] Moreover, it seems that Shragg's position implicitly reflects a Zionist bias,

[319] Ibid., 55.
[320] Ibid.
[321] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 84.
[322] Ibid., 84.

since he, on more than one occasion, confuses the Lemba's claims to a homeland in ancient Israel (or the more accurate "Kingdom of Judah") with the modern nation state of Israel.[323] Support for this critique can be found in Tamarkin's book *Genetic Afterlives* where he explains that "genetic diaspora is a version of Jewish diaspora that naturalizes and therefore depoliticizes Zionism—a contentious politics of Jewish nationalism—by mapping genetic origins onto the contemporary Jewish nation-state."[324] Shragg's conflation of a Lemba Jewish diaspora with diasporic origins in modern Israel reflects this naturalization of Zionism through the mapping of Jewish origins onto the contemporary Jewish nation-state. However, this appears to be more explicit later on in his dissertation when Shragg discusses the question of the Lemba and their attitudes towards the state of Israel.

In the first instance, Shragg's observations provide support for Tamarkin's perspective, highlighted elsewhere, that the Lemba are not necessarily interested in returning to Israel, since they are rooted in their own culture and homeland.[325] However, in subsequent pages this matter is complicated by Shragg's observation that "amongst Lemba individuals, there is a deeply rooted connection to the land of Israel, their diasporic homeland."[326] As Modreck Maeresera, a young Lemba leader in Zimbabwe, explains, "there is a sense that Israel is something that belongs to every Jew. . . for a lizard to enjoy the sunshine, it must have a cave to crawl back to. That's what Israel represents to the Lemba… we always have somewhere to go back to."[327] In this context, Shragg's discussion of the state of Israel shifts to the issue of asylum seekers: "However, regarding issues of asylum, Israel's stance is clear. It does not formally recognize the

323 For instance, see Shragg, 65.
324 Tamarkin, 84.
325 Shragg., 161.
326 Ibid.
327 Ibid., 161.

Lemba Jews' claims. Contrary to other Afro-Judaic communities like the Igbo Jews of Nigeria for instance, who encountered similar roadblocks which were met with anger and outward frustration, the Lemba Jews seem almost at peace with this decision."[328] Moreover, as Maeresera explains, "it doesn't generally concern us that Israel has not accepted us yet, however, there is hope that if we need to make *aliyah*, Israel will accept us."[329] According to Shragg, for Maeresera, this all depends on the necessity for Lemba people to do so. In this context, Shragg notes that Maeresera is well-aware of the complexities of "external Jewish communities attempting to gain asylum."[330] For example, as Maeresera states, "we are not pushing to have those political frictions with the government of Israel. They have observed previous individual and community struggles with this issue and in recognition of this, are holding off and not pressing the issue. . . What we need more now is to be connected to Israel in one way or another."[331] While Shragg's framing of this conversation appears to reveal an implicitly pro-Zionist political bias, it is important to note that Maeresera's approach privileges Lemba agency inasmuch as he addresses the needs of his community in relation to his own thoughts about the relationship between the Lemba and the state of Israel.

Although Shragg's dissertation revolves around the identity of the Lemba as a diasporic Jewish community in Zimbabwe, reproducing the rhetoric of genetic diaspora, his research is significant because he illustrates the creativity of Lemba people as they articulate their Jewish identity in present-day Zimbabwe. This is useful for my thesis, inasmuch as it showcases the inventiveness of Lemba individuals as they reconstruct their religion and culture on the basis of raw materials in a contemporary context. In this case, Lemba Jewish music at the Harare Lemba

[328] Ibid.
[329] Ibid., 161-162.
[330] Ibid., 162.
[331] Ibid.

Synagogue makes use of American Hebrew liturgical music, the Koren Sacks Siddur (prayerbook)[332], as well as elements of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jewish traditions. In this way, Shragg's dissertation provides a valuable context through which to further explore contemporary Lemba claims to Judaism. Moreover, Shragg's research parallels with several points that I have made throughout this thesis, including the Lemba's socially constructed identity as Jews and their creativity in adopting this identity for themselves; the importance of outlining particular historical contexts that have created the conditions of possibility for their claims; the diversity of Lemba voices throughout Southern Africa. Consider the opening lines of Shragg's abstract:

> This dissertation examines the role music plays in performances of religious devotion and the construction of social identity of Lemba and Rusape Jewish communities in Zimbabwe. A study of the musical practices of Lemba Jews reveals a combination of local music styles with Hebrew text to create a new genre of Jewish liturgical music.[333]

Through Shragg's analysis of contemporary Lemba music and culture in Zimbabwe, he presents significant insights that I will now focus on, in order to further discuss the creative bricolage of Lemba religious and cultural identity in the particular context of Zimbabwe, which also reconnects to Wuriga's scholarship discussed above.

Shragg's research methodology is ethnographic and focuses in particular on how contemporary Jewish groups in Zimbabwe use music as a way of creating new genres of Jewish liturgical music. In order to frame this discussion, Shragg also draws inspiration from the work of Hobsbawm and Ranger. As Shragg states, "cultural historian Eric Hobsbawm's theories on invented traditions provide a useful model for understanding the practices of the Lemba Jews."[334] In this context, Shragg situates his ethnographic research in three different communities: The

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[332] Ibid., 13.
[333] Ibid,, 3.
[334] Ibid., 79.

Harare Lemba Synagogue in Zimbabwe, Beth El Temple in Rusape (home to the Rusape Jewish community, distinct from the Lemba Jewish community), and the Great Zimbabwe Synagogue located outside of Mapakomere in the Masvingo Province.

Shragg analyzes the music of Lemba composer and self-taught multi-instrumentalist Hamlet Zhou, who has composed and written songs that reflect a rich variety of influences, including Zimbabwean pop and Shona-influenced roots music. Elements of Zhou's compositions include the use of guitar and mbira (a traditional Shona melodic instrument). Although Shragg states that in Harare "women are encouraged to learn and compose equally as men,"[335] Shragg focuses on the work of Zhou, since Zhou is "solely responsible for the entire community's musical repertoire."[336] As Shragg states,

> In the Lemba Jewish community of Harare, I observed music being used as a vehicle to construct new Lemba Jewish traditions, to construct their indigenous Lemba and Jewish identity in modern Zimbabwe, to connect with Jews on a global scale, and to create a sense of solidarity among their community.[337]

Zhou's 2019 album entitled "Ancient Roots/New Traditions," creatively use texts from traditional Jewish liturgy. These songs are sung in Hebrew with an Israeli pronunciation, clearly as a result of external influences including the work of Kulanu with this particular Lemba community in Harare, including the influence of Jewish American musicians, such as cantor Mike Stein, who helped with the recording of the album.[338] Shragg draws attention to the album track "Adon Olam" (Eternal Lord). As Shragg states,

> The origin of this prayer is not officially known, however it is often attributed to Solomon Ibn Gabirol, an 11th century Jewish philosopher and poet. The poem itself was not adopted into the liturgy until the 15th century. This poem and its many varied musical

[335] Ibid., 17.
[336] Ibid., 46.
[337] Ibid., 65.
[338] Ibid., 62-73,

> settings is one of the most widespread and well-known prayers in the gamut of the Jewish liturgy and composers are often setting the text to new melodies.[339]

Shragg then provides a compelling musical analysis that shows the inventive means through which Hamlet composes his music, as a playful approach to traditional Jewish music that clearly conveys the feel of contemporary Zimbabwean culture and music.[340] Shragg's observations, here, reflect a cultural transition as the Lemba community in Harare develops new modes of expression through Jewish music, and as they connect not only with a transnational global Jewish audience, but also with different Lemba communities throughout Southern Africa.[341]

In this context, Shragg further highlights significant details about the music during the Shabbat service at the Lemba Harare Synagogue, as Shragg states,

> the current form of the Shabbat services incorporates a heavy mix of Ashkenazic *nusach* (melodies, Hebrew) with the newly created music. According to community members this is seen as a positive, not a negative. 'It's not that we are rejecting our traditions and totally losing ourselves to the new tradition, its that we are merging those whenever possible, to keep track of both identities.[342]

Later on, Shragg discusses how he met with Rabson Wuriga, whose community in Mapakomere, a rural town in southern Zimbabwe, reflects a more conservative approach to Lemba material culture. As Shragg recounts,

> I was eager to sit down with Dr. Wuriga and discuss their history and listen to his story. It was during a tour of their unfinished construction project, a new synagogue and community center where Dr. Wuriga revealed some information to me about the status of the relationship between himself, his community, and the Harare Lemba Jewish community. Services in Mapokomere do not use music at all. In fact, the entire service is read and spoken aloud in English.[343]

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339 Ibid., 89.
340 Ibid., 92.
341 Ibid., 70.
342 Ibid.
343 Ibid., 72.

In his interview with Wuriga, Shragg reflects on the relationship between the Harare Lemba Synagogue and Wuriga's community in Mapakomere. As Shragg states,

> I found myself curious as for the last month I had been experiencing beautiful and engaging music used in worship. I knew Dr. Wuriga had a relationship with Modreck and Hamlet so why were Hamlet's melodies not being used? When asked about this, Dr.Wuriga gave a rather interesting answer. 'Well I don't think its traditional Lemba music. It is a generation trying to develop songs. It's a generation developing music. What we call Lemba music, its there, the prayers are there, which are only done during very sacred gatherings, which we don't avail to everyone who comes.' I asked him if there would have been music had I, an external visitor to the community not been there, but he said no. In his eyes, these secret Lemba prayers he referred to are the only 'traditional' prayers the rest are just 'music'.[344]

It is interesting to note the contrast between the service read and spoken aloud in English, and the use of traditional Lemba prayers during sacred gatherings. This implies that the traditional Lemba prayers described above are not recognizably Jewish, and that the services, read and spoken aloud in English (the colonial language) are based on imported material, likely as a result of Kulanu's outreach activities. As Shragg notes, the organization initially provided financial support and Jewish educational material to Wuriga's community, prior to their work with Harare Lemba Synagogue.[345] In any case, for Wuriga, Zhou's music appears to lack a connection with traditional Lemba theological and cultural content.[346] Wuriga's perspective on this issue speaks to the contested nature of inventive tradition among Lemba communities, and also to the diversity of Lemba voices as they engage with the transmission of their traditions. As Shragg's research suggests, the compositional material of Hamlet Zhou reflects a new paradigm in the development of new Lemba music, further illustrating the creativity of Lemba individuals as they reconstruct their existing traditions and customs.

[344] Ibid., 73.
[345] Ibid., 74.
[346] Ibid., 73.

Recent scholarship that discusses Lemba origin stories suggests a strong possibility of a historical relationship between the Lemba and ancient Israelites, who left Judah after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE. Indeed, this possibility has often been framed in terms of the discourse of the lost tribes of Israel. However, as I have suggested, in order to understand this claim, it is important to note its' historicity as a modern construct shaped by a variety of contextual factors, including the ways in which scholars have approached this topic. For the Lemba, however, the raw materials of scholarship, as well as the work of missionaries and colonial ethnologists, including the Bible, in addition to the more contemporary materials discussed in this final section, most certainly act as resources in the transmission process, as the Lemba reinterpret these raw materials in the pursuit of their own self-knowledge, and as they creatively construct their identity as black Jews, enacting their own agency in the world.

Conclusion

This thesis has traced several narratives in the history of the Lemba, a self-defined ethnic group in Southern Africa. While writing this thesis I wished to highlight the question around the Jewish identity of the Lemba. However, in doing so, I have discovered that this, at least in one way, is less a question about Jewish identity, than it is about the way in a which a particular group of people have constructed a Jewish identity on their own terms and in specific ways. I argue that Lemba constructions of religion and culture emerge from a politically and spiritually charged history of activism, scholarship, and leadership. These contexts continue to inform and produce new knowledge about religion and culture in a fluid and inventive manner. In order to substantiate this thesis, I adopted the methodological approach characterized by the invention of tradition, an idea that was first introduced by Hobsbawm and Ranger as invented tradition, but later critiqued by Palmisano and Pannofino, who developed the alternative concept, inventive tradition, as a nuanced analytical framework to discuss the creative and inventive dimensions of the transmission process. I have used this concept to think, in a critical, but also respectful manner, about how the Lemba have constructed the category of black Jews, especially to show how this discourse has been perpetuated by scholars of the Lemba for different purposes.

In chapter two, I described the work of missionaries and ethnologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their written material that discussed the question of Lemba origins. In this context, I also examined the colonial legacy of Nicholas Van Warmelo, and the way in which his published material shaped the conditions of the Lemba's legal treatment during apartheid. Towards the end of the chapter, I introduced the political and intellectual legacies of Lemba leaders and scholars such as M. N. Mphelo and M. M. Motenda, as they responded to the work of Van Warmelo and others. Their insights prove, from the outset, that Lemba traditions

are by their nature inventive, as they emerge in fluid and contingent cultural settings. In chapter three, I highlighted, based on the important research of scholars such as Gina Buijs, Noah Tamarkin, and Magdel Le Roux, the political, social, and cultural context of the Lemba before and during apartheid when the Lemba established the LCA, a political organization that championed Lemba rights during an oppressive era in the history of South Africa. In this context, I reflected on the political and spiritual visions of M. M. Motenda, William Masala and M. E. R. Mathivha, figures who created the conditions of possibility for the Lemba's identification as black Jews. Towards the end of chapter three, I discussed the recent efforts of Kgoshi Mpketsane, an unrecognized Lemba chief, to seek ethnic recognition from the government of South Africa, and the inventive ways in which he navigated the legal complexities of postapartheid justice.

In chapter four, I reflected on the genetic tests supposedly proving the Lemba as descendants of the Cohanim, an ancient Jewish lineage connected to the biblical figure of Aaron, as well as the media coverage. Through an analysis of the genetic tests, as well as an examination of the more recent genetic tests contesting the previous results, I believe that there is little evidence to suggest a historical continuity between the Lemba and an ancient Jewish diaspora. Nevertheless, this idea has been perpetuated by the media, scholars, and other interest groups, in different ways for different ideological purposes. The final chapter concluded with a historical analysis of the intellectual work of Lemba leaders, including M. E. R. Mathivha and Rabson Wuriga, as well as a discussion of contemporary constructions of Lemba Jewish identity in present-day Zimbabwe. I suggest that the construction of the Lemba identity as black Jews in these contexts is a product of multiple social, economic, political, and religious forces, responding to the forces of modernity and globalization. Perhaps the greatest influence on the

idea of the Lemba as a Jewish people, though rarely written about in the scholarship that I have encountered, was the translation of the Bible into the Venda language, and the way in which this affected the social and philosophical worldview of the Lemba, as they reimagined their own traditions and customs in relation to biblical narratives of the Jewish people. Furthermore, the contemporary construction of Lemba Jewishness in Zimbabwe reflects both a shifting and contested paradigm of Jewish identity among the Lemba, as they further imagine and construct their identity as black Jews.

As Palmisano and Pannofino state, the term "inventive" is different from "invented", especially in the way that it places emphasis not only the past, but also on the future. The turn described in Tamarkin's book, *Genetic Afterlives*, a turn that I have only briefly discussed in chapter three, is the turn towards indigeneity, as Lemba people have stressed not only their identity as black Jews, but also their identity as an Indigenous people of South Africa.[347] This has also been addressed in recent articles and books highlighting Lemba practices from the point of view of international social work and healthcare.[348] It seems that future research that addresses the invention of tradition, for the Lemba, will likely move in this direction, since the Lemba have had recent success at cultivating an identity not only as black Jews, but also as a people, indigenous to southern Africa.

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[347] Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives*, 153.

[348] Edmos Mtetwa and Munyaradzi Muchacha, "In search of culturally sensitive social work practice in the care and protection of children in Zimbabwe: The case of Remba/Lemba culture," *African Journal of Social Work* 10, no. 2 (2020): 93; Tabona Shoko, *Karanga indigenous religion in Zimbabwe: Health and well-being*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013: 24.

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