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"On Saturday We Don't Beat the Drum": Refuge, Ritual, and Remembering Amongst the Sehwi Jews of Ghana

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“On Saturday We Don’t Beat the Drum”:

Refuge, Ritual, and Remembering Amongst the Sehwi Jews of Ghana

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in History

by

Janice Ruth Levi

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"On Saturday We Don't Beat the Drum":

Refuge, Ritual, and Remembering Amongst the Sehwi Jews of Ghana

by

Janice Ruth Levi

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Andrew Apter, Chair

The dissertation argues that there is a historical precedent for the existence of Jewish communities emerging in Western Ghana rather than a phenomenon derivative of colonial logic, historico-racial schema, suspicious financial motives, or modern technologies as scholars outside of African Studies have claimed. It examines the *longue durée* of Jewish presence (both physical and dialectical) in West Africa that has contributed to the manifestations of a Jewish present in western Ghana. In widening the temporal and geographic scope that has created scholarly blind spots, the dissertation acknowledges an interconnected history for a millennium (11th-21st centuries), forging a path between African and Jewish Studies. Through the lens of survival, incorporating acculturation and disguise, it paints Northwestern Africa as a place giving aid and refuge (not seeking it) and a space where history was preserved and transmitted before and

beyond Western conceptualizations. The dissertation argues that intercontinental and international aspects of Northwest Africa (inclusive of the Sahara), and long-established networks that existed before and persisted after imperial lines were drawn, made survival possible for the Sehwi, and specifically the House of Israel.

The Sehwi, a migrant group that settled in western Ghana to escape war and persecution, maintained their history through orality and ritual. Through examining the oral history of the Sehwi, the dissertation argues that key to their survival was maintaining secrecy and negotiating with imperial and global forces the boundaries of belonging: geographic, imperial, and ethnic. The House of Israel, a Sehwi community in western Ghana that has identified as Jews since the 1970s, also utilizes these strategies of survival to preserve their ancestral beliefs. By interrogating silence and whispers as well as embodied archives — the unspoken mechanisms of communication (largely via ritual) — the dissertation argues that instability of belonging and assurances of safety impacts how the past is transmitted.

The dissertation of Janice Ruth Levi is approved.

Aomar Boum

Robin D. G. Kelley

Ghislaine E. Lydon

Sarah Abrevaya Stein

Andrew Apter, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

To Spirit

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the Spring of 2010, enrolled in a methods course and a bibliography class at Indiana University, I began my quest to understand why some scholars assumed Jews never inhabited the West African landscape after the known persecutions in northern Africa, lands connected via the Sahara and its trade networks. Professors Maria Grosz-Ngate and Marion Frank-Wilson, who taught the courses, respectively, questioned my interests and pushed me to expand my then stubborn emphasis on Judaism in Mali. Resistant, I broadened my bibliographical search south towards Ghana, only to be prodded further to increase the geographic scope outside of West Africa, where more scholarship was available on Jewish Africa. In my attempt to negotiate, I settled on "Jews in West Africa" as my bibliographic topic. In 2010, and arguably to this day, this statement was not largely supported and I received a lot of push back from various faculty. This push, of which I am grateful, only encouraged me to keep digging. I mined the holdings and special collections at Indiana University searching for any texts that may make mention. As the semester was coming to a close, Maria requested I meet her for coffee to talk about the viability of the project. Days before the meeting, I came across Ismael Diadie Haïdara's *Les Juifs a Tombouctou*. At coffee, I slid Haïdara's book across the table, to which she indicated I may be on to something and that I had a few weeks to flesh out my bibliography or I would have to consider another focus to my master's thesis. By the end of the semester, in addition to 118 sources mentioning Jews in West Africa (colonial ethnographies, online forums, encyclopedic entries, and a handful of monographs among them), I had also found an online poem about the community in Ghana and a video online with images of these Ghanaian Jews. In presenting the information to my methods class, Maria matter-of-factly stated that I would have to travel to

Ghana if I wanted answers to many of my questions. And so, I booked a flight with a seemingly outdated phone number in hand from a website (as there was no answer when calling from the US). It would be my first trip to the continent and luckily someone picked up the phone after spending 4 days in Accra and persistently redialing the number. Upon following directions given over the phone, I found my way on a bus to Sefwi Wiawso, then a taxi to a nearby junction, to a room in a housing complex with the banner "Only one God" hanging on a wall with a menorah situated on an old TV set underneath.

Before launching into my deep gratitude for so many individuals and communities who have inspired, supported, and mentored me, I also recognize that this research and many of the relationships built would not have been possible without the generous support of several institutions. The bulk of my research was funded by the Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Research Fund, West African Research Association's Predoctoral Research Fellowship, as well as preliminary research assisted by funds from the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa Moroccan Studies Research Grant, and Department of Education's Title VI Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship. The University of California, Los Angeles, my academic home, also provided necessary support to carry out this research and time dedicated to writing. Special gratitude to the department of History, the Y & S Nazarian Center for Israeli Studies, and the International Institute Fieldwork Fellowship for contributing to the success of this project. And, I am grateful for the Graduate Research Mentorship(s) and Dissertation Year Fellowship that UCLA Graduate Division awarded. Without these funds, this research would not have been made possible.

First, I owe a great debt to the community that makes up The House of Israel (HOI) in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana (past and present). The community welcomed me into their homes, sacred spaces, and lives. Not only did they share their story, but also their trust. Members of the HOI epitomize the Ghanaian hospitality. For over a decade, I came in and out of their lives and whether arriving in Sefwi Wiawso or their digital inbox (Facebook and Whatsapp), I was greeted with generosity. In addition to sharing their lives, the HOI helped to connect me to various elders who were custodians of history outside of the community, to secure transport to and from locations when I was still so very green to travelling solo, to provide many a meal, and even more, to hold conversations and connection when amidst the, at times, lonely work of a scholar. Special and warmest thanks to Kofi Kwarteng, Joseph Armah and family, Joseph Nipah, Alex Armah, Richard Owusu Ansah and family, Michael Owusu Ansah, Andoh Kwame Bush, Ebenezer Kwesi Yeboah, and so many more. Outside of the HOI, but located in Sefwi Wiawso or neighboring Dwinase, Felix Ahorsi (head librarian at the Sefwi Wiawso Public Library), Jesse Yaw Aidoo and Dacosta Aboagye offered friendship and conversation many a day. I am also incredibly appreciative to the women and elders who found energy and time to answer my many questions. These include Harrison Ofori, Mr. Kwaw, Kwadwo Osei, and especially Manta Nipah, who all stopped their domestic, professional, or daily responsibilities, even if for mere moments, to provide some information from a female perspective.

While the House of Israel's narrative inspired me, it was the scholars and teachers who have given me invaluable tools to do the work of a historian. My advisor, Ghislaine Lydon, has taught me much over these many years. Her belief in my project opened the door to me continuing this quest and has guided me, pushed me, and bettered me in more ways than can be listed. Andrew Apter has urged me to think more deeply about my ethnographic observations

and has introduced me to foundational theories that have intrigued my curiosities and influenced my approaches. Sarah Stein has provided grounding with her consistent feedback that manages to clarify my thoughts when my mind feels scattered. Aomar Boum's scholarship and advice has been a critical launchpad for my own work and his academic inquiries have fascinated as much as they have inspired. Robin D. G. Kelley has been a solid support for me over the years and has introduced me to so many texts to consider how the past has an impact on our lives today, what all is at stake, and also how these histories yet to be written (or not finished being written) hold a world of possibility. I feel so fortunate to have these brilliant scholars form my committee but also inform my world. Their mentorship has been monumental and their feedback critical to my growth as a scholar. Beyond my committee, other scholars at UCLA have left indelible impressions on my career and life. Mary Polly Nooter Roberts provided the most interactive learning space I have yet to experience, and her class on memory has greatly influenced my research but also teaching methodologies. Her husband Al Roberts, too, has shaped my approaches. Sanjay Subramanyam and Ra'anan Boustan, whose comments on early seminar papers, have instilled more rigor to my method. I also express gratitude to Bill Worger, whose continual support in research and teaching has been invaluable. As mentioned above, mentors at Indiana University too are deserving of thanks, including Maria Grosz-Ngate, Marion Frank-Wilson, Gracia Clark, Joëlle Bahloul, and Michelle Moyd. At the University of Oklahoma, Jidlaph Kamoche and Carsten Schapkow.

My time on this project was also marked by many hours in archives and libraries. I am grateful to the PRAAD archivists and staff in Accra, Sekondi, and Kumasi for helping me locate, copy, and/or digitize so many materials that were essential to this dissertation and will undoubtedly contribute to many projects to come. Many thanks to the librarians and staff at

KNUST Library and the Balme Library for answering questions and pointing me in the right direction towards relevant collections. Their familiar faces, day after day, were a comfort amidst relocating after weeks and months from city to city, country to country. In Senegal, archivists and staff at the Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS) and the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noir-at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (IFAN) were equally helpful. In Mali, Bouna Cherif Fofana provided critical assistance in helping me to make connections in my limited time to access archives. In Morocco, archivists, librarians, and staff at the Musée du Judaïsme Marocain and the Bibliothèque Nationale du Maroc (BNRM) aided in locating sources for much of the *longue durée* history that captured so much of my attention in my early graduate years. I am also grateful to the staff at the National Archive in London and the British Library who delivered items to my locker with speed and provided assistance as needed. Special thanks to Dr. Jane Desbourough, curator of the Scientific Instruments at the Science Museum (UK), for photographing materials before they were packed away in storage for remodeling of the facilities. Lastly, but certainly not least, I am indebted to Gabrielle Zilkha for allowing me access to her entire collection of interviews and materials (transcriptions and translations), gathered when making her documentary film on the House of Israel in Ghana. They have been an irreplaceable resource in tracking consistency and feedback in interviews since 2010.

I have been incredibly fortunate to connect with a community of scholars and individuals who have dedicated so much of their time to the study of African Jewry. As a young graduate student in a master's program, The International Society for the Study of African Jewry (ISSAJ) invited me to join their organization and conference. Edith Bruder, a founder, has been a mentor over the years and I am especially thankful for her support and encouragement. Kulanu: All of Us, a non-profit organization out of New York, too has connected me to a variety of scholars and

contacts over the years. And, when able, they have allowed me to deliver requested materials to the HOI in Sefwi Wiawso, all donated by Kulanu. Special thanks go to Harriet Bograd and Bonita Sussman for their dedication to remain supportive of and in contact with the HOI.

This past decade, I was part of an intellectual community that was instrumental to my development as a scholar as well as a handful of individuals that supported, in a variety of ways, my work. Conversations with my academic peers challenged my position and strengthened my research, writing, and teaching. Special thanks to Thabisile Griffin, Madina Thiam, Nivedita Nath, Sarah Balakrishnan, Karina Simonson, Zvezdana Ostojic, Sam Anderson, Vincent Hiribarren, David Spielman, and Lori de Lucia. My family and friends have provided the necessary support, relief, rest and joy to fuel this journey. Thanks to my parents and siblings, and especially my dear nieces and nephew (Bella, Eliza, Nicholas, and Lexi) who renewed my *joie de vivre* during the monastic years of dissertating. Their infectious energy and laughter was more contagious and long-lasting than any gloom that accompanied the Covid pandemic. Much gratitude also belongs to my dearest friend Dana Mohammed-Zadeh who has been my bouncing board, confidant, therapist, and comic relief these past many years. We started as co-workers in Oklahoma, and unknowingly chartered separate paths to Los Angeles the same year which forged a friendship that has been one of my greatest comforts. Her daily audio "podcasts" never ceased, with a delivery to my Whatsapp inbox no matter where I found myself in the world. I am also deeply indebted to Lauren Tate-Baeza and her family for watching my most prized possession, my pup Nyagali, for months at a time when I conducted research. Lastly but not least, my faith has sustained me in a variety of challenges, personal and academic, over these years and I would be remiss not to share my gratitude within these acknowledgements.

VITA

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"Making Visible the Invisible: A Historiographical Approach to Jewish Africa from Ghana." In, *In the Shadow of Moses: New Jewish Movements in Africa and the Diaspora*. Eds. Daniel Lis, William Miles, and Tudor Parfitt. Los Angeles: TSEHAI Publishers, 2016.

"The House of Israel: Judaism in Ghana." In *African Zion: Studies in Black Judaism*, edited by Edith Bruder and Tudor Parfitt. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.

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2010-2011	Dept. of Education Title VI Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship, Bambara, Indiana University

Selected Presentations

April 2022	"Revelation Unveiled: Imagining and (Re)constructing Judaism in Ghana." Hosted by the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP), Virtual
May 2021	"Judaism in Africa. An Unexpected Destination?" Russian Academy of Sciences Institute for African Studies Annual Meeting, Virtual
March 2021	"I am Known By My Clothing: Jewish Refugeeship and Community in Twentieth-Century Ghana." Hosted by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and UCLA Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies, Virtual
Nov 2020	"There Once was a Time: Considerations of the Historical Precedents of Judaism in West Africa." African Studies Association (ASA) Annual Meeting, Virtual
May 2019	"Shhhhhh: Whispered and Unspoken Transmission of Jewish Culture in 20th and 21st Century Ghana." University of California, Irvine. New Horizon in Jewish Studies Graduate Essay Prize Lecture. Irvine, California.
Dec 2016	"Jews of a Saharan Imagination: Reversing the Historical Oversight of Jewish Communities in West Africa." African Studies Association (ASA) Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C.
Aug 2016	"The House of Israel (Ghana): Precolonial Memories, Colonial Amnesia and Post-Colonial Realities." Jews in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa, African Jewish Museum, Cape Town, South Africa. Hosted by University of Cape Town and Bar-Ilan University
Nov 2015	"Shedding the Cloak of Invisibility: the (Re)Emergence of Jewish West Africa." International Society for the Study of African Jewry (ISSAJ) Conference, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme, Paris, France.

PROLOGUE

In season three (2015) of the popular Netflix drama *Orange is the New Black*, a Black female prisoner, Cindy, becomes privy to the improved quality of taste when requesting kosher meals from the cafeteria, versus the generic slop that the prison typically provides. This dietary preference becomes the first step in her journey to become Jewish. Although Cindy's encounter with the kosher food is introduced by a non-Jewish white prisoner, it is Cindy's habitual request for kosher meals, along with her fellow Black peers to whom she advertised the better fare, that flags the state to mischievous activity. Per freedom of religion protections, kosher meals must be provided to prisoners; yet, these special dietary requests are pricier than the general food provisions costing the prison more than average. Upon seeing the requests by a multitude of non-white prisoners, a rabbi is sent to the female penitentiary to investigate potential fraud and to determine if the request for kosher meals are legitimate. As prisoners learn their motive will be interrogated, many drop their new Jewish identity. However, Cindy does not. Her Blackness and supposed Jewishness solicited doubt from the rabbi as well as another prisoner who was Jewish (ethnic); thereafter scheduling interviews with the remaining converts. A former Catholic nun, who is white, is quickly considered Jewish with her biblical knowledge as well as a few select other white prisoners (all non-Jewish). However, Cindy's motivation to be Jewish is in question throughout the season where she is continually viewed as a con with her faith motivation criminalized. It is her desire for better food (prison wealth) that is emphasized more than any other reason. For a fellow Jewish prisoner, the food was the only motivator as she could not understand her desire to become a double minority. Another prisoner exclaimed that Cindy was a "race squatting carpet bagger" when discussing the absurdity of a "Black Jew" and her

unreasonable persistence on insisting on a new faith identity. Throughout the remainder of the season, Cindy's journey is continually followed and met with skepticism. The end of the season results in her official conversion and mikvah.[1]

Fiction aside, on November 12, 2018, Yehuda Webster, an Orthodox Jew living in Brooklyn, was harassed by a Hasidic group after being spotted carrying a Torah scroll. Webster, often carried Torah scrolls in his neighborhood of Crown Heights having to transport them to and from bar mitzvahs and the Judaica shop where he rented them. But on this particular Monday, he was chased after, and trapped in his Lyft car when the crowd accosted the vehicle with their bodies and another car. It was not until after the police intervened that Webster was free to leave. [2] But what caused this Orthodox Jew to be harassed by his faith brethren? He was Black. Yehuda Webster, an African-American male, converted to Judaism and would become an advocate for Black Jewish voices and representation in his community. But, despite his efforts and others such as organizations like Kulanu: All of Us, or Be'chol Lechon (Institute for Jewish Diversity), the idea of a "Black Jew" is far from many people's imaginations: including within Jewish and Black communities. Webster's access to a holy item raised flags due to his Black body; and thus, was immediately criminalized and cast as suspect, with his intentions mischaracterized by his faith brethren.

During the 20th century, Jewish racial identity increasingly moved towards notions of whiteness with the perceptions of "Black Jews" being fictional and farcical. In Karen Brodkin's

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[1] Jodie Foster, Michael Trim, Taylor Schilling, Michael Joseph Harney, and Kate Mulgrew dirs. 2015. *Orange Is the New Black Season 3*. Lionsgate.

[2] Ari Feldman, "Black Jew Swarmed by Hasidic Mob— For Carrying a Torah While Not White," *Forward*, 16 November 2018, https://forward.com/news/national/414373/black-jew-swarmed-by-hasidic-mob-for-carrying-a-torah-while-not-white/?fbclid=IwAR1PIAFCOAYybG9hEDSjsr6NPFjGox3QVsORupAbn1LvDWexST6lkM5iTdo.

book, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America,* Brodkin concluded that the "whitening" of Jews resulted from immigrant populations post World War II asserting themselves into a race culture in which "whiteness" provided benefits. Thus, in "whitening" their identity, they simultaneously became anti-Black.[3] South Africa, which was governed by the racial system of apartheid also brought Jews into the "white" fold. The National Party did not consider Jews much different than the Black communities of South Africa, but they wanted to benefit from the economic networks of Jews both globally and in the newly formed state of Israel.[4] And Jews saw the relationship equally advantageous in regards to economic opportunities, community inclusion, and to avoid the fear of an anti-Semitic backlash (specifically after the trauma of World War II).[5] This transnational shift in ethnic perception has impacted Black Jewish persons and communities.

The House of Israel in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana is aware that their Blackness, or to them an African identity, has created a conflict with the outside world taking their Jewishness seriously, as it does many communities across the continent and Global South.[6] It is a conversation well-known to the House of Israel in Ghana more now than it was in my first visit in 2010. The first resistance to Judaism came from their neighbors, who associated Judaism with "Christ-killing"

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[3] Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*, (New Brunswick N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

[4] Richard P. Stevens, "Zionism, South Africa and Apartheid: The Paradoxical Triangle," Phylon 32, no. 2 (1971), 123.

[5] Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience: the Jews in Apartheid South Africa* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2003); Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain, *The Jews in South Africa: an illustrated history* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2008); South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth, *The Jewish Community of Graaff-Reinet: a brief history*, (Johannesburg: South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth, 1999.).

[6] I discuss the tension between Black and Jewish identities and hybridity in Janice R. Levi, "The House of Israel: Judaism in Ghana," in *African Zion: Studies in Black Judaism*, edited by Edith Bruder and Tudor Parfitt, (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 117-135.

as discussed in Chapter 4, but now it is a global perception that wears at their once fervent desire to connect with global Jewry. In part, as this dissertation will highlight, is the sense of a governing body governing their bodies: that is, dictating what rituals must be performed (*hatafat dam brit)* and doing away with what is deemed no longer a reflection of a modern normative Judaism. For the HOI, phenotype has nothing to do with Jewishness as it is first most a faith identity.[7] However, notions of race cannot be escaped by these Black African Jewish communities as the pigmentation of their skin has marked them for suspicion, arguably due to the criminalization of Black bodies prevalent in the global north—where rabbinical authorities and the Jewish majority of the diaspora operate and live. The discussion of race, race-making, and race gatekeeping is another theme that will need attention to understand the emergence and reception of Black Jewish communities in Africa and around the globe.

This work has begun in Israel and the Global North. Shalva Weil, an Israeli historian, considers "gradations" of Blackness amongst Jews in Israel and how the perception and labelling of "Blackness" has shifted from Mizrahi Jews to Ethiopian Jews over time.[8] Gabriella Djerrahian, too, has contributed to the Black-Jewish relationship within Israel and the Diaspora.[9] In Israel, the Beta Israel of Ethiopia know all too well the dynamic of race and religious identity as it is evident in an understanding of legitimating Jewishness. Upon their arrival to Israel, the Ethiopian Jews were placed in accommodation centers, which imposed "white" Jewish culture to

[7] Interviews by author. Note, it is their ritual that identifies them first, and believed ancestry second, not DNA or skin color.

[8] Shalva Weil, "Color Gradations and Degradations Among Ethiopian Jews," (presentation, Jews and Color Symposium, Florida International University Global Jewish Studies Program and Tel Aviv University, Miami, FL, January 24, 2016).

[9] Uri Dorchin and Gabriella Djerrahian, *Blackness in Israel: Rethinking Racial Boundaries*, (Milton Park Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2021).

"modernize" or normativism their practice. Scholars have noted how many Ethiopians were given new Hebrew names and were discouraged from eating Ethiopian foods and participating in Ethiopian cultural practices.[10] Dating back to the 19th century, with the creation of the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU), communities of North African Jews, who may be seen as less "white" than their Ashkenazi counterparts, underwent the *mission civilisatrice* in order to dispense with their "antiquated" religious practice to mirror the normative (and more secular) majority of Jews in Western Europe.[11] Although one could conclude that the practice of Ethiopians and North Africans sparked a desire to reorient these Jews to a modern notion of Jewishness, it could also be concluded that due to their geographical location in Africa or darker skin resulted in more assimilationist tactics than those emigrating to Israel from European countries who were able to maintain their former national identities and names, reflective of such.

In the US, race as a qualifier for Jewish identity over religiosity is best demonstrated by the history of the Commandment Keepers in Harlem. This community was birthed out of frustration that their Blackness roused suspicion of their authentic claim to Judaism. After worshiping alongside their white brethren for decades, the Black practitioners at the Harlem synagogue were asked to undergo a formal conversion in order to be legitimately seen as Jewish. After realizing their white counterparts did not see them as Jewish because they could not

[10] Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century*, (New York: New York University Press, 1995); David Kessler, *The Falashas: a short history of the Ethiopian Jews*, (London: Frank Cass, 1996).

[11] Michael M. Laskier, *Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862-1962*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); Daniel J. Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents: Jews at the Formative Period of Colonial Rule in Morocco," *Jewish Social Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 170-206.

produce a genealogical history, a history not requested of other white members as they looked as if they belonged, the Black congregants began to identify as Hebrew-Israelites concluding Jews were white, and Hebrew-Israelites were Black.[12] This distinction had nothing to do with their ability to worship or practice the same ritual, but rather prompted due to their phenotypical features that alerted their white co-religionists that they were not the norm.[13] Aurélien Mokoko Gampiot studies the Fédération des Juifs Noirs (FJN), an organization made up of African Jews (mostly Ivoirian) now living in France, who are politically engaged in discussing the discrimination they receive in regards to being Black and Jewish.[14] In both cases, race markers initiate questioning of the authenticity of a religious identity.

Another theme emerging in the scholarship being produced on these Black African Jewish communities is one of economics. This theme is tarnished with a racialized gaze that assumes Black African populations are destitute and are only interested in access to the Jewish/Israel nation and purse. Comments on online blogs represent this perspective by belittling these communities' claims as a hoax and for some a ploy to undermine Israel as agents of an Arab terrorist force.[15]

Looking at how communities from the global south, specifically Africa, have been treated by the global north is instructive when analyzing these (re)emerging communities. However, not

[12] The assertion of this identity against a majority is representative of Jan Assmann's "normative inversion," which creates a counter-religion to the majority. The Hebrew-Israelites may be such a distinction that is emerging over a "lost tribe" notion. See Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press., 1997).

[13] John L. Jackson, *Thin Description*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[14] Aurélien Mokoko Gampiot, "Black Judaism in France and the United States: An Example of the Intersection Between Religion and Race/Ethnicity," *Contemporary Jewry.* 37, no. 2 (2017): 309-331; See also, Edith Bruder and Tudor Parfitt, *African Zion: Studies in Black Judaism*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

[15] Levi, "The House of Israel, 2012, 117-135.

all are interested in identity politics for the purpose of being admitted to the Jewish Nation, as the Beta Israel, but rather being seen as legitimate Jews in their present location. For the House of Israel in Ghana, this is the case as they have repeatedly mentioned no interest in emigrating to Israel. Further, the community has split in the previous years as the Sehwi rabbi, trained in Uganda, officially converted and suggested that the House of Israel follow suit, a suggestion the community rejected whole heartedly. Their reasoning was rooted in their insistence that their oral narrative be seen as legitimate, their Jewish identity be taken seriously, and their performance of Judaism need not satisfy or conform to others. Perhaps, haunted by colonial imposition, they are inflexible to modify their practices and their identity to the definition of another power structure. But this is also a familiar tactic that has ensured the survival of their ancestral practices for centuries prior to the encounter with normative Judaism. Further, they have insisted that Judaism is not indicative of a particular race, and will not entertain any identitarian politics that posit race with or against a religious identity. This thematic will grow increasingly more important and should be addressed in histories being constructed about the communities emerging in Africa as it has influenced the historical suspicions and analyses of these (re)emerging communities.

Another theme to be explored is how local manifestations and national identities impact Jewish communities in Africa. Although much more ink has been spilled over Jewish identities in the nation and empire within the canon of Jewish studies, little has been penned in the case of Africa. For the Beta Israel, Ethiopia was never colonized and they maintained an "outsider" image, with the pejorative *Falasha* indicating foreigner or outsider.[16] However, looking at Ghana as a case study, it will be argued that ethnic identity is core to the House of Israel's assertion. That is, their claim to a pre-colonial past is what propels them to maintain their interpretation of

[16] Kaplan, *The Beta Israel,* 1995*;* Kessler 1996.

the past, as well as their manifestation of Jewish identity in the present in spite of outside pressure to convert for global recognition. For the House of Israel, it is conversion that led them away from their indigenous practices when colonial forces imposed Christianity. Their chief converted and made all his subjects convert, and thus led their religious identity into a hiatus. Now, post-independence and with the freedom of religion clause in the 1992 Ghanaian constitution, the House of Israel has no intention of forsaking their indigenous identity for another dictated identity.[17]

Why does all this matter? By the end of the 20th century and into the 21st, Black communities and cultural celebrities are identifying as Jewish. Ethiopian Jews were admitted to Israel under the Law of Return and musicians such as Lenny Kravitz, Drake, as well as comedian Tiffany Haddish publicly asserted Jewish identities. Global perceptions influenced by racial science criminalized Blackness,[18] and Judaism participated in this racial thinking and hierarchies while also being subjected to them. Namely, in the collective discrediting, questioning and/or exoticizing these and other Black individuals and communities. Scholars of these communities have to acknowledge the portrayal these communities are receiving, even when most may not know that they exist. We also must refrain from creating the same boundaries of the scholars before us that have obscured continuities and histories. Popular culture is already depicting the Black Jew as the "other" "inauthentic" individual, and as scholars we must not repeat the tone of the colonial writers who also "othered" Black bodies upon the encounter. We have to resist the notion of "othering" because Black Jews do not fit into a normative racial category that has been

[17] Levi, "The House of Israel," 2012.

[18] There is much work on the criminalization of Blackness, especially in the United States. See Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture Politics and the Black Working Class*, (New York: Free Press, 1996); and Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race Crime and the Making of Modern Urban America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

constructed. We must also be careful that our "new" categories of analysis do not caricaturize or mischaracterize. Rather, recognizing the erasure and obstruction of boundaries and taxonomies, scholarly investigations into these communities should consider historical possibilities not hindered by present-day racial assumptions or imperial in(ter)ventions.

The emergence of the House of Israel amongst the Sehwi in Sefwi Wiawso Ghana is a reflection of the multicentury and transregional connections and encounters in Northwestern Africa. The oral histories of this community reveal a past where competing empires held different philosophies of rule, with cultural erasure and domination not being the only option on the metaphorical table. Cross-cultural cooperation and offers of protection in exchange for loyalty and trade skills provided a route for survival and cultural maintenance. It is a story that shows a people who were willing to migrate from their homes and negotiate their loyalties in order for their cultural practices to survive. Where silence appeared to be coerced at times, became a tool to protect their identity and to deflect unwanted attention. Into the 20th century, where connections with global Jewry offered new opportunities, silence again crept in when avoiding communication once many in the community believed an outside influence attempting to alter their ancestral practices or impose on their decisions. The history of this community provides new insights on transregional and global networks in Northwestern Africa and how efforts of erasure and silence were transformed into methods of historical transmission that could survive boundaries of time, space, and identities.

INTRODUCTION

"Whatever you are looking for, you won't find it" exclaimed Kofi Kwarteng in an exasperated tone over lunch after a Shabbat service in December 2018. Ben Baidoo, contributed, "we don't have papers to prove anything."[1] The conversation that followed brought to light the litany of researchers (including myself), journalists, and documentary filmmakers that had travelled to Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana inquiring about who they were and how they came to be. Over the past decade, members of the House of Israel, a small self-proclaimed Jewish community in the Western North district of Ghana, had become tired of sharing over and over the narrative of their believed past. It had become an account that seemingly fell on deaf ears, as nothing satisfied the inquiry of outsiders in a search for "proof" that they, the House of Israel, were truly Jews or even a "Lost Tribe."[2] After short visits from individuals over the years, they would hear back how they were written out of a Jewish history as imposters, a new corrupted interpretation, or a group to be gawked at that would fit into an exotic tale. Kofi and Ben went on to share that my project was hopeless as I would never satisfy a Western academic requirement, where history has to be

[1] Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, 15 December 2018. Research was conducted by author. All research methods were approved by IRB review from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP) for research conducted between 2015-2021 and the Indiana University – Bloomington Human Subject's Review Board for research conducted in 2010.

[2] As of my 2010 interviews, a notion of "lost tribe" was unheard of, and community members seemed to have no understanding of what a "lost tribe" meant (when asked if they considered themselves a "lost tribe" and when asked "What do you know of "lost tribes" they would explain they did not understand the question, one responded "there are many tribes in Africa," and others would just ask for the next question). By the time documentary filmmaker Gabrielle Zilkha interviewed community members in 2011 and historian Nathan Devir in 2012, they had become aware of what a "lost tribe" was an some suggested they were in fact a "lost tribe." This could have been due to my own interaction with the community and undoubtedly due to the amount of academics and international visitors who have interacted with the community since. Interviews by author, Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, August 2010 and Gabrielle Zilkha, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA (USA), March 2017.

supported by a paper trail: they, simply, did not have in their possession a textual archive that documented the story they knew to be true.[3]

The textual record on Judaism in Africa, especially south of the Sahara, is indeed minimal.[4] John S. Mbiti's survey *African Religions and Philosophy* barely mentions Judaism in Africa, categorizing it as an "other" due to demographics.[5] In his most recent edition of *Introduction to African Religion,* published in 2015, Mbiti acknowledges the Abayudaya of Uganda, and known communities in Ethiopia, North Africa, and populations in South Africa and Zimbabwe,[6] but provides no mention of communities in West Africa.[7] Similarly, works in Jewish Studies mostly focus on Northern Africa, South Africa, and Ethiopia as represented in the Oxford Bibliography series.[8] A few atlases and encyclopedias in Jewish Studies only give brief

[3] The discussion further revealed their own frustrations of "disappointing" others who had ideas and expected them, for lack of a better term, to minstrel to the needs of the outsider's gaze and/or be eternally deferential and willing to accept instruction from an outsider who must know more about an authentic Judaism then they themselves. The pressure to perform to the needs and expectations of a global Jewry infringed on their own understanding and convictions. "We are Jewish, we know it" Kofi quipped "we don't have to be your Jewish."

[4] Africa, the world's second largest continent, is home to thousands of multi-faceted religions. For the most part, scholars of religious cultures in Africa have focused on practitioners of Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religions (ATRs), and New Religious Movements (NRMs).

[5] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, (New York: Praeger, 1969, 1990). The CIA World Factbook, similarly does not recognize Judaism as a religion practiced in any sub-Saharan African country, excluding Ethiopia and South Africa, both of which are known for Jewish communities—indigenous populations in the former, and a sizeable white population in the latter. < https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region_afr.html> Accessed 16 Nov. 2017.

[6] It is not clear if he is referencing known white Jewish settlers in Zimbabwe and South Africa, or the Lemba.

[7] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2015).

[8] Hagar Salamon and Steven Kaplan, "Ethiopian Jews," in *Oxford Bibliographies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), from http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199840731/obo-9780199840731-0037.xml; Milton Shain, "South African Jewry," in *Oxford Bibliographies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), from http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199840731/obo-9780199840731-0053.xml; Rachel Simon, "North Africa," in *Oxford Bibliographies*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), from http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199840731/obo-9780199840731-0078.xml.

detail on the historic and emerging communities of West Africa.[9] This historical oversight, found both in African and Jewish historiography, makes it difficult to understand this occurrence. This dissertation illuminates a historical past, specifically in Northwest Africa, in order to understand the rise of Judaism in Ghana.[10]

In 1993, Paul Gilroy solicited the study of Black-Jewish relations to understand the Atlantic World.[11] This relationship, too, could shed light on the Saharan world: including the mapping of the landscape, infrastructure of Saharan ports, as well as political, cultural, and economic knowledge and networks. In 2006, historian John Hunwick's preface to the *Jews of a Saharan Oasis* calls out the historical oversight of Jewish West Africa (specifically in the Sahara) and hopes that his initial inquiries will "help promote interest in African matters among scholars of Judaism."[12] Early responders included scholars more closely associated with African Studies than Jewish Studies, such as anthropologist Edith Bruder and historian Richard Hull. In 2008, Bruder published *The Black Jews of Africa: History, Religion, Identity*. This in-depth scholarly survey spanned the continent to document communities identifying as Jews. Overviews of the history of Jews across the continent funneled into questions and observations about identity formation, where Bruder's ethnographic interests centered in the study.[13] Nearly one-

[9] Elie Barnavi, Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Michel Opatowski, and Denis Charbit, *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People: From the Time of the Patriarchs to the Present*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2002); Mark Avrum Ehrlich, *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, (Santa Barbara, 2009); Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of Jewish History*, (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

[10] One of the more recent utterances of a Jewish past comes from Ghana's neighbor to the east, Togo. *Israel Today.* http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/29202/Default.aspx.

[11] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), xi.

[12] John Hunwick, *Jews of a Saharan oasis: elimination of the Tamantit community*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006), vii.

[13] Edith Bruder, *The Black Jews of Africa: History, Religion, Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

hundred pages are dedicated to West Africa's history of Jewish presence, with Bruder suggesting metaphorical and conceptual relationships connecting emerging communities with ancient Hebrews.[14] In 2009, historian of Africa Richard Hull published a survey of Jewish Africa aptly entitled *Jews and Judaism in African History*. Within, Hull argued Jews dominated the trans-Saharan trade between Northern Africa and Europe and asserted Jews were still connected to Aragon from the mid-thirteenth to the end of the fifteenth century. These fruitful economic relationships with European markets, he argues, may have incited animosities of Muslims towards Jews.[15] In the introduction, Hull makes mention of over one thousand Jews living in Ghana and Nigeria.[16] In 2010, Bruder founded the International Society for the Study of African Jewry (ISSAJ) which has been dedicated to the study of these communities including its first publication, *African Zion: Studies in Black Judaism* in 2012. This edited volume extends beyond Africa to her diaspora in the Americas. Contributing on African communities, were anthropologists Edith Bruder and Daniel Lis, religious scholars Magdel le Roux and Tudor Parfitt, and historians Dierk Lange, Shalva Weil, and myself (to name a few). In 2014, Idrissa Bâ published his book, *Sur Les Traces D'une Diaspora Juive En Afrique Au Moyen Âge*, based on his dissertation research in 2006, which contributed to the history of Jewish traders across the Sahara and Sahel and raised questions of Judaizing influences on present West African populations.[17]

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Richard Hull, *Jews and Judaism in African History*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009), 57-65.

[16] Ibid., xiv.

[17] Idrissa Bâ, *Sur Les Traces D'une Diaspora Juive En Afrique Au Moyen Âge*, (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2014); Idrissa Bâ,"Présence Juive Au Sahara Et Au Soudan Au Moyen-Âge: Perceptions Et Réalités," Dissertation, Université de Paris I Panthéon, 2006.

Yet, as interest grew, the topic of African Jews found a willing cadre of scholars across academic fields, but specifically in Jewish and Religious Studies as well as Political Science. While Hunwick's parrying of the inquiry has had its advantages in interdisciplinary approaches, it, too, has come with hazards. Publications by authors trained outside of Africanist backgrounds have held onto some of the ethnocentric discourse that is reminiscent of colonial ethnographies that patronize these communities in an attempt to understand and document what is being described by many as a "phenomenon."[18]

Most known is Tudor Parfitt who has worked with and on Jewish communities across the continent and is now largely associated with African Jews widely. Dabbling in the histories to various extents over his career, Parfitt started his work with Ethiopian Jews, and later regarding Jewish claims amongst the Lemba in South Africa and Zimbabwe.[19] Parfitt dramatizes his time on the continent, as can be seen in the docuseries *Secrets of the Bible*. In the episode dedicated to his research, "Tudor Parfitt and the Lost Tribes of Israel," Parfitt, who proudly recollects his nickname as the "British Indiana Jones" is painted as a scholar, and hero, whose valiant efforts in his search for the lost ark of the covenant as well as answers to lost tribes is met with hostility from the "African." In perhaps the most theatrical scene, viewers see a reenactment of Parfitt bursting past a national entry point to avoid being shot while Zimbabwean border patrol fires at

[18] Marla Brettschneider, *The Jewish Phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Politics of Contradictory Discourses* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2015); Daniel Lis, William F. S. Miles, and Tudor Parfitt, *In the Shadow of Moses: New Jewish Movements in Africa and the Diaspora*, (Los Angeles, Tsehai Publishers, 2016); Tudor Parfitt and Netanel Fisher, *Becoming Jewish: New Jews and Emerging Jewish Communities in a Globalized World*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

[19] Parfitt has many works, regarding Jewish Africa. His earlier work on Ethiopia, see Tudor Parfitt, *Operation Moses: The Untold Story of the Secret Exodus of the Falasha Jews from Ethiopia*, (New York: Stein and Day Publications, 1985); For studies on the Lemba, see Tudor Parfitt and Yulia Egorova, *Genetics, Mass Media, and Identity: A Case Study of the Genetic Research on the Lemba and Bene Israel*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

his vehicle.[20] This reenactment and retelling valorizes his dedication rather than acknowledging his unlawful entry where in the West "illegal" migrants are vilified by entering countries without proper visas and permissions. For communities in West Africa, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter two, Parfitt assumes a colonial influence for the emergence of narratives tethered to Jewish pasts. For him, these origin stories can be explained by the intellectual gymnastics of white actors on the continent versus any knowledge of Jewish practices and beliefs by Africans themselves.[21]

Contributing to our understanding of how global networks play a vital role in establishing a Jewish identity, Nathan Devir's *New Children of Israel: Emerging Jewish Communities in an Era of Globalization* (2017) considers how globalization paradigms cannot and should not be ignored when analyzing communities across Africa. In Cameroon, he argues these networks were vital in establishing a Jewish identity. Like the Abuyudaya of Uganda, the Cameroonian community does not assert a re-emergence, but rather a new interest in Judaism as they came to learn about it through the internet.[22] Globalization frameworks on a virtual scale can certainly be utilized in studying communities in Ghana and Nigeria as they now use the internet to supplement their own understanding, but it cannot explain the (re)emergence of these communities as they occurred before the age of the Internet. However, analyzing global networks through colonial structures, trade, and journalism are still applicable.

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[20] *Secrets of the Bible*, "Tudor Parfitt and the Lost Tribes of Israel," World Media Rights in association with IMG and ZDF Enterprises, 2014.

[21] Tudor Parfitt, *Black Jews in Africa and the Americas*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[22] Nathan P. Devir, *New Children of Israel: Emerging Jewish Communities in an Era of Globalization*, (Salt Lake City: Utah UP, 2017).

Devir, a scholar of Jewish History, seemingly takes up Hunwick's call. Yet, Devir's historicization of the community in Sefwi Wiawso in 2017 side steps a larger, interethnic and nuanced history known to scholars of West Africa. In the same book, Devir concludes the Sehwi (he says Sefwi, a distinction that will be discussed in Chapter 3) are indigenous to Ghana, a conclusion that is simply not true. I shared this conclusion with residents in the Sefwi Wiawso district (largely Sehwi) during my research in 2018-19, an assumption I had never heard and was curious to see how folks would react. The visible and verbal responses were quite animated as many, for lack of a better term, were infuriated with someone rewriting, and for many outright lying, about their history.[23] The verification of his own conclusions about the falsity of any Jewish claim by Stefano Boni, a European academic who has contributed to the western textual tradition more than any other about the Sefwi region, economics, politics, and traditions, seemingly outweighs any local history.[24] In addition, his archival findings further cement his position that histories connected to migration and known Jewish communities in the north must be a myth, as he claimed the archival support corroborated his conclusion that 'Sefwi' were indigenous to the area (unsure if he means Ghana or the forested area they now live; however, he cites an interview with a chief from Sefwi Anwhiaso from Daaku's research, not Sefwi Wiawso). Yet, no specific archival files or series were identified.[25] Perhaps it reveals the naïvete of this

[23] Devir reveals that he was threatened "to be sliced and diced with a machete." Perhaps an expression to relay the frustration felt with some of his conclusions. See, Devir, 2017, 11.

[24] Devir also relies heavily on the testimony of David Ahenkorah who has left the community after he was not selected to lead the HOI, and he has been establishing his own modeled after Hebrew-Israelites. He has now stated that it is the Hebrew-Israelites who inspired all of HOI, which is denied by members and elders of the HOI.

[25] Regarding the migration claims, Devir uses a quote from a chief of Sefwi Anwhiaso (from Daaku's collection of Sefwi oral histories) about not having come from anywhere, Devir writes "My own research into early colonial records, newspaper reports, and transcriptions of Akan (and, in particular, Sefwi) heritage narratives at the National Archive of Ghana, in Accra, yielded similarly inconclusive results." Yet there is no file series or document ID given as to which records he peered into, or more thoroughly analyzed. Perhaps the "inconclusive" results were indicative

scholar that his "one month" visit to Ghana would generate a full understanding of Sehwi histories.[26]

A scholar with more training in Africa than others, political scientist William F. S. Miles, has turned his career's attention to Jewish communities in Africa, publishing two books and co-editing another.[27] Designing a theory of concentric circles, Miles identifies circles of influence that further spiral into mediations of a Jewish identity. The outer circle, he suggests are African groups who perform more of a Messianic Judaism, with iterations of an ancient Hebrew past. In the middle, are communities who parrot Judaism while still maintaining, or even inventing, unique practices indicative of their own histories. The most inner circle, Miles suggests, are communities who have ascribed to "normative" or more contemporary Judaism yet have markers of African influences. In this mapping, all communities are derivative of influence from the outside normative versus emergence via historical precedent.[28] Miles takes particular interest in the Igbo community of Nigeria, coining a new label "Jewbos."[29] This term while seemingly a reflection of a hybridity of cultures, becomes a caricature, where, like others treat the Sehwi, becomes a carnival spectacle and something to be gawked at and explained by the "normative"

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of the various origins of the diverse populations that make up the Sefwi townships, specifically between Anwhiaso, Wiawso, and Bekwai.

[26] Devir indicates he spent one month in the country.

[27] William F. S. Miles, *Afro-Jewish Encounters: From Timbuktu to the Indian Ocean and Beyond*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2014); and William F. S. Miles, *Jews of Nigeria: An Afro-Judaic Odyssey*, (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2013).

[28] William F.S. Miles, "Who Is a Jew (in Africa)? Definitional and Ethical Considerations in the Study of Sub-Saharan Jewry and Judaism." *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 10, no. 1 (2019): 1-15.

[29] 2016 ASA, Roundtable: Studying "Emerging" Jewish Groups in Africa: Curiosity, Policy, and Reciprocity 12/02/2016.

viewer.[30] Regardless of authenticity, the impact of a belief in a historical past has arguably resulted in real historical happenings. Africans are practicing mainstream normative Judaism, they wear kippot and tallit, they speak Hebrew, they worship on Shabbat, keep kosher, and observe High Holidays.

This dissertation is a response, in parts to John Hunwick's call to action. Methodologically, my dissertation broadens, and at times challenges, formative methodological approaches regarding hierarchies of credibility in oral histories. I observed modes of transmission in oral interviews, namely the presence of whispers or quieted voices depending on location and proximity to the public. In the archive, I also considered where "whispers" emerged, by analyzing unmarked and miscellaneous folders that provided key details regarding these histories. In observing ritual, I noted where certain rites persisted as well as when the community insisted that ritual be maintained in a manner authentic to their ancestry and not the expectations of a normative Jewish community. The dissertation, therein, contributes to the depth and spectrum of the oral, textual, and ritual archives.

Scope, Methods, and Sources

The obscuring of history may have been an unintentional casualty of boundary-making, whereas the obfuscating of historical presence, I argue, was at times intentional, by way of boundary-crossing, especially by those who lived under duress. This dissertation spans beyond the present-day nation of Ghana, and extends north and east to the ancient empire of Ghana, beyond the southern edges of the Sahara and into the Northern parts of Africa. As the oral histories reveal,

[30] The notion of whether these communities are deemed to be a mimicry of an actual crypto or ancestral community will be reflected on in the dissertation's conclusion.

the Sehwi are not indigenous to the modern-day nation state of Ghana, and thus this work cannot be contained by a national study. Similarly, identity cannot be bounded as we see different monikers at work in describing these communities: at times voluntarily for acculturation and disguise, at other times due to imperial classifications, coercion, and racial logic.

The temporal scope and methods, too, had to be expanded. To locate these shadowed histories, I reviewed 1,000 years of history to establish a historical precedent through onomastics, epigraphic evidence, oral and ritual archives, Arabic and colonial texts (in English and French), and considered glottochronological data to corroborate past encounters specifically with the use of Manding languages in Sehwi ritual expressions. Additionally, I have spent over a decade communicating and living months at a time with the Sehwi, participating in and observing Jewish high holidays and weekly services. I have conducted interviews discussing oral histories of the Sehwi in the Western-North, Western, Ashanti, and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. Records in national and digital archives, university and public libraries in Ghana, Senegal, Morocco, Mali, and England have also been instrumental to this project. My research has also relied on the published materials and archives of organizations who have worked with the House of Israel, including Kulanu and United Israel World Union. News articles and graduate theses have also supplemented my understanding of the Sehwi and the Sefwi Wiawso area. These textual, oral, and ritual archives required an unbounded view in order to identify continuities in the record, and in-depth fieldwork was imperative in order to demystify, if not debunk, the perceived illusion of a "lost tribe" ideology as well as a monolithic understanding of Jewish identity.

Oral Archive

As I came to realize during my first research trip in Ghana in 2010, the explicit notion of being Jewish was not always given outright, but rather whispered. This very method of relaying the past, through whispers, has led me to believe that it is a history indicative of secrecy as a result of the intolerance and anti-Semitic climate documented from the past.[31] However, it could be constituent of Hamitic ideologies that led to the justification of enslavement.[32] Just as Luise White utilizes the realm of rumors to expose, not history at face value per se, but the history in which rumors reveal, so I use whispers to amplify a world where tensions between identities exist, and where these spiritual imaginings may be historical realities.[33] Sandra Greene has also noted whispers in oral history. She writes, "Analyses of the official silences and private whisperings are critical for understanding the debates and tensions within African societies. As 'hidden transcripts' and a form of 'cultural censorship,' they illustrate the complexities that underpin African oral discourses about the past."[34] The presence of whispers or quieted voices, depending on my location and proximity to the boundaries of a public or private space, became more evident to me when observing modes of transmission in oral interviews. By 2018, whispers were not as evident as the community was mostly known, locally. Instead, as will be discussed in

[31] John O. Hunwick, "Al-Mahîlî and the Jews of Tuwât: The Demise of a Community." *Studia Islamica*, no. 61 (1985): 155-183; Hunwick, *Jews of a Saharan oasis,* 2006; Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, *The Forgotten Diaspora: Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[32] In gathering oral histories, when discussing a Jewish past/heritage, it was sometimes conveyed in a whisper, connoting a need to keep it secret/silent. On silencing and slave histories: Bayo Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance Refashioning the Slave Trade in Ghana*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[33] Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

[34] Sandra E. Greene, "Whispers and Silences: Explorations in African Oral History," *Africa Today*. 50, no. 2 (2003): 41-53.

chapter 4, there were other methods to attempt disguise or keep hidden their identity from the public realm.

As described in the beginning vignette of this introduction, I also became aware of the frustrations of the House of Israel (HOI) community members when discussing their past, an attitude I had yet to encounter since I began my visits in 2010. What I would soon identify as interlocutor fatigue, with individuals being resistant to share information with me not out of a desire to keep secret or quiet as had been the case in 2010, but rather out of a fatigue in the retelling but also an irritation that whatever was said could be twisted and discounted once I left and sat behind my computer. The "fatigue" shifted after this conversation regarding proof with records, one that led to a fruitful exchange to remind these community members of my purpose there: to record their oral history and understand why they believed it was a Jewish-associated past. Often, as researchers, we have a script explaining our purpose as we first introduce ourselves, and then dive into the work. Overwhelmed, curious, or just taking in our presence, those first comments do not always resonate as the listener and observer are constructing their own impression of your being there. And ultimately, it is over time our purpose becomes clearer than the script we so carefully crafted communicates. I am not ashamed to say that it was 8 years after my first introduction, that I started having the most honest and vulnerable conversations with members of the HOI, once it was clear I was not coming with an expectation for them to perform but rather to be, nor was I there to impose or monitor their actions.[35]

[35] Some in the community questioned the purpose and demands from one particular organization, that they felt silenced their own goals. They did not want to be the exotic African Jew who were eternally deferential for funds if it mean they had no say in the relationship, that they increasingly felt was the case. Because of this, they have resisted communication, blaming unstable internet and phone connections along with local tensions to avoid continual follow-up. I, too, was asked by this organization to encourage a response from the community which I discussed with the HOI and to report back. There were sincere concerns about the community but also institutional worries about funds being sent via Western Union and how they were being used. But, as I was not an affiliate with

I affirmed that they knew more about their past than I did, as I only knew through the lens of my own approach to the study of Ghana and Judaism as well as personal experiences, and I did not expect to have a know-all understanding of what, can be interpreted in a myriad of ways over an expansive temporal and geographical scope.[36] Through the sharing of my own academic background rooted in Africanist training, a career this community had witnessed from nearly the beginning when I arrived as a green MA student in 2010, I conveyed my own research ethics based on my training and respect for and student of other systems of knowledge production and historical transmission: specifically indigenous to the continent. I was able to share what I had known of western knowledge production and its limits, as well as its mythologies and false claims which has epistemically gaslighted and violated marginalized voices for too long. In being honest about my own suspicion and critique of western scholarship and institutions, as well as recognizing my position within it, I was able to build a rapport with members across the generational spectrum, as well as those who had been identifying as Jews for 50 plus years, and those who were relatively new to the fold. We shared stories of my training and how it unpacked untruths, narratives they too were familiar based on colonial education. Feeling seen, heard, and dare I say, trusted to narrate their own stories without my "knowing better," as well as my announcement that I had zero interest in "grading" their Jewishness further facilitated the conversations. In chats between walks from the synagogue to town, and taxi cabs back to my accommodations, I was able to convey my interest in their stories, never instructing on what they needed to do to be more Jewish (through Hebrew learning or conversion) or more committed

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the organization, I explained I could not operate on their behalf or check on these concerns. And, in solidarity, would remain silent about their status and whereabouts.

[36] Gabrielle Zilkha brought to my attention the Jewish expression "two Jews, three opinions."

(through the directives of other institutions who have sent funds, with expectations). All of this fueled more substantial conversations after a slump of interlocutor fatigue earlier in the year.

The 2010 interviews with members of the HOI, remain the most profound. By 2016, the interviews collected already had morphed, perhaps explained by David Henige's notion of "feedback," due to access to the documentary film *Doing Jewish* where the historical theoretical mapping visualized in the film, (that I helped construct based on my own research), was described to me as if it were the original history always claimed by the group.[37] Theories not conveyed during my trip in 2010, by 2016, were clearly articulated: most notably notions of a "lost tribe," a concept unheard of when interviews were conducted six years earlier. [38] These earlier interviews, before an onslaught of researchers and visitors (Edith Bruder, Nathan Devir, Tudor Parfitt, Daniel Lis, William Miles, Sam Kestenbaum and Marla Brettschneider all of whom have since written on the House of Israel or are currently constructing projects), have been vital in assessing a past before "feedback" has altered understandings and local transmissions. By 2018, I was largely aware that there was vocabulary expected, but as mentioned previously even with these buzz words, members of the HOI were tired of sharing a narrative that, regardless of the vocabulary, would still be questioned and discredited. But in that, I saw a return to more consistent interviews, "lost tribe" no longer carried weight or excitement and so members only emphasized that they were Jewish, and they "knew it." Afterall, it was for these reasons they

[37] The recent release of the documentary *Doing Jewish: a Story from Ghana* (Directed by Gabrielle Zilkha. Four Corners Productions, Inc , 2016) provided various hypotheses that could explain the emergence of Jewish communities. I recognized the description of the historical theories as I worked as a historical consultant on this project, helping with the script; thus, surprised to hear it almost verbatim during my interview with the rabbi, as well as him describing the visual animation that was produced for the documentary. Kofi Kwarteng, several interviews by author, Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, and New Adhiembra, Ghana, 2018-2019.

[38] I discuss this in more detail in the second footnote of the Introduction.

refused to convert to be recognized as Jews based on another interpretation of what Jewish was.[39] In interviewing Sehwi elders and local historians outside of the House of Israel, I heard statements that closely aligned to those in 2010, unadulterated by all of the discourse surrounding and responding to this community by outsiders.

Textual Archive

That is not to say I failed to critically evaluate their narrative, as this dissertation aims to demonstrate; however, it is to say that I trusted that while they may not have the access to the archives and research funds my university could provide, to travel and interrogate various archives, and afford the time to think on and connect the dots that rolled out in a multitude of narrations. Rather than trying to make sense of the bizarre (which itself reveals the assumed absurdity of their claim), oral histories given to me became the launchpad for my research questions and inquiries within the archive — essentially wanting the subaltern, in this case the *nkasa*, to speak.[40] I knew looking to the textual archive would not be as simple as looking up "Sefwi history" or "Jews in Ghana," as these files did not exist (Sefwi Native Affairs being the closest to a straightforward set of records).[41] Rather, within the national archives documents corroborating vignettes were attached to records on land concessions, stool claims, and most

[39] This ultimately created a break in the community, as Rabbi Alex Armah who converted when training with the Abayudaya of Uganda felt that the community could receive more support if they were officially recognized as Jews. Early converts who joined Aaron, among others who knew the Sehwi histories, refused. For them, this was another colonial model expecting them to deny what they knew to be true and submit to someone else's interpretation as superior.

[40] *nkasa*, Akan: those who "do not speak." See Chapter 3. Also, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Nelson Cary and Lawrence Grossberg, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

[41] Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Accra, Ghana, ADM and CSO fonds.

often in the "miscellaneous" folder where records of "alien" and "stranger" communities were found under a metaphorical, when not literal, layer of dust (or in one case, to my surprise, a webbed nest of a few spiders). The archival whispers were as impactful as the verbal murmurs, showing up as annotations and pencil scratchings, or edits in ink that directed for redactions. In secondary sources, it was the footnotes that held the most important pieces of the puzzle, including observations of actual whispers tethered to origins.[42] There was also silence via archival personnel, perhaps due to my own silence. That is, upon my preparing to move to the next archive, I decided to inquire with the regional archive staff more specifically to my interests instead of a generic "religion in Ghana" explanation. I relayed my curiosity about Judaism. This admission barred me from viewing files which had once spoken to me (files I had already seen but wanted to view again in order to photograph, having paid a fee) had been silenced, as these same files were then "lost" and could no longer be accessed. Further, I was then requested to not return for two days because I had already asked for too many records, effectively ending my visit as I was en route to another location. Admittedly, this may be a result of my silence on the matter from the beginning, interpreted as being a sneaky western researcher with ulterior motives. Yet, I had been forthcoming in earlier years at another archive in Ghana, where I was told outright there was nothing on the matter and I could not be helped. This made me consider "silences" as discussed by Jacque Depelchin, realizing silences in the textual archive could represent imperial (dis)interests but also an indicator of intentional erasure or even institutional covers.[43]

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[42] Stefano Boni, "History and Ideology of an Akan Centre: The Cosmological Topography of Wiawso". *History and Anthropology.* 18, no. 1 (2007): 25-50. Reference to footnote 46 within the article.

[43] Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition*, (Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2004). On silences in the archive and the production of the archive: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015); On uncovering archival silences: Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Black Holes, Dark Matter, and Buried Troves:

Ritual Archive

For the House of Israel, ritual memory is *the* memory of a Hebraic heritage. The title of this dissertation captures the emphasis placed in oral histories on ritual. "On Saturday's we don't beat the drum" was expressed by an elder of the House of Israel (Samuel Mintah) who was at the time relaying how the Sabbath is observed, and was always observed by his Sehwi ancestors.[44] To observe one ritual, others (the beating of drum) stopped indicating the paramount importance of holding reverence for their holy day. Oral histories that recall a time when these pre-colonial practices were active, paired with the narrative of Jewish rites from scripture and international Jewish visitors provide context to the gaps in the local history— a history that does not explicitly define the origins and reasons for the practice. These practices "reactivate" the memory embodied through ritual and allow new histories to be "shaped" and constructed to fill the need of a past narrative that may have been disrupted by imposing hegemonic forces. Practices such as eschewing work on Saturday, dietary restrictions and butchering techniques, seclusion of the ill and menstruating women confirm, for the HOI, a Jewish heritage.[45] But is this the projection of European notions of antiquated customs, or is it the embodiment of a religious past that could no longer be articulated for fear of a backlash? Are these the practices of *conversos*, *crypto-Jews*, and/or *New Christians* that have become habit to perform, but the meaning and origin lost?[46] In

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Decolonization and the Multi-Sited Archives of Algerian Jewish History," *The American Historical Review.* 120, no. 3 (2015): 900-919.

[44] Samuel Mintah, interview by author, New Adhiembra, Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. 24 Aug 2010.

[45] See also, Remy Ilona, *The Igbos: Jews in Africa?* (Vol. 1): Research Findings, Historical Links, Commentaries Narratives, 2nd ed., (Abuja, Nigeria: Remy Ilona, 2004); Daniel Lis, *Jewish Identity Among the Igbo of Nigeria: Israel's "Lost Tribe" and the Question of Belonging in the Jewish State*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2014).

[46] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember,* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989). Connerton's concept of "habit memory" explains the origin of learning the habit is not as important as the recollection of the habit being

considering legacies of trauma connected to persecutions and forced conversions, I explore how identities in the diaspora may have been maintained in spaces where they were not welcome. If Yerushalmi is correct and written histories were not utilized in preference of ritual and liturgy, could it be that medieval Jews in Northwest Africa transmitted a Jewish identity through these methods? Moreover, in moments when Judaism was prohibited, were Jewish communities covert in the preservation of identity through these media? When experiencing trauma or distress, was conversion absolute and did it lead to a complete loss in a former religious and/or ethnic identity? Not to jump to conclusions, the dissertation also considers ritual as a "generative locus," coined by anthropologist Andrew Apter who recognized how ritual can produce a multitude of meanings to serve present needs.[47] Narratives of a Jewish past along with rituals performed with seemingly Jewish similarities, the dissertation finds, were not solely used by the House of Israel, but more so amongst the accounts written by authors involved in the colonial project.

Ritual can mark historical change. Scholars have noted the changes to Jewish practices in North Africa due to the establishment of the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU) in 1860, whose *mission civilisatrice* in the 19th century sought to normativize the Jewish diaspora through Western ideals. The AIU focused their mission on more populous communities in the north, neglecting communities in the south that were connected to Saharan networks. Communities in the south continued to practice Judaism as they had for centuries; therein, creating a disparity in

performed. This recall serves as evidence of a social memory that *was* performed, with the other details of *how, when*, and *why* becoming less significant.

[47] Andrew Apter, "History in the Dungeon: Atlantic Slavery and the Spirit of Capitalism in Cape Coast Castle, Ghana," *American Historical Review* 122, no. 1 (2017): 49-54.

understandings of Jewishness along a north/south and "modern"/"antiquated" divide.[48] Thus, it is possible that ritual could mirror more Mosaic teachings understood to be of the Saharan "antiquated" rituals of the interior, versus "modern" normative rituals along the coast. Kulanu, a non-profit organization that aspires to bring attention to lesser-known Jewish communities around the world, has been in contact with the House of Israel since the 1990s. Kulanu produces a quarterly newsletter with contributions of international visitors discussing practices observed and how they, eagerly, taught the community how things are presently done.[49] By studying ritual, historical processes of remembrance provides data points to determine when "feedback" encounters "cultural retentions" in ritual memory.[50] Like glottochronology, there is a shift with normative inclusions to the ritual upon contact with Western Jewish communities. Whether completely new rituals are accepted (with the accompaniment of Judaica and donated Mahzor),[51] modified (symbolic items for seder), or rejected (*hatafat dam brit,* inclusion of menstruating women), is a result of the many encounters with global Jewry over the past five decades. Now, observations of these shifts in ritual, within the HOI, yield a historical value. Discussion surrounding the shifts, or consideration of change, also reveal connections to and commitments with the past. Some "newcomers" have joined the HOI, some of which are not Sehwi, and thus have different approaches to Jewish ritual, with divisions on ritual as past versus ritual as

[48] Laskier, *Alliance Israelite Universelle,* 1984; Schroeter and Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents," 2006.

[49] Kulanu: All of Us, <http://www.kulanu.org/>. These snapshots along with interviews on the evolution of practices have been instructive and are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

[50] Herskovits' "Africanisms" (1941) and Williams' "Hebrewisms" (1930) both harken to the institutionalization of memory via ritual. Melville J. Herskovits, *Thy Myth of the Negro Past*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941); Joseph J. Williams, *Hebrewisms of West Africa: From Nile to Niger With the Jews*, (New York: Biblo-Tannen, 1930).

[51] Prayer book for High Holidays.

present. That is not to say that those who see ritual as past, do not absorb and take on practices that the global Jewry adhere to: learning Hebrew, wearing prayer shawls, etc. But rather, they see these practices as those that have been lost or due to lost connection were not able to be incorporated in a collective temporality with their global brethren. However, removing practices (such as the separation of menstruating women) are seen as dismissing the past, and thus inauthentic to the Jewish identity they, ritually, understand.[52]

While some may see the project as a way to legitimate Jewish identity via the oral histories provided by these specific Sehwi individuals who claim a Jewish ancestry,[53] that is not the work of this dissertation. I neither have the authority to authenticate a faith identity nor the means, or interest, in which to verify a "pure" ethnic identity. However, as a historian, I can analyze resources and determine if there is historical precedent or possibilities, and attempt to historicize the data that I have gathered, witnessed, and even experienced over the course, of now, 13 years of research. Mapping out Jewish presence in Northwest Africa from the 11th century to 21st century revealed this vast space has not been devoid of Jews or Jewish communities until an enigmatic appearance of communities emerging in the 20th and 21st centuries. Thus, what is being described as a "phenomenon" for all of Africa, I argue is epiphenomenal, specifically in the case of Sehwi. Remy Ilona, a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at University of California, Riverside and who has published multiple works on the Igbo Jewish communities, too, may come to such a conclusion considering the overlapping histories and influence of imperial forces of Islam and European colonialism. Yet, acknowledging a

[52] Rituals such as the *hatafat dam brit*, which is Talmudic not from the Torah, is seen as a practice designed for those truly converting with no ancestral claim or previous practice of the faith. For the HOI, to participate in such a ceremony would delegitimate who they claim and believe to be, ancestrally and presently.

[53] Not *all* Sehwi claim this.

Jewish past in West Africa will not provide answers for the entire continent, but it may explain the rise of some communities in West Africa, and specifically one community in Ghana, the House of Israel.

Chapters and Arguments

The dissertation begins by acknowledging the history of physical Jewish presence in Northwest Africa, a region that largely makes up the countries associated with the geographical North and West division but specifically in regards to the lands tethered to the former Ghana and Songhai empires.[54] It maps out the *longue durée* within the interior, along the coast, and via new technologies in the modern era (planes, trains, and automobiles).This expansive frame maps out the geographical and temporal scope of Jewish presence in West Africa, and thereby acknowledges the potential starting points for origins and migrations that lend themselves to the oral histories now being articulated by present-day communities asserting a Jewish past, specifically the HOI in western Ghana. The chapter also attempts to understand this period of silence in the archival record, acknowledging that both Islamic and European ethnographers not writing of Jewish persons, due to lack of interest (as were the lives of women and enslaved folks), not necessarily proof of their absence. The chapter discusses the oversight produced by themes of Jewish elimination in the medieval era, which has muzzled the possibilities oral histories evoke. Similarly, the chapter echoes the works of Ghislaine Lydon, Ira Zaartman, Sam

[54] When discussing Northwest Africa, I am largely discussing the region of Tuat and Songhai regions. I employ the same geographic scope of Ghislaine Lydon's "western Africa" in *On Trans-Saharan Trails*. Lydon defines this scope as "what is typically referred to as West Africa in addition to the Sahara, stretching to its northwestern (southern Morocco, western Sahara, southern Algeria) and central (Niger, southern Libya, Chad) edges." The scope of this paper, does not include the "central edge." Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.

Anderson, Lori de Lucia, and Madina Thiam who have contributed to our understanding of the Sahara as a bridge and not an impenetrable zone that created a barrier for people and ideas. The chapter discusses how histories are transmitted under duress, and how archives become mobile. By highlighting Jewish presence or even the rumor of Jewish presence from the 11th century onward, the chapter demonstrates the pervasiveness of a Jewish past in West Africa and serves as a launching pad for investigations into manifestations of Jewish identity today.

Chapter Two confronts "lost tribe" theories as they relate to colonial fascinations as well as genealogies and narratives of the cursed biblical character of Ham.[55] It contends with iterations of a past Jewish history through the eyes of ethnographers and how the dialectical continuities of rumor have taken on a life of their own, with scholars attributing emerging communities to ideas, philosophies, and histories of Judaism as introduced by Christian missionaries and colonialists. Lastly, it considers how modernizing efforts of Jewish institutions who were attempting to secure their own place in colonial structures furthered the divide between "white" and "Black" Jews.

Chapter Three turns back to the migration histories made evident in Chapter One. It contributes to the literature of the Sefwi region of Ghana, an area of Ghana that has received little attention.[56] Chapter Three reveals the diversity of Sefwi, a forested land that became settled by migrants and refugees and has continued to welcome laborers from across the country and continent. The Sehwi, peoples who largely reside in the Sefwi Wiawso district, established the city as a safe haven against Islamic extremism from the north, colonial conscriptions and

[55] Parfitt, *Black Jews,* 2013.

[56] Most notably is H. H. Ofori, Stefano Boni, and P. A. Roberts.

influence from Europe, and an imperial Ashanti culture that could water down their own unique practices. After resisting physical and ideological threats from before their settlement in Sefwi Wiawso, most Sehwi eventually were swept up into Nkrumah's pan-Africanist agenda that grafted onto Christian networks to establish a uniform national Ghanaian identity. In doing so, only a few Sehwi maintained ancestral practices.[57]

Chapter Four picks up with those who knew and wanted to continue the ancestral practices of the Sehwi. The chapter centers on the House of Israel, a Jewish community that emerged in the 1970s after their leader had a vision that it was Judaism that the Sehwi ancestors practiced. The chapter investigates how methods of transmission of this past by members of the HOI reflect a history of duress and persecution.

The dissertation argues that there is a historical precedent for the existence of Jewish communities emerging in Western Ghana rather than a phenomenon derivative of colonial logic, historico-racial schema, suspicious financial motives, or modern technologies as scholars outside of African Studies have claimed. It contributes to the growing literature on African Jews by investigating the oral histories of Sehwi persons who believe they have a Jewish past. It is not meant to be a history writ large of all communities across the continent as their stories have different variables and complexities that too are deserving of their own study versus a one-size-fits-all" homogenization of African Judaism (or even POC Judaism) which elides the historical, cultural, and political contexts of each community. Even within Ghana: Sehwi, Ewe, Ga and especially the interethnic and cosmopolitan congregation that is forming in Accra (who do not,

[57] Public record utilizes the spelling of "Sefwi." I utilize Sefwi when referring to geographic places, and Sehwi when speaking to the ethnic group (largely residing in Sefwi Wiawso and surrounding district).

collectively, claim any ancestry) cannot form a monolith, much less the entire continent and beyond, and it is my hope that this dissertation provides that awareness.

In addition, by widening the temporal and geographic scope that has created scholarly blind spots, the dissertation provides explanation for how a community, and its history, exists even when it was not supposed to survive under various systems of domination. Through the lens of Jewish survival, incorporating acculturation and disguise, it paints Northwestern Africa as a place giving aid and refuge (not seeking it) and a space where history was preserved and transmitted before and beyond Western conceptualizations. My research contributes to our understanding of historical silences, legacies, and preservation and to uncovering the history of human migration and cultural interaction under duress. Further, my work forges a path between African and Jewish Studies, by acknowledging an interconnected history for a millennium (11th-21st centuries). The dissertation expounds on the intercontinental and international aspects of Northwest Africa (inclusive of the Sahara), and long-established networks that existed before and persisted after imperial and/or colonial lines were drawn that made survival possible.

CHAPTER ONE

From Ancient Jana to Present-Day Ghana: Towards a New Historiography of Jewish Presence in West Africa, 1068-1939 CE

The Jerusalem of the West[1] referred to the north African city of Tlemcen (present-day Algeria) in the 15th century due to its sizeable Jewish community.[2] Situated almost directly west of Jerusalem, with an approximately 3 degree difference in latitude, Tlemcen was connected to cities along the northern shores of the Sahara, perhaps most importantly Tamentit (present-day Algeria) and Sijilmasa (present-day Morocco). These Saharan and port cities were home to a number of Jews, and were viewed by Arabic intellectuals as sitting all in the same region inclusive of the Sahara, and what is today cordoned off as West Africa.[3] The "Furthest West" was a vast region including the Sudan with Sijilmasa its gateway.[4] The "West" as discussed in the Arabic chronicles was a geography that included the entire western peninsula, which protrudes from the primary stack of southern, central, eastern Africa, consisting of a bounty of migration trails from the Mediterranean, through the Sahara, to the southern edges of the Songhai

[1] Hunwick, *Jews of a Saharan oasis,* 2006; Susan Slyomovics, "Geographies of Jewish Tlemcen," *The Journal of North African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2000), 81-96; André Chouraqui, *Between East and West: A History of the Jews of North Africa*, (Skokie, Ill: Varda Books, 2001).

[2] Ibid.

[3] According to Arabic astrology is still all part of the third clime. J. F. P. Hopkins and Nehemia Levtzion, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), xvii-xix. On Al-Bīrūnī, and *kishwar* system, See*:* Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 87-92, 119-120.

[4] Ibn Ḥawqal, *in* Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 45. Also, Messier and Miller discusses the role of Sijilmasa as *the* connection to the empire of Ghana, the Takrur and Songhai. See, Ronald A. Messier and James Andrew Miller, *The Last Civilized Place: Sijilmasa and Its Saharan Destiny*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 59.

empire and eventually inclusive of the Akan empire—whose lands were mined and its yields carried on these long-established and life-giving trade routes.[5] Cultures throughout this vast space were indeed unique, but there were also similarities, only further enhanced by engagement in trade, and the spread of Islam. The "West" was a land of milk and honey and of gold. It had plentiful resources, wealth, intrigue, scholarly centers, kingdoms and empires.[6] The mysteries of the West pulled cartographers to map its spaces and treasures, and eventually foreign empires to create their own manifest destiny, which eventually resulted in the exploitation of the peoples and raw materials found there in order to strengthen the wealth of their own empire. Centers of trade on the northern shores of the Sahara were not termini but rather stopovers to the western expanse, portals to a safe haven, and launch pads to new territories to wield power or proselytize ideologies.

The Saharan Blind

Later this vast West, from the scholar's gaze, became more concentrated and excluded Northern Africa, and parts of the Sahara which ultimately produced historical erasure as a result of border placement which deemphasized the multicultural connections and influences the vast West African trade expedited. The partitioning of this vast continent consequently disrupted connected histories and treated the Sahara as a boundary of regions rather than a facilitator of networks and

[5] Albert Adu Boahen, *Britain, the Sahara and the Western Sudan, 1788-1861*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); James Grey Jackson and ʻAbd ʾal-Salām S͡hābīnī, *An Account of Timbuctoo and Housa: Territories in the Interior of Africa, by El Hage Abd Salam Shabeeny*, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1820); Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*, 2009.

[6] Jackson and ʻAbd ʾal-Salām S͡hābīni 1820. Milk and Honey identified in the Sus and gold from Timbuctoo and into Coomasie; Whereas James Richardson reports that Arabs and Moors are brought up in lack, it is more difficult from slaves from Western Africa: "Negroes are expatriated from ʻa land flowing with milk and honey.'" James Richardson, *Reports on the Commerce of Northern Africa: Confidential*. (London: 1846), 72.

spaces. The Western Sudan, and now West Africa, was cast as a cohesive cultural unit unrelated to the uniqueness of the North African cultural identity separated by a sea of sand versus a body of water; yet, these more contemporary scopes cut off the trading entrepôts that served as multicultural milieus as much as distribution and connection points for goods to be circulated in the northern fringes of this western domain and stocked up for the travels towards the south. Mapping Jewish history in West Africa, requires a redrawing, or perhaps better conceptualized: a (re)pairing of boundaries. As mentioned above, the western peninsula of Africa was linked via trade for over a millennium, both through the interior and around the coast. Much like maritime historians are acknowledging the histories that bodies of water hold and facilitate, this Braudelian approach can be extended to the Sahara, too, as it is not devoid of its own history and thus cannot simply be understood as a vacuum where people entered at one end and exited the other, with limited scholarship of the world and processes existing in this in-between.[7] When it comes to Jewish history of Africa, especially in the premodern periods, staying confined to these regions of study and boundaries of nation, have to be avoided. The Sahara cannot be excluded, nor can logic that sees "two Africas" entertained.[8]

[7] Fernand Braudel, "The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[8] Ghislaine Lydon, "Saharan Oceans and Bridges, Barriers and Divides in Africa's Historiographical Landscape," *The Journal of African History* 56, no. 1 (2015), 3-22; Ghislaine Lydon, "Writing Trans-Saharan History: Methods, Sources and Interpretations Across the African Divide," *The Journal of North African Studies.* 10, no. 3 (2005): 293-324; Ira William Zartman, *The Sahara - Bridge or Barrier?* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for Internet. Peace, 1963). I resist using "sub-Saharan" as a identitarian category as pointed out by Ghislaine Lydon (2005) and Ira W. Zartman (1963), that acknowledge the division it creates between North Africa and the rest of the continent, which fails to see the Sahara as a connective space in the continent, and not as a barrier of two separate and unrelated cultures and societies. Additionally, they argue that it implies sub-ness, or an inferiority. This is crucial as discussing origins and praxis of Black African Jewish communities, specifically in West Africa (the primary geographical scope of this essay) are arguably linked to North African communities via the Sahara *and* their Judaism is often seen as sub-par or inferior or even counterfeit.

Treating Jewish history in a geographical (or disciplinary) vacuum elides the migratory and trade networks recorded by ethnographers of the Sahara and the *bilād al-sūdān* from antiquity through the modern eras. Scholars do not attest Jewish history in North Africa, traditionally a region including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt with Chad and (present-day) Sudan sometimes considered by academic fields. A region that, for some departments of African Studies, views it as outside the scope of the discipline under the premise that North Africa's cultural heritage and contemporary positionality is more closely aligned with that of the Middle East than continental Africa, south of the Sahara, a consequence of this false Saharan divide. The corpus of scholarship in Jewish Studies in the global south, specifically on continental Africa, is considerably small in relation to communities in the global north. When addressing Jewish movement south of the Sahara, the literature reduces exponentially, with most scholarship focused on long-acknowledged Jewish communities of North Africa.[9] Jewish North Africa similarly is regarded as distinct from and extraneous to the continent's southern domains. This oversight prevents scholars today from potentially understanding the rise of Jewish communities (re)emerging in Western Africa, and continental Africa, writ large. Scholarship that has been produced in the last 20 years has attempted to understand these groups, consequently disconnected from Mizrahim in the north, and search for origin stories to explain their presence, a presence that is being labeled as a "phenomenon."[10] Yet, this continental "phenomenon" does not have a one-size-fits-all answer, which ignores the historical precedent of a specific region and arguably as consequence of boundary disruptions and historical erasures. This is especially

[9] André Chouraqui, *Histoire des juifs en Afrique du Nord*, (Monaco: Rocher, 1998);. H. Z. Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa,* Vol. 1. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974); Nahum Slouschz, *The Jews of North Africa*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish publication society of America, 1944).

[10] Brettschneider, *The Jewish Phenomenon,* 2015; Lis, et al, *In the Shadow of Moses*, 2016; Parfitt and Fisher, *Becoming Jewish*, 2016.

the case in Western Africa—a space that has historically been linked to the cultural influences of the (contemporary) north for over a millenium. With migration being part and parcel of global Jewish history, and specifically in this territorial scope of Northwest Africa, the conclusions about the Saharan divide have been inimicable. Thus, the thematic challenge of geography must be disrupted for the study of Jews in West Africa, as this subject cannot be contained by these scholastic boundaries. In opening this space, scholars can begin to see the themes of origins as they relate to this history from the Ancient Empire of Ghana to present day Ghana, from Demark to the Gold Coast colony, and from New York City to Sefwi Wiawso— all via trade routes, coastal lines, and Internet cables.

This chapter seeks to establish the whole of Northwest Africa as a space that fostered Jewish trade and refugeeship, from the 11th to the 21st century. As discussed below, Jewish persons engaged in trade and sought safe haven resulting in community and colonial anxieties for a millennium, throughout the interior and along the coast. Via Arabic sources, a notation of Jewish presence reveals their marginalization in society and the protective cloak they seek from their neighbors as well as efforts to hide their Jewish origins. During the European conquest, archaeological and written sources reveal Jewish individuals being mindful of concealing their Jewish identity in order to go unnoticed and avoid harassment based on centuries of intolerance in imperial spaces. By the early 20th century, with antisemitism growing in Europe, Ashkenazi Jews look to West Africa for geographical cover. Upon the creation of Israel in 1948, rather than physical protection, West Africa (and continental Africa) shifts to become a terrain of opportunity where new networks are formed to support and build alliances with the young nation.

Audacity of Absence

The canon on North African Jewry is sizable, and its history, I argue, is connected to the rest of the West. For the purpose of this study, I focus primarily on the southern edges of what is now known as "North Africa," to begin to fill in the gaps of Jewish Africa, in the West, with Tlemcen, Sijilmasa, and Tamantit being three critical sites in "North Africa" that contribute to the history of (contemporary) West Africa. This chapter contends with the audacity of an absence theory of Jews south of Sahara, in the medieval period, based on (1) the foregone conclusion that Sijilmasa was the southernmost Jewish community based on textual archives, and (2) that anti Jewish conditions made it impossible for Jewish survival beyond quasi-tolerant spaces in the north. Tethered to this point, and acknowledging the antisemitic climate Jews lived (in North Africa and most of the world), is the awareness that Jews were marginalized. More simply stated, Jews, like slaves and women, would not have been the subject of study for early historians and ethnographers and thus their absence from the textual record is not necessarily evidence of their absence in these spaces. Yet, it is not just the Saharan barrier and these scholarly conclusions that have thwarted our knowledge of Jewish West Africa. As will be discussed below, Jews themselves also, in part, obstructed this history by using various tactics to conceal their identity.

Textual absence

Through the textual archive, records indicating Jewish presence date back to the 11th century in Sijilmasa, a southern trade port of the Sahara connected to what is today West Africa, and for the scope of this essay Northwest Africa. J. F. P. Hopkins and Nehemia Levtzion have provided a translation of Arabic texts from the medieval period that observe Jewish populations in West

Africa, including 11th century historian Abū ʿUbayd ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Muḥammad ibn Ayyūb ibn ʿAmr al-Bakrī who would also notate the Jewish population in Sijilmasa.[11] One of the concerns of the collection is to note that the authors who penned these documents often did not step foot into these spaces but relied on interlocutors (ibn Battuta being the only in the collection to travel south of the Sahara). Thus, later documents discussing Jews in regions further south cannot be taken at face value due to the lack of corroboration in other sources. With a lack of textual data from this period, it is even more difficult to authenticate. Others have argued that the northern fringes of the Sahara was most probably the furthest south Jews went into the interior of Africa, or at least of any significant community.[12] This conclusion is largely predicated on Shelomo Dov Goitein's findings within the contents of the Cairo Geniza, a trove of sources that sheds light on Jewish life in Arab lands from the 9th to 13th centuries. From this collection, Goitein recognized that no records within the geniza addressed business or travel in the Sudan, nor were there any documents from the Sudan. Goitein thus concludes that as Sijilmasa was the southernmost site visible in the collection it must reflect the southernmost point of Jewish existence.[13] Before continuing in laying out record of Jewish presence in the textual archive, it is important to pause to discuss the importance of Goitein's work, which supported the information penned by al-Bakrī that he received from his informants. It also must be noted, that it is not the geniza documents alone that have legitimated this history, with

[11] Al-Bakrī, *in* Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 65.

[12] Aomar Boum, "Saharan Jewry: History, Memory and Imagined Identity," *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, no. 3 (2011): 325-341; Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa*, 1974; S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society. The Jewish Communities of the Arab World As Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza,* 6 vols, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Raymond Mauny, *Tableau Geographique De L'ouest Africain Au Moyen Age D'apres Les Sources Ecrites, La Tradition Et L'archeologie*, (Dakar: Institut Francais d'Afrique Noire, 1961).

[13] S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, (Princeton, N.J.: Univ. Press, 1973).

archaeological evidence also providing support. The point to make here, is, that from the 11th century, during the Almohad and Almoravid dynasties that were notably harsh and intolerant of Jews, a Jewish community was reported back to al-Bakrī, who did not go to Sijilmasa himself.[14] And, without "having been there," al-Bakrī's history was substantiated. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the importance of these Arabic sources, even if they stand alone, as not mere rumor, but a world of Jewish presence that may be revealed through other sources.[15]

Absence of tolerance

Another contentious debate to be wrestled with regarding a Jewish West Africa stems from the known historical climate of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in Africa and the notion that these Abrahamic faiths have been competitors and not able to coexist, largely fueled by Inquisition, Crusade, or presentist lenses. I argue that this belief of intolerance and/or extremism leads to conclusions that may shadow or conceal a history. Again, in the vein of Judaism, I speak specifically to the notion that Jews either did not travel south of the Sahara or were able to survive in spite of the violence against them. Starting in the medieval period Arabic documents, from Al-Bakrī, Al-Zuhrī, Al-Idrīsī and others, indicated that Jews had "fled" but found home in other areas, largely Berber ruled.[16] These documents were produced during the Almohad and Almoravid dynasties; yet, through these writings (although uncorroborated) it could indicate that Jews were able to flee to find homes elsewhere, and that some lives were spared depending on their circumstances. This would be in line with those who have written that Berber's were often

[14] Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 62; See also, Chouraqui, *Between East and West*, 2001.

[15] White, *Speaking with Vampires,* 2009.

[16] Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000.

more tolerant of Jews,[17] and would be reflective of the Covenant of Umar, a pact created in the 7th century that created and protected the status of the *dhimmi*, or protected persons of Abrahamic beliefs. John Hunwick wrote extensively on the views of a radical Islamic preacher, Muhammad b, ‘Abd Al-Karim Al-Maghīlī, who, ultimately, believed that according to the Covenant of Umar— Jews (and *dhimmi*) largely should be kept in “humility and abasement.”[18] While this will be unpacked later, this perspective could also be reflective in the subjects that drew interest from the Arabic writers. As will be seen from the sources, in this climate of intolerance Jews were often relegated to demeaning professions: custodians of towns and slaves, both populations that have historically not received much, if any, attention at the time of the writings. Lastly, interpretations of the Covenant of Umar, specifically by Al-Maghīlī, also discouraged collective gatherings of non-believers, and due to histories of violence against Jewish communities, as seen in Tamantit, could have discouraged communicating the presence of such an underground community.[19]

Perhaps better documented textually, but still minimally and overshadowed by the presumption of absence due to intolerance that motivated allusions of conversion, is the interrogation of Jewish presence in coastal West Africa during the era of European expansion and the fallout of the Inquisition. Although Jewish persons were undoubtedly a minority along the West African coastline and in the interior, the impact of their emigration is not a question of

[17] Chouraqui, *Between East and West*, 2001; Sidney Mendelssohn, *The Jews of Africa, Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,* (New York, E. P. Dutton & co., 1920).

[18] Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim Al-Maghīlī, and John O. Hunwick, *Sharī‘a in Songhay: The Replies of Al-Maghīlī to the Questions of Askia Al-Hājj Muhammad,* (Oxford [England]: Published for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, 1985), 38-42; Hunwick, “Al-Mahîlî and the Jews of Tuwât,” 1985: 155-183.

[19] Hunwick, *Jews of a Saharan Oasis*, 2006. On Al-Maghīlī targeting organization of “apostates,” Al-Maghīlī, and Hunwick, *Sharī‘a in Songhay,* 1985*:* 126-7.

how great the numbers were but how the impact of these customs were hidden and potentially influenced faith identity outside of the Iberian Peninsula, specifically on the impact on trans-Saharan and coastal Africa.[20] An area that incorporates countries that physically touch the Saharan desert, were engaged in trans-Saharan networks and communities, and/or had connections to the Portuguese crown. Similarly, this area is an important region as its northern edge is situated just next to the Iberian Peninsula, its coastal cities were territories of the Portuguese empire, and Jewish persons were heavily involved in the trade of the region. With a growth of Jews in the area, we can consider that the influx was due to both increasing persecution in the Iberian Peninsula and coincidentally better commercial opportunities.[21] It should be noted, however, that in this region Jewish persons still maintained restricted freedoms—whether as property of the crown in the territories or under *dhimmi* status with their co-religionists in Morocco, which ultimately led to additional veneers and external identities that did not reflect their interior faith. To disregard these communities and persons that existed in such close proximity to the Iberian Peninsula and with established connections to Jewish and Iberian networks is a major weakness of scholars of the Iberian Expulsion along with the medievalists who have similarly been arrogant of absence in the interior of Northwest Africa, therein not interrogating Arabic sources (as seen above) and or narratives of Jewish pasts and rituals (Chapter 2). The metaphorical seesaw of toleration experienced in this multi-century timeframe very well may have been a motivator to relocate to or remain in the trans-Saharan and coastal region, with some level of concealment.

[20] It should also be noted that *converso* /*marrano* populations had an impact on the New World. See Nathan Wachtel, *Mémoires marranes: itinéraires dans le sertão du Nordeste brésilien*, (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

[21] Kevin Ingram, "The *Converso* Phenomenon and the Issue of Spanish Identity," in, *Cross-Cultural History and the Domestication of Otherness*, eds. Michal Rozbicki and George O. Ndege, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 29.

The last period under review, the 20th century has been shielded by the legacy of this audacity of believed absence. The first half of the century provides records that West Africa as an extension of colonial ideologies was prejudiced against Jewish colonialists, merchants, and refugees, who lived there. By the last half of the 20th century, as African Jewish communities emerge, the arrogance of absence from the previous centuries ultimately created a bewilderment with analyses for Jewish encounters in the last half of the 20th century understood as symptomatic of the wiles of the internet or lure of Jewish philanthropy.[22]

Ultimately, the theme of absence which has pervaded from the medieval era, places a muzzle on the possibilities of the oral histories now being articulated, which therein point scholars to look for a more contemporary origins for the (re)emergence of present-day communities. Similarly, viewing the Sahara as an impenetrable zone creates a barrier for possible narratives of migration; therein, shifting the gaze of origin to modern-day influences versus a historical impact. These thematic forgone conclusions contribute to the skepticism of today's communities.

Longue Durée

Jewish migration was common before the Babylonian destruction of Solomon's temple of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and the Roman invasion and destruction of Herod's temple in 70 CE which both ushered a mass dispersal of the Jewish diaspora. The curse of Ham, which has been largely concerned with pigmentation and racial thinking, underscored by the Hamitic Hypothesis, also describes a population being cast out (descendants of Ham) and were believed

[22]Lis et al., *In the Shadow of Moses.*

to have migrated and conducted trade along the Mediterranean and North African seaboard.[23] Scholars of antiquity have also suggested Jews were conducting trade throughout the expanse of North Africa during the Phoenician period (1500 BCE-300BCE). This era coincides with the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem, which is believed to be when the lost ten tribes were banished, and the destruction of the first temple in 587 BCE by the Babylonians. Due to the lack of migration records from this era, "lost tribes of Israel" theories have circulated.[24] Many believed these ten tribes were executed, banished and later died, while scholars of Mizrahim and Anusim entertain migratory and assimilatory theories into the geographical regions Israel has close proximity: Eastern Africa (Beta Israel of Ethiopia readmission to Israel is predicated from this logic), and North Africa (Mizrahim/Maghrebi believed to be both descendant of Sephardi and Magrebi communities, and controversially and still an active debate: Arab or Berber Jews). Few scholars of North Africa have settled on the facts of Jewish migration and settlement in North Africa who debate whether "Arab" Jews became "Berberized" or if Berbers converted to Judaism.[25] Yet, this debate is largely rooted in the etiological history that surrounds the less clear origins and historiographies of (North) African Jews but understood to have lived in the Middle East and North Africa since Judaism's beginnings. Yet, westward and northern migration towards Spain (Sephardim) and northern Europe (Ashkenazi) has been more documented than the more plausible southern movement into and beyond the Sahara.

[23] The Hamitic Hypothesis will be further dissected in the second chapter.

[24] Tudor Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002).

[25] Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*, 2009: 66 ; See also, Michel Abitbol, *Communautés Juives Des Marges Sahariennes Du Maghreb*, (Jérusalem: Institut Ben-Zvi, 1982); Bâ, *Présence juive,* 2006**;** Boum, "Saharan Jewry: 2011; Daniel Schroeter, "La découverte des juifs berbères," in *Relations judéo-musulmanes au Maroc: perceptions et réalités*, M. Abitbol and R. Assaraf, eds. (Paris: Éditions Stavit, 1997), 169–187.

With unclear migration histories, Jewish identity in antiquity has also been contested and rumored. For example, the Berber Queen Kahina of the Jerawa tribe in the 7th century. The Jerawa were part of the Zenetes, a nomadic group, rumored to be Jewish, and settling in Tamantit in the 6th century.[26] Ibn Khaldun is perhaps the first to discuss Kahina as a Jewess, with other scholars, notably H. Z. Hirschberg, rejecting the claim.[27] Others contend she was Christian due to an idol she carried that some believed was a Christian icon.[28] While others suggest it was a stone idol fashioned like a Berber war god, some suggesting it resembled a bull. [29] Ibn Khaldun also suggested that her burial was at a well, a location that took on its own mythology.[30] Yet, some of the clichés surrounding the story of Kahina will be recurring motifs in the descriptions of Jewish persons and contributions in other Arabic chronicles discussed below.[31]

Still enigmatic is the extent Jews engaged in trade across the Sahara. Remnants of their presence are evident through epigraphic evidence,[32] artisanal goods,[33] and in ethnographies from the medieval period onward and will be discussed more in-depth below. Further 20th century

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[26] E. F. Gautier and Dorothy Ford Mayhew, *Sahara the Great Desert*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1935).

[27] Jessica Leigh Keuter, *The Contested Legend of Al-Kâhina: Prophetess or Propaganda?* MA Thesis. (Los Angeles: University of California, 2019).

[28] Abdelkrim Allagui, "The Jews of the Maghreb: Between Memory and History," in, *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, edited by Meddeb Abdelwahab and Stora Benjamin, by Todd Jane Marie and Smith Michael B., 985-1004, (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013): 994-998.

[29] Hsain Ilahiane, *Historical Dictionary of the Berbers (Imazighen)*, (Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2017), 120-121.

[30] Keuter 2019.

[31] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965)*;* Joseph C. Miller, *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History*, (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980).

[32] Bâ, *Sur les traces*, 2014; Ismael Diadié Haïdara, *Les Juifs À Tombouctou: Recueil Des Sources Écrites Relatives Au Commerce Juif À Tombouctou Au XIXe Siècle*, (Bamako: Editions Donniya, 1999).

[33] Labelle Prussin, "Judaic Threads in the West African Tapestry: No More Forever?," *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 2 (June 2006), 328-353: 339.

ethnographies also recognize a Jewish past pre-dating other Abrahamic influences. Scholars of North African Jewries such as Nahum Slouschz, Charles Monteil, and Michel Abitbol acknowledge that Judaism existed among Berber populations, in a Hebraic-Israelite narrative, prior to the introduction of Islam in Northwest Africa (largely the countries associated with the geographical North and West division) with reference to a Davidic lineage within some oral histories.[34] Others such as Vincent Monteil, relying on oral records, suggest a Berber Jewish community of Ifran Anti-Atlas in the deep south of Morocco claim a Hebraic heritage originating back to Nebuchadnezzer.[35] Charles de la Roncière and André Chouraqui also contend with the Phoenician origin stories.[36] These origin stories may be mythological, but should be analyzed carefully. Those being articulated by communities south of the Sahara, who were in contact via trade (specifically the gold trade) from the mines and gold fields in Ghana up through Jenne and Timbuktu and connected to the northern termini of the Sahara and in "Berber" territories,[37] and who were likewise neglected in the "modernizing" efforts of the *mission civilisatrice* that shunned indigenous and more antiquated rituals,[38] can similarly be interrogated and not quickly tossed.

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[34] Nahum Slouschz, *Étude sur l'histoire des Juifs et du judaisme au Maroc*, (Paris: E. Leroux, 1906)*;* Nahum Slouschz, *Travels in North Africa*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1927); Nahum Slouschz*, Un voyage d'études juives en Afrique*, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1913). Charles Monteil, *Problèmes du Soudan occidental: juifs et judaïsés*, (Paris: Larose, 1952); and Abitbol, *Communate Juives*, 1998*;* Michel Abitbol, "Juifs maghrébins et commerce transsaharien du VIIIe ou XVe siècle," in *Sol, La Parole Et L'écrit: 2000 Ans D'histoire Africaine: Mélanges À Raymond Mauny,* (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 1981), Pp. 561-577.

[35] Vincent-Mansour Monteil, *Les Juifs d'Ifran (Anti-Atlas Marocain): Situation actuelle : Cimetières : Ancêtres: Tombe de Yousef ben Mimoun*. 1948).

[36] Charles de La Roncière, *La decouverte de l'Afrique au Moyen Âge,* (Le Caire: Société royale de géographie d'Égypte, 1925); André Chouraqui, *La saga des Juifs en Afrique du Nord*. (Paris: Hachette, 1972); Chouraqui, *Between East and West*, 2001.

[37] Mauny, *Tableau Geographique,* 1961.

[38] Laskier, *Alliance Israelite Universelle,* 1984; Schroeter and Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents," 2006.

En Route from Sijilmasa to the *Bilād al-Sūdān*

In 1068, a Muslim geographer and historian from Spain known as al-Bakrī, wrote a detailed account of persons living in Sijilmasa, a port on the northern edge of the Sahara in what is present-day Morocco.[39] His description was constructed through the observations of informants who had travelled in Northwest Africa, as he himself had not.[40] From the accounts of his interlocutors, al-Bakrī composed the description, within which, he identifies Jews living there. A detail corroborated by Goitein due to the contents of the Cairo Genizza. Al-Bakrī's text does not provide an extensive analysis of these Jews or how large the population was. His mention of Jews is tangential, only noting the occupation in which they participated in relation to the community of Sijilmasa. He recorded that Jews were "masons" and were "restricted to this trade alone."[41] Although brief, al-Bakrī articulated the role of Jews in this Saharan port and provided a clue into their treatment. Whether or not Jews only participated in masonry is difficult to authenticate with a lack of record from the end of the 11th century; however, this note provides a glance into their occupational roles.

Historian Ronald A. Messier and geographer James A. Miller who wrote extensively on their archaeological study of Sijilmasa provided more detail about the Jewish aspect of the city based on archaeological evidence and the *Kitāb al-Istibṣār* "the Fatimids executed the wealthy Jews of the city, confiscated their property, and allowed only those Jews to remain who would

[39] Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 62.

[40] Nehemia Levtzion and Jay Spaulding, *Medieval West Africa: Views from Arab Scholars and Merchants*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003), xii, 66.

[41] Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 65. The text could also connote that Jews were only masons to the city's leper population.

serve as masons or cleaners of cesspools."[42] Messier and Miller also contend with the fluctuation of Jewish treatment in the history of the city, where Jews were once thriving merchants, perhaps causing jealousy for their amassed wealth, as well as having a cultured and intellectual reputation. The pair identify Sijilmasa as "the only rabbinical city in the South."[43] This qualifier is seemingly more accurate to Goitein's furthest inhabited domain thesis. Yet, by the time al-Bakrī penned his history, Jews who did survive may have remained there as custodians, not only of the city but also perhaps of the past—whether or not the informants al-Bakrī relied upon were Jewish. This point will be taken up below, but it is possible that his interlocutors were Jewish or provided more information about Jewish persons, only to be censored out by al-Bakrī or Muslim-authors. Or perhaps, like the text itself, Jews were barely discussed or minimally present.

Writing from the multicultural hub of Sijilmasa and through his "systematic enquiries from traders and other travellers," Abū al-Qāsim b. ʻAlī Ibn Ḥawqal al-Naṣībī, known as Ibn Ḥawqal reported in 967 that it took approx. 2 months and 10 days to reach Ghana from Sijilmasa (via Awdaghust).[44] Sijilmasa, as Messier and Miller point out, "was the link to sub-Saharan West Africa."[45]

Ancient Ghana and the Songhai Empire

In the 12th century, Muslim geographers al-Zuhrī and al-Idrīsī, provided greater detail about Jews in West Africa. Like al-Bakrī, neither al-Zuhrī nor al-Idrīsī actually travelled to the areas

[42] Messier and Miller, 119.

[43] Ibid., 119-120.

[44] Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 43-46.

[45] Messier and Miller, 22.

discussed but rather relied on the observations of others. Thus, questions of censorship must again be raised. However, the information reported back to these authors and recorded within their texts are significant. By the middle of the 12th century (1130-1155), Al-Zuhrī composed his text on the peoples of ancient Ghana. Ghana, both the empire, and Saharan township were connected to Sijilmasa by caravan routes detailed by Ibn Ḥawqal as early as the 10th century.[46] Al-Zuhrī writes:

> The people of Zafun[47] take captives from the people of Amima, a tribe of the Janawa who live in the eastern part of the desert between Zafun and Kawkaw near the Nile of Egypt. They are people who profess Judaism. Their country is entered from Kawkaw and Waraqlan. They are the poorest of the Janawa. They read the Torah.[48]

Most important to highlight is the significant observation of "people who profess Judaism," in a region in what is now present-day West Africa, with the kingdom of Ghana situated in a region saddling the borders of what is now Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal with the "Nile of Egypt" referring to the Niger.[49] Kawkaw is understood to be Gao, Mali[50] and Zafun to be Diafunu.[51] This small mention, itself, is paramount in establishing a Jewish heritage in West Africa as early as the 12th century. Not only are there Jews, but they are practicing their Judaism with items of

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[46] Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 43-46.

[47] Al-Zuhrī explains that the people of Zafun are Muslims. This contributes to the discussion of Muslims who protected Jews in exile/captivity. Ibid. 99.

[48] Ibid.

[49] The Nile is often confused with the Niger in the writings of al-Idrīsī (Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 105) as well as the mistaken distinction in the works of al-Bakrī (Levtzion and Spaulding, *Medieval,* 2003: 10). This geographical mistake is made by other Arab writers from the same and subsequent centuries.

[50] Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 450.

[51] Endre Stiansen and Jane I. Guyer, *Credit, Currencies and Culture: African Financial Institutions in Historical Perspective*, (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet: 1999), p. 88 would argue it is Dia. With Hopkins and Levtzion suggesting it is Zafunu. Regardless, Dia would become a center in the Diafunu province.

Judaica in their possession, such as the holy text of the Torah. It also important to note that it is distinguished that they read the Torah, not the Qu'ran, or preceding Christianity in the region, the Bible.[52] Further, al-Zuhrī recorded a peculiarity of this population in their use of a "magic stone" that is "shaped like a human being."[53] This, too, could seemingly be an object of Judaica. Perhaps, these stone figures are representative of *golems*, which are used in Jewish mysticism, more popular in Andalusia in the medieval period.[54] Or, it could simply signify the use of various stones and/or amulets in Judaism. Additionally, the use of stone could convey the access Jews had to stone fashioning, implying similar work in masonry as al-Bakrī observed in Sijilmasa.

Interestingly, Tindirma falls in between Diafunu and Gao, and is along the Niger. Tindirma is mentioned in the *Taʾrīkh al-Fattāsh* reporting from the end of the 15th century and is noted for the impressive wells built by Jews, who had lived in the area previously.[55]If, Al-Zuhrī is referencing Tindirma then the access to stone would align. Further, what is known about the wells in Tindirma and the Jewish population that had lived there, per the *Taʾrīkh al-Fattāsh*, comes from a local interlocutor who claimed that his information came from "an old slave…who was the last survivor among the Jewish people."[56] This alone, provides detail as to why Jews

[52] This is important as contemporary scholars believe that Christian ethnographers from the colonial period confused Islamic practices, liturgy, and text with Hebraic and Jewish customs…therein contributing to the notion that present-day Jewish communities emerged from colonial logic and/or "Old Testamentism." This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. On this concept, see Devir, 2017.

[53] Al-Zuhrī, *in* Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 100.

[54] M. T. Krause, "Introduction: "Bereshit bara Elohim": A Survey of the Genesis and Evolution of the Golem," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 7, no. 2/3, Special Issue on the Golem (1995), 113–136. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/43308236.

[55] Maḥmūd Kutī ibn Mutawakkil Kutī Timbuktī, Christopher Wise, and Hala Abu Taleb, *Taʾrīkh al-Fattāsh*: *The Timbuktu Chronicles, 1493-1599: English Translation of the Original Works in Arabic by Al Hajj Mahmud Kati*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011), 119-121.

[56] Ibid.*,* 122-23.

may have not been accounted for in the histories and chronicles of the *bilād al-sūdān*. We know from al-Bakrī that Jews had the lowliest of professions, and what can be gleaned from the *Taʾrīkh al-Fattāsh*, were slaves: marginalized populations that would not catch the attention of historians at the time. Although Al-Zuhrī's account does not provide expansive detail, nor do Hopkins and Levtzion contextualize these observations in their compendium, these mentions are historically momentous as it challenges Goitein's, among others, conclusion regarding Sijilmasa being the southernmost point of Jewish presence and habitation. And, unlike the sources that will be investigated in Chapter Two, this record implies a confession of religious belonging, versus a narrative of understanding of what rituals are being witnessed.

Although brief, the information relayed by the custodian of Tindirma's past in the *Taʾrīkh al-Fattāsh* sheds light on the role of interlocutor that Jews may have held. Idrissa Bâ and Charles de la Roncière both note that in addition to written text, other documents such as maps can inform about the occupation, presence, and travels of practitioners of Judaism. They suggest that the level of detail both regarding terrain and the additional contribution of political climates available on Jewish produced maps (Abraham Cresques' 1375 Catalan map) would indicate an understanding of the landscape beyond what was available on Muslim-produced cartography.[57] Furthermore, in the appendix of John Hunwick's translation of the *Ta'rīkh Al-Sūdān (or History of the Sudan),* he notes that two Jews were informants to the of Goa: Alfonso de Albuquerque (end of 15th, 1453-1516) who informed him of the caravan patterns and pilgrimage of the Askia Muhammad, who in turn was pivotal in the treatment of Jews and the subsequent

[57] Bâ, *Sur les traces*; de la Roncière, *La decouverte*.

"disappearance" of their communities in the first years of the 16th century.[58] This provides further evidence that Jews may have been critical in gathering and relaying information about the geographical and political climate, from within the interior. This argument counters other written sources where scholars such as Nahum Slouschz, Aomar Boum, S. D. Goitein, Raymond Mauny and H. Z. Hirschberg (1963)[59] who have concluded that Jewish populations, or at least Jewish communities of any significance, did not exist south of the Sahara and thus most likely, in discussion of map production, relied on Muslim maps and information**.**

The record in the 13th century is rather quiet, with mostly replications of al-Idrīsī's text cited by Ibn Sa'īd, of Jews living in Lamlam (in the old empire of Ghana). In 1154, al-Idrīsī composed an even more-detailed account of Jews. The preface to al-Idrīsī's account in the smaller collection of Arabic sources edited by Levtzion and Spaulding simply notes that there are Jews living in the area known as Lamlam, in the old empire of Ghana. In this text, the living conditions of Jews are more hostile. Al-Idrīsī writes, "(t)he people of Barisa, Sila, and Ghana make forays into the land of Lamlam and capture its inhabitants."[60] Similarly, al-Idrīsī's discussion of Jews in Qamnuriya and Ajdabiya, in present-day Algeria, further documents the hostility against Jews in the twelfth century. According to al-Idrīsī, Jews in Qamnuriya were people on the run who had sought "protection of their neighbours and hid themselves under their wings."[61] Al-Idrīsī imparts only a few remained and struggled to survive, writing "(t)heir

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[58] 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Abd Allāh Sa'dī, and John O. Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire Al-Sa'dī's Ta'rīkh Al-Sūdān Down to 1613, and Other Contemporary Documents*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 335.

[59] H. Z. Hirschberg, "The Problem of the Judaized Berbers," *Journal of African History* 4, no. 3 (1963): 313-339.

[60] Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 108. Ibn Sa'īd, writing in the 13th century replicates the notion of Jews living in Lamlam. The editors make note that Ibn Sa'īd heavily relied on the works of al-Idrīsī and may be the reason no new information is provided, Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 181-85.

[61] Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 117.

conditions are harsh, and they toil for their livelihood in a state of poverty, wandering over the land, spending their days in peace for a time because of the suspension of hostilities with their neighbours."[62] Ultimately, al-Idrīsī's account further locates Jews in Northwest Africa in the late medieval period but also describes their unstable conditions and lack of resources. Although protection is offered by their neighbors, the stability of Jews is not secured.

By the 14th century, Tamantit, in the Tuwati region of the Sahara, was increasing in population suggesting that during the13th century migration to the area was becoming more prominent or more visible, than when Kahina had been rumored to be an inhabitant there. A century later, the "Jerusalem of the West" captured the attention of radical Islamist preacher Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim Al-Maghīlī, largely due to the rumor that it was Jews from the region who murdered his son. Al-Maghīlī became fixated on reducing Jews in the *umma* to live in "humiliation and abasement" and campaigned for Jewish elimination, via threat of life and bribery. Al-Maghīlī had to take a strong tone due to the long-standing relations Jews and Muslims had in the region. According to the *Replies,* the synagogue there had, "existed since unknown antiquity [and] no one had previously objected to its existence it must be presumed that its establishment had been sanctioned by early Muslims with who the Jews entered into a pact."[63] Alone, this description implies a level of protection afforded to Jews who were able to preserve their holy place for centuries, without contention from the Muslim majority. Al-Asnuni, the *qāḍī* of Tuwat, had agreed that the synagogue should remain which infuriated Al-Maghīlī, leading

[62] Ibid. Al-Idrīsī also mentions Jews in Lamlam (Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 108), as does Ibn Sa'īd in the 13th century. Also, there is mention of Jews in Ajdabiya, in what is now present-day Libya (Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus,* 2000: 129).

[63] Al-Maghīlī, and Hunwick, *Sharī'a in Songhay,* 1985*:* 36; See also, Hunwick, "Al-Mahîlî and the Jews of Tuwât," 1985.

him to tell Muslims to "rise up and kill the Jews and to enslave their women and children and to destroy their synagogues."[64] Hunwick continues, "Muslims who come to their defence—indeed, those who reject Al-Maghīlī's views—are to be considered infidels and likewise killed."[65] This call to action was disastrous for the Jewish communities in Tuwat, and arguably for other Jewish communities in the Sahara at the end of the fourteenth century.[66] Ultimately, the synagogue in Tamantit was destroyed, the population reduced, and Tuwati merchants across the Sahara and into the Songhai were hunted down as possible conspirators.[67] Hunwick concluded that "the synagogue was certainly destroyed and *many* Jews were put to death."[68] And, the Jews of Tuwat "fled to other oases" with those remaining behind converting.[69]

From the 15th century and into the 16th century, due to the hostility Jews faced in response to Al-Maghīlī's antics throughout the Western Peninusla of Africa, more is known of Jewish anxieties. His message against Jews also carried to the south of the Sahara (where he travelled) resulting in a fair amount of controversy and ultimately the *qadi* of Timbuktu placing a ban on Jewish trade rather than playing into the more violent demands of Al-Maghīlī.[70] Much can be and should be unpacked regarding Al-Maghīlī in the Songhai. Hunwick, Blum, and Fisher

[64] Al-Maghīlī, and Hunwick, *Sharī'a in Songhay,* 1985:37.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Hunwick*, Jews of a Saharan Oasis*, 2006.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Al-Maghīlī, and Hunwick, *Sharī'a in Songhay,* 1985: 38. Italics added for emphasis.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Al-Maghīlī, and Hunwick, *Sharī'a in Songhay,* 1985*;* Hunwick*, Jews of a Saharan Oasis,* 2006; and Charlotte Blum and Humphrey Fisher, "Love for Three Oranges, or, the Askiya's Dilemma: The Askiya, Al-Maghīlī and Timbuktu, c. 1500 A.D., *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 1 (1993): 79-81.

all conclude that Jews most likely were not in the Songhai region relying on Ibn 'Askar's 1577 account of Jews being prohibited in the Songhai region. However, Al-Maghīlī was communicating with the Askia Muhammad, at the end of the 15th century with Ibn 'Askar's account capturing moreso the result of these policies than the reality of Jewish presence at the time of Al-Maghīlī. This being taken into account for a multitude of reasons. Scholars Charlotte Blum and Humphrey Fisher best examine the dissension amongst Muslim leaders in regards to the treatment of the Jewish communities they were living amidst. In the article, the policies of Askia Muhammad and the influence of Al-Maghīlī showcases this tension between Al-Maghīlī's hardline tactics against the Jews and the Askia's hesitation to implement such harsh policies. Most significant is Blum and Fisher's awareness of the overall tension in the Muslim world about how to behave towards their Jewish counterparts. The authors essentially place Askia Muhammad as a powerless pawn between the anti-Semitic tactics of Al-Maghīlī and the more tolerant policies of the *qāḍī* of Timbuktu, Mahmud b. 'Umar Aqit.[71] However, the authors recognize the Askia did not hope to extend his power past his own territory to satisfy Al-Maghīlī's violent aims. It is the *qāḍī* of Timbuktu who intervened in the implementation of Al-Maghīlī's policies and restricted the persecutions from continuing,[72] just like the *qāḍī* of Tuwat had been able to implement some measures of protection. Blum and Fisher write, "the *askiya*, at Al-Maghīlī's bidding, brings in anti-Jewish measures. The *qāḍī* of Timbuktu countermands these, and the *askiya* falls into line. Al-Maghīlī leaves in a huff."[73] This intervention by the *qāḍī*

[71] Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels, *The History of Islam in Africa*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 427. The *Ta'rīkh Al-Sūdān* describes the *qadi* of Timbuktu in great detail. He is described as having "perfect judgement" and "feared the censure of no man over what concerned God." Al-Sa'dī, and Hunwick, *Ta'rīkh Al-Sūdān,* 2003: 53-55.

[72] Blum and Fisher.

[73] Ibid., 87.

of Timbuktu represents the dissidence in Muslim lands on how to treat the Jews. Thus, the lack of homogeneity in the treatment of Jews is not only seen by Muslims who live and work alongside their Jewish neighbors but also seen at the highest level of Muslim leadership. This demonstrates the inconsistency of treatment towards Jews and raises new questions in determining the historical absence of Jewish populations after these watershed moments.

For Blum and Fisher, the Jewish Question "tipped the scales" regarding the animosity between Al-Maghīlī and the leaders in the Songhai. But why? If Jews were not in the region, as many lean on due to Ibn 'Askar's account why was there pushback? Interestingly, Blum and Fisher acknowledge in a footnote the absence of Jews in Gao cannot confirm the absence of Jews elsewhere in the Songhai.[74] While, Malian historian Ismael Diadié Haïdara claims that many Malians are descendants of those who fled the persecutions of Tuwat, after the community's destruction, and relocated to Gao in northern Mali.[75] Relying on the *Replies*, it is evident the persecutions were a "deterrent" but the question still remains if trade by Jews completely froze. With the evidence of Muslim resistance to Al-Maghīlī's strong prejudice against Jews, was the official ban indicative of actual treatment on the ground? Or, was a confiscation of goods, if caught, a way to placate Muslim alliances while quietly being cognizant of silent barter systems made use of in the Ghana Empire[76] by Mande traders prevalent from Sijilmasa[77] to Gambia?[78]

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[74] Blum and Fisher 81.

[75] Bruder, *The Black Jews of Africa*, 2008: 137.

[76] Robert O. Collins, *Western African History: African History in Documents*, (New York: M. Wiener, 1997), 6.

[77] Messier and Miller, 14-15. The authors describe silent barter at the riverside near Timbuktu with gold from regions unknown (Akan), to Timbuktu, to Sijilmasa.

[78] Duarte Pacheco Pereira and George H. T. Kimble. *Esmeraldo De Situ Orbis*, (London: Routledge, 2016).

After the rise of Al-Maghīlī, the record in the interior goes fairly quiet. This, in part perhaps, by lack of interest in historians making notations of populations who are to remain in "humiliation in abasement" and perhaps also due to any Jewish survivors converting and concealing their identity from the public gaze. Per Haïdara, these Jewish families converted to Islam, as they "had to choose between the sword and the Qur'an."[79] This would imply death, flight, or conversion. Perhaps, those without much means were kept on as city masons, custodians, and/or slaves. Leo Africanus reported that Askia forbade Jews to live in Timbuktu, and as Hunwick deduced, "implying that hitherto they had done so."[80] But the implication, per Haïdara, has epigraphic evidence that Jews once, indeed, lived in the area. Haïdara indicates that there are a few Jewish cemeteries in the region, a few on the Niger Bend, and some near Timbuktu. However, Haïdara understands that despite these remnants, Jewish history here is mostly unknown, and the remaining vestiges are hardly visible. In describing the cemetery of Timbuktu, Haïdara writes, "The cemetery of the Jews in Timbuktu is today a simple dune covered in shrubs, without epitaphs. This is the lost domain of some forgotten deaths in history."[81]

Part of the silence was possibly a result of change one's surname to avoid recognition. Changes in cognomens are evident in Abraham Laredo's onomastic inventory of Jewish surnames of Morocco. Laredo documented thousands of families who were present in Morocco across multiple centuries pre and post dating the 1492 expulsion from Spain. Included among the list, with only five persons identified possessing the surname of "Cota," was a Spanish poet

[79] Haïdara, 29. My translation. Original: "devaient choisir entre l'épée et le Coran."

[80] Al-Maghīlī, and Hunwick, *Sharī'a in Songhay,* 1985: 33.

[81] Haïdara*,* 51.

named Rodrigo de Cota. Although not much detail is provided, his registry does indicate that the poet was recorded on the "liste des juifs secrets" and seemingly disappeared from the Spanish record at the end of the 15th century. Laredo's account provides evidence of Cotas in Morocco in the 13th through 15th centuries.[82]

Haïdara's account of Jewish persons trading across the Sahara and specifically in Timbuktu potentially connects and evidences the expanse of the Moroccan Cota's mobility to communities and persons active south of the Sahara. Haïdara's study of Jewish presence in Mali argues the cognomens of Cota, Kûhîn, and Abana are modifications of known Jewish family names.[83] Haïdara argues Jews arrived in Timbuktu via Morocco due to persecutions in Iberia as well as Jewish involvement in the trans-Saharan trade. Dating the presence of Jews on the *liste des juifs secrets* back to 1497 from Spain, four of the five Cota's documented by Laredo would corroborate Haïdara's theory of movement to Morocco prompted by the Inquisition. Haïdara noted the Cota, written as Kati, Koti, or Cota adopted the last name of *Wâkorey* (along with the Abana) and the Kûhîn, also written as Cohen, adopting the surname of *Arma.* The adoption of the surname "Arma" is intriguing but may also be influenced by Moriscos who fought in the Timbuktu region and were known as *arma*, or "sharpshooters."[84] Coincidentally, the present day Jewish community in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana have the surname "Armah" and suggest that they came from Mali in their oral narrative, which will be discussed in more detail in chapters 3 and

[82] Abraham Isaac Laredo, *Les noms des Juifs du Maroc: essai d'onomastique judéo-marocaine* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (Instituto "B. Arias Montano, 1978), 1059.

[83] Haïdara, 22-44.

[84] Michel Abitbol, *Tombouctou et les Arma de la conquête marocaine du Soudan nigérien en 1591 à l'hégémonie de l'empire peul du Macina en 1833* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1979).

4.[85] Authors Briggs and Guède observed in their study of the Ghardaia Jews of Algeria "…another trait characteristic of Saharan as well as other Jews, the not uncommon practice of changing family names in response to stress of one sort or another."[86] While hanging names is an indicator of physical stress, from a hostile environment, it is also an act of concealment.

While Al-Maghīlī may have been a thorn in the side of local rulers, causing him to be banished from Fez, to Songhai, and ultimately causing trouble in Niger, records from the interior diminish after his stirring of the pot.[87] Around the same time of the uproar in Songhay, a small mention of an early 16th century Jewish community in Walata, an epicenter for the gold trade, is mentioned by writer and publisher Valentim Fernandes.[88] A resumption of Jewish trade to Timbuktu in the 19th century brought about by Mardochèe Aby Serour, who claimed descent from previous Timbuktu Jewish traders was short-lived. Ultimately, identifiable Jewish activity in the interior seems to have come to a stand still.[89]

European Expansion Along the Coast

In the meantime, Jews were active along the coast of Western Africa via a different wave of migration. Through the study of crypto-Jews, lançados, *conversos*, and/or New Christians in the

[85] Armah is also a common surname of the Ga in southeastern Ghana who similarly claim, due to ritual, a Jewish past. The Ga, however, assert they are one of the Lost Tribes. See Joseph Nii Abekar Mensah, *Traditions and Customs of Gadangmes of Ghana: Descendants of Authentic Biblical Hebrew Israelites*, (Houston: Strategic Books Publishing, 2013).

[86] Lloyd Cabot Briggs and Norina Lami Guède, *No More for Ever: A Saharan Jewish Town. With Appendices on Physical Anthropology, Demography and Social Structure* (Cambridge: The Museum, 1964), 21.

[87] Al-Maghīlī, and Hunwick, *Sharī'a in Songhay,* 1985.

[88] Valentim Fernandes, and Pierre de Cenival. *Description de la côte d'Afrique de Ceuta au Sénégal (1506-1507)*. Paris: Libr. Larose, 1938, 85.

[89] Haïdara, 1999 *;* Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*, 2009; Jacob Oliel, *Mardochée Aby Serour, 1826-1886: rabbin, caravanier, guide au Sahara*, (Montréal: Éditions Élysée, 2010).

15th-17th centuries, Jewish presence can further be documented along the West African coastline. Like the pogroms in the Songhai, the oppressive climate generated by the expulsion of Jews and forced conversions in late 15th century Spain and Portugal seemingly quelled the expression of the Jewish faith identity in the public sphere. However, these designators of a conversion spectrum (from crypto to new) has indicated for Sephardim that oppression and forced conversions did not fully suppress a Jewish identity. Yet, the volatile status of being a Jew during this era both in Europe and in North Africa contributed to the silenced voices of these persons and the concealing of a Jewish identity. I argue that what seems like an absence of a population, is rather cloaked in terms that camouflage their existence. Due to the visible adoption, or more so profession, of other faiths, it is difficult to measure how many Sephardim maintained their Judaism in the private sphere.

In his article "The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492," Henry Kamen suggests that the number of Jews who left Spain was in fact quite few, especially compared to other estimations. His argument is based on the attempt to quantify the actual number of Jews, through tax documentation,[90] and persons in which documents record emigration and a later return to Spain. His geographical focus is largely situated in Europe, and highlights persons who oscillate between Spain, Portugal, and other southern European countries. His shortcoming is his failure to critically analyze the state of Portuguese Jews and their subsequent expulsion, as its impact also affected Spanish refugees who had fled there a few years before. Furthermore, eliding Jewish activity in and emigration to Africa is a weakness due

[90] Henry Kamen, "The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492," Past & Present, No. 119, 1988, pp. 30-55. Kamen highlights the *cabeza de pecho* and the *aljama* tax (34).

to its geographical proximity and its economic ties to the crown,[91] along with records that indicate that Jewish persons were already acting on behalf of the crown in the imperial territories (another blindspot). Thus, Kamen is seemingly interested in tracking the number of Jews who were physically present in Spain in the few years surrounding the 1492 decree. In fact, he argues that Jews who left Spain for Portugal, merely returned once Judaism became illegal in Portugal. This migration pattern is simply too limited as Kamen does not fully acknowledge the extent of migration of Jews (Portuguese and Spanish refugees) in Africa.[92] Also, there is an assumption that converted Jews were no longer Jews and thus not necessary to tally as he suggests the Spanish crown preferred conversion.[93] This preferential goal implies that after conversion, New Christians could escape the discriminatory eye, which we will see later is not the case. In his essay, "The *Converso* Phenomenon and the Issue of Spanish Identity," Kevin Ingram goes as far as to suggest that very few conversions were genuine, as many New Christians or *judeoconversos* continued practicing their Jewish faith in private.[94] As we will see this concealed practice happened beyond the boundaries of the Iberian Peninsula.

In 1496, inspired by Spain's edict of 1492, Portugal gave Jewish persons two options: convert via baptism or emigrate.[95] Similar to the ultimatum "between the sword and the Qur'an" from the early 16th century,[96] and the climate in Spain mostly unfavorable, Jews sought a safe

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[91] Ibid., 39.

[92] Ibid., 39-42. Kamen gives Africa a nod, by suggesting a "possible" migration.

[93] Ibid., 37.

[94] Kevin Ingram, "The *Converso* Phenomenon," 2012: 15.

[95] Hull, 151.

[96] Haïdara, 29.

haven. However, prior to this expulsion, Jews were already living in the imperial territories, including regions of Morocco and Senegambia, and especially in Atlantic port cities where trade flourished much like the Saharan counterparts centuries prior. There exists record of Portuguese subjects in Asfi, Morocco in the early 16th century,[97] where letters on behalf of King Dom Manuel assured Jews living there of safety and protection despite the pogroms and forced conversions occurring on the Iberian Peninsula. A letter dated in 1509 states:

> Dom Manuel etc. to whomever my letter shall come: We make it known by this present letter that, having in mind what is necessary for our service and for the welfare and prosperity of the affairs of our city of Safi, it pleases us to grant to the Jews who now live and reside in our city, and who in future will live and reside there, that at no time will we order them to be expelled, nor in any manner will they be expelled from the said city contrary to their will, nor will we order them to become Christian by force or by any other means against their will.[98]

This letter goes on to explain that should ever an expulsion take place, residents will be given a two-year advanced warning. The purpose for this toleration was in order to keep peace amongst the largely Jewish merchant class in Asfi (Safi, the Latinized iteration) and to sustain the trade industry.[99] Kamen indicates that a large number of Jews in Girona were affiliated with the textile industry and due to production needs were granted greater toleration.[100] Coincidentally, Asfi was also known for its large Jewish community of textile merchants from Portugal.[101] Without further investigation into the tax records and family names associated with textile production, it is

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[97] Emily Gottriech discusses how Jews in the Saharan ports, including Sijilmasa, would migrate to coastal ports, such as Asfi/Safi in the 19th century for trade. See Emily R. Gottreich, *Jewish Space in the Morroccan City: A History of the Mellah of Marrakech, 1550-1930* (PhD diss: Harvard University. 1999).

[98] Malyn Newitt (trans.), *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415-1670: A Documentary History,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 36.

[99] Ibid., 35-36.

[100] Kamen, 36.

[101] Newitt, 35-36.

difficult to know if the two are connected and if any families from Girona ended up in Asfi. However, it is important to note that Kamen argues that many Jews in Portugal returned to Spain after the edict in Portugal in 1496, claiming that some reports state even half of the population returned in some areas.[102] Yet, when Portugal issued its mandate it is plausible that Jewish refugees originally from Spain migrated with their Portuguese co-religionists to Portuguese territories as the edict of Spain had only occurred four years prior and Spain's volatile culture had not evaporated.

Beyond the terms New Christians, *conversos*, and crypto-Jews that are commonly associated with a concealed Jewish identity, is the Portuguese term *lançados*, or the thrown out ones. Kamen's focus on Jewish emigrants, exiled from Spain, remains too narrow when considering the multiple terms that could be analyzed to capture Jewish identity. Thus, it is necessary to reiterate the importance of investigating the Portuguese's Jewish population as Spanish Jews sought refugee in the neighboring kingdom. In *The Black Jews of Africa*, Edith Bruder analyzes the role of the *lançado* in the Portuguese empire and the support they received to engage in trade off the West African coastline. These populations, largely made up of exiled Jews but also Portuguese criminals, were banished to the imperial territories. Removed due to the climate of the Inquisition, Jews were able to set up successful trading networks, especially through connection with their co-religionists in trans-Saharan Africa, and seemingly practice their faith with more freedom in the African locales. However, their success in the trade and ability to move about was tethered to their faith concealment, through the use of labels that did not identify them as Jewish persons and by hiding their religious customs.

[102] Kamen, 42-43.

Portuguese Jews who had fled the Inquisition for Senegambia, in the 17th century, is but one example. Many *crypto-Jews* came to the area to seek a more secure home where their religious activities would not be supervised as closely. Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta analyzed numerous Portuguese manuscripts and determined that Jews, who openly professed their religion, were living in the region during the beginning years of the 17th century.[103] There was also a large presence of Dutch Jews engaging in trade on the Petit Côte with previous relations to the Portuguese Jewry who had fled to Amsterdam. Others, after years of secretly practicing their faith, went to Holland to become "publicly recognized Jews" after participating in various rituals to confirm their adherence to the faith.[104] These Dutch merchants utilized their common bond with their Portuguese Jewish brethren by establishing strong trade relations[105] and soon inhabited different ports in Senegambia, notably Porto de Ale and Joal.[106] Over time, the Jews felt progressively more protected and thus did not shy away from asserting their faith and taking on Hebrew names. However, due to fear of the Inquisition, Mark and da Silva Horta also recognize that Jews were clandestine in their religious activities where many remained secret in their faith. The synagogue in Joal was camouflaged as part of a housing complex with a protective corridor linking the synagogue to the home of a local citizen.[107]

It is not unreasonable to ascertain that Portuguese immigrants would have affected local practices through their encounter. Perhaps most convincing is Mark and da Silva Horta's study,

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[103] Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, "Two Early Seventeenth-Century Sephardic Communities on Senegal's Petite Côte," *History in Africa* 31 (2004), 231-256: 232.

[104] Ibid., 234-35, 241-242, 245.

[105] Ibid., 244.

[106] Ibid., 234.

[107] Ibid., 247-48.

which analyzed the lengths Jews went to in order to conceal their faith identity, including the camouflaged synagogue in a housing complex mentioned above. Interestingly, Mark and da Silva Horta correctly suppose that Jewish men trading in the region liaised with local women who bore their children, and wrote to rabbinical leadership in Amsterdam about their Jewishness. Boyarin and Boyarin discuss Black Jews, and racism evolving in the Netherlands due the encounter with scientific racism and Black Jews in their community —Black Jews who came from the African coast where Dutch were engaged in the slave trade and commodities from the 17th century. It is unclear whether the children of these Sephardi Jews were raised in the Jewish faith and if they were recognized by other Jews (as Jewish descent is matrilinealy based).[108] However, it is not far-fetched that the children would have observed their father's religious practices in the private sphere of the home and even mimicked them especially with discussions of Black Jews evident in Amsterdam.[109] For the Portuguese, *cassare* or the establishing of an alliance, or marriage, between European an Africans was regarded as a clever "life insurance" plan. Lief Svalesen stated "African women took good care of their white husbands and with a safety net of local family connections the white men who 'cassarerte' were better off socially and mentally than the rest. A wife obtained cheaper food, and her white husband had a much safer life in this alien land…the woman did her best to keep her husband alive; if he died mysteriously, she could risk being charged with poisoning him."[110]

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[108] Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry.* 19, no. 4 (1993): 693-725; 252-55.

[109] Mark and da Silva Horta, *The Forgotten Diaspora,* 2011: 61-74. See also: Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance,* 2008: 33-43. Holsey describes the variation in relationships between European men and local Ghanaian women and their family relations.

[110] Leif Svalesen, *The Slave Ship Fredensborg*, Trans. Pat Shaw and Selena Winsnes, (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2001), 96-97.

As will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, colonial ethnographers and travel writings made several notes of Jewish practices of indigenes in areas influenced by Islam and outside of Islamic domains in the 18th through 20th centuries. And while these observations may have been understood through a religious framework known to colonialists, it is also a possible reflection of imperial anxieties of crypto-Jews who did not abandon Jewish practices upon conversion. Capturing this angst is a 1632 letter addressed to a Catholic Cardinal, which discussed the legacy of New Christians in the Portuguese settlements in West Africa. What may be connected to a larger discussion of religious homogeneity that was introduced with Universalist ideology[111] or the racialized reasoning of the Hamitic hypothesis[112] was described by the Portuguese author writing on practices he witnessed in São Tomé, off the West African coast, as Jewish customs. This description may not be due to the trend of equating indigenous customs to a lost tribe for millenarian or universalist beliefs, but rather from the knowledge of a prevalent New Christian population. The disparaging tone of the letter indicates a prejudice against Jews/New Christians and not a romanticized view that is evident in other travelogues and diaries in the 18th through 20th centuries. The letter states:

> The canon says that the island is so infested with New Christians that Jewish practices are carried on almost openly. They have poisoned the bishops and governors who try to punish them. It is requested that New Christians should no longer receive benefices and canonries and that the capitular vicar, who they say is of that race and one of those principally guilty of the poisoning, should be removed from his office.[113]

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[111] Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 108. See also, Robert C. Bartlett, **"**On the Politics of Faith and Reason: The Project of Enlightenment in Pierre Bayle and Montesquieu**,"** The Journal of Politics, Vol. 63, No. 1, 2001, 101-22.

[112] Parfitt, *Black Jews,* 2013: 24-35.

[113] Newitt, 66.

First, this letter confirms a New Christian population as far as São Tomé, a Portuguese territory. Second, we see the mark of New Christian as inferior and untrustworthy with anxieties about the authenticity of a conversion. Antisemitic accusations reminiscent of defamatory accusations of Jews poisoning Christians and vandalizing the holy eucharist mark a hostility towards Jews still present in the mid 17th century that would lend itself to Jews, such as those living in Joal, Senegambia, to continually conceal their Jewish identity.[114]

In the early twentieth century, Jews continued to be *personae non gratae* within Europe and antisemitism was escalating while being entrenched by Nazi ideology and policy — whose influence spread north from Germany to Northern Europe and south to North Africa, with Vichy France impacting local governance giving local Beys some flexibility to protect, or rather turn a blind eye, to their Jewish populations.[115] As antisemitic policies and harassment continued to ramp up in mainland Europe, the world stood by, with many nations not acting upon concern about ideological differences regarding Aryanism that made victim of European Jewry, Blacks, homosexuals, and others; yet, it was a response to Hitler's uncouth advance of territory, with the invasion of Poland in 1939 being the last straw before Britain and France declared war.

West Africa, perhaps seen as worlds away from the atrocities on the European front, was not excluded from the Jewish gaze when seeking an escape, a refuge, a cloak of protection. Letters from Jewish men to the colonial authorities in the British Gold Coast pleaded for a safe haven.[116] Most were denied as the Gold Coast colony felt they could not trust refugees to be friendly, and not enemy, aliens who may don a refugee identity to slip in the borders and then

[114] Kevin Ingram, *The Conversos and Moriscos in Late Medieval Spain and Beyond*, vol. 2, Converso and Morisco Studies. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 3-4.

[115] Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *The Holocaust and North Africa*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2019).

[116] Multiple files from the CSO 15 and 26 series, PRAAD.

attempt to gain territory for the Nazi Regime. Colonial territories were requested to follow the same protocol as that in the UK regarding enemy aliens, or those perceived to be, which included internment until their identities and circumstances (including being able to self-finance) were better understood. Throughout the colonies, the Jewish Question was articulated as "the question of the settlement of refugees" as most Western nations did not want an increased Jewish refugee population. Per a letter from Malcolm MacDonald, then Secretary of State for the Colonies and who would in 1939 draft the MacDonald White Paper introducing a Jewish state in British Mandate Palestine, the colonial government should consider the plight of the refugees who had "professional and technical qualifications of a high order" as such skills "might well prove useful and valuable additions to the community." Considerations were made only if these skilled refugees "bona fides is clearly established and who are in possession of sufficient funds to ensure against the risk of their becoming a charge upon the revenues of the territory."[117] Vouching for one's reputation was often facilitated through an ad placed in *The*

Figure 1 Ad placed by Herbert Bein, a German Jewish trader with the United Africa Co. Ltd., requesting objections to his naturalization in The African Morning Post 27 Dec. 1939—an indicator of his intention to apply for such.

[117] PRAAD CSO 15/1/123. Letter dated 23 October 1939.

African Morning Post, or another local newspaper, where citizens could write in should requests to remain and/or be naturalized were contested (*Figure 1*). Herbert Bein, a German Jewish refugee who worked for the United African Company Ltd. was approved on his second application, having already worked in the Gold Coast for 27 months. He later sought refuge in the UK and South Africa due to failing health, but was denied.[118]

Some Jews, for instance, 35 year old Hans Karl Loeb who had escaped Buchenwald, was able to slip into the Gold Coast in May 1939 by joining his brother who was already working north of Accra for Bartholomew and Co. Hans was able to gain work, but not for long. Due to the outbreak of the war, the colonial state interned both him and his brother Walter in Kumasi.[119] Identifying German "refugees" and their allegiance to the crown became a fixation of the colonial state. Part of the naturalization process, and status as a "friendly" alien was to authenticate one's good standing in the colony by running an ad inviting public objection to the application, such as seen with Herbert Bein.[120] For the Loeb brothers, internment resulted in the loss of their jobs. With that, the colonial state feared having to support, financially, the refugees and began passing paperwork to emigrate them elsewhere. The file ends with Hans finding work at the Konogo Gold Mine, just east of Kumasi.[121]

Others, such as Ernest Weihs, a trilinguial shoemaker from the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Monraivia requested entry but was denied. Colonial Secretary Northcroft responded a swift two weeks after Mr. Weihs 10 July 1939 dated letter stating "no person other

[118] PRAAD CSO 26/4/161.

[119] PRAAD CSO 15/1/131.

[120] PRAAD CSO 26/4/161, in addition to multiple other files in the CSO 15 and 26 series.

[121] PRAAD, CSO 15/1/131.

than a native of West Africa is allowed to enter the Colony, unless he can shew to the satisfaction of the Immigration Officer either that he is in possession of substantial funds or that he can obtain a guarantee from a prospective employer…As it appears that you will not be able, advise you that it is not desirable that you should make preparations to settle in the Gold Coast."[122]

Amidst the debate between colonial governors and statesmen back in the UK, the Omanhene from the Central Province, perhaps like medieval African communities in West Africa, considered providing shelter for European Jews by allotting a portion of land for refuge. In a report from the Central Province on May 1, 1939, the plan is detailed by the Commissioner of the Central Province, A. F. E. Fieldgate. Fieldgate reported "The Omanhene…had discussed the question of Jewish immigration with other Chiefs and that they were prepared to offer land for settlement."[123] But, the British administration struck down the idea, stating "The Omanhene should be informed that, while His Excellency greatly appreciates his motive in offering land for occupation by Jewish refugees, a settlement scheme such as that which the Omanhene seems to envisage would be wholly impracticable."[124] Consideration of Jewish refugees did gain quite a bit of attention, and Britain had been debating its response since the Evian Conference held in Evian, France almost a year prior to the Omanhene's idea.[125] Yet,by October 1939, following the

[122] PRAAD, CSO 15/1/130.

[123] PRAAD CSO 15/1/123. Sgd A.F.E. Fieldgate, Commissioner Central Province, 1 May 1939 (No. 1010/ C.P.127/38A).

[124] PRAAD CSO 15/1/123. Sgd G.N.N. Nunn 6 June 1939 (No. 472/38/22).

[125] It was held in Evian, France, from July 6--15, 1938. After Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, Roosevelt called for an international conference to promote the emigration of Austrian and German Jewish refugees and create an international organization whose purpose would be to deal with the general refugee problem. PRAAD CSO 15/1/123.

protocol set out by the Alien Order in the UK was recommended. Beforehand, Malcolm MacDonald was attempting to tally the number of refugees who had entered the colonial empire and its territories. On the 29th of July, Sgt. Arnold Hodson reported zero refugees had entered the Gold Coast in the 6 month period under review, with 675 Germans, Austrians, and Czechoslavakians having entered 5.5 years before the March 1939 inquiry period, all of whom were there mostly due to being missionaries or engaged in commerce. Hodson reported that they were "anti-Nazi" and only three families could be identified as refugees.[126]

Conclusion

Upon the establishment of Israel by the British Mandate in 1948, the young nation rapidly developed and established international networks that would advance its capital and influence. With the rhetoric of mutual aid, Israel created programs, such as Histadrut, a Israeli Trade Union that had global reach during the era of independence, facilitating training for several African countries, including Ghana: with training in agriculture, medicine, construction, shipping, naval and air.[127] With other spheres of influence competing for attention on the continent, Israel's relationship with emerging African nations was at time tenuous.[128] Yet, economically Israel continually invested in trade and export.[129] This chapter sought to provide a millennium of

[126] PRAAD CSO 15/1/123.

[127] Jewish and Israeli relations with Ghana in the independence era will be taken up in Chapter 4.PRAAD RG 17/1/80, Conférence territoriale de l'Union soudanaise: 17-18-19 octobre 1958. Compte rendu du voyage en Israël. Propositions et résolutions autour du Paysannat soudanais, ANS Dakar, Construction and shipping: Israel in the Third World, edited by Michael Curtis, Susan Aurelia Gitelson.

[128] Israel was concerned with Nkrumah's involvement with the U.S.S.R, who supported Arab nations that did not acknowledge Israel as a legitimate state. D.18/64. In 1960, Nkrumah offered Ghana as a neutral meeting space between leaders of Israel and Arab countries to come to an agreement. RG 17/1/49A.

[129] PRAAD RG 3/5/1923.

Jewish presence, from ancient Ghana to the independent nation of Ghana, often living in secret and in duress. By reviewing the existing historiography and noting the volatile conditions Jews operated within, I argue that a new historiography requires the examination of historical methods that would aid the preservation of archives when on the move (embodied archives) and historical transmission that can go unnoticed by oppressive forces.

While Jews lived in secret and concealed their faith identity in the medieval and early modern eras in the West African landscape, hiding ones identity would slowly become less possible by the last quarter of the 20th century up through the 21st, where post-colonial West African histories, oral and textual, would begin to increase the volume regarding Jewish presence in the present, as well as the past. Some amplification came via an uptick of colonial ethnographies observing West African practices, with several notations to those that were akin to Jewish ritual (discussed in Chapter 2). While known Jews were being still a socially marginalized in the metropole, colonialists began contemplating and romanticizing the possibility of lost Jews. Yet, being a Jew, nowhere in the world, seemingly had any political or social advantage. Thus, few early 20th century records, penned from the African perspective, highlight any notion of Judaism.[130] This interest in a mythologized Jewish past, which arguably has a millennium of dialectical, rather than physical, continuities, will be the subject of the next chapter.

[130] Carl Christian Reindorf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 23.

CHAPTER TWO

Creation of a Myth: The Civility Rubric of Racial Science, Lost Tribes, and the Subsequent Obfuscation of a Jewish Past

In 1930, an autobiography of a "Black Jew" was published by Bata Kindai Amgoza ibn Lobagola. The author, who claimed to come from Dahomey,[1] described the customs of his ancestral people whom originated from Nodaghusah, a village approximately a few days walk from Timbuktu.[2] Lobagola's story was popular with western audiences, so much so that reputable publisher Knopf printed his story and paying customers in the United States heard the story of his alleged background and ancestral heritage. In his performance, Lobagola orated extensive roots, mapping a Jewish origin with great detail by relaying that he and his people, "B'nai Ephraim," originally left the holy land after the destruction of the temple where they traversed the African continent north of the Sahel and settled in Morocco, achieved success, and remained there until driven out due to oppression. From Morocco, his ancestors moved south past Timbuktu, described as an arid land where they were unsatisfied to live under the rule of the desert inhabitants already settled there, thus continuing south to an oasis-like land that he claimed was Dahomey. While crossing the Sahara, Lobagola explains that many of his people perished resulting in the few and often overlooked number of Jews in the region.[3] As for

[1] Now, the Republic of Benin.

[2] Bata Kindai Amgoza ibn Lobagola, *Lobagola: an African Savage's Own Story*, (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), 1.

[3] Ibid., 44-46.

customs, he explained his people possessed a Torah written in Aramaic with the text scorched into the pages, which allowed the words to never deteriorate.[4] This text, he claimed, was revered by his people— they and their seven rabbis protected it so that it would not be destroyed. Lobagola informed readers and audiences that his people strictly adhered to the law when he stated, "My people observe the biblical laws to the letter…Our lives are wrapped up in religious observances;" yet, he exoticized how it was done when he stated, "Our people circumcise their boys at the age of eight days, carrying out the rite to the letter, although not in the same way as in Palestine today. Our rabbis permit us to use only our teeth and finger-nails for the observance."[5] He goes on to explain most of the Jewish holidays are kept and honored without knowing their purpose.

Interestingly, this migratory narration mirrors the story of the House of Israel (to be discussed in Chapter 4), as do key rituals he highlights. However, the orator Lobagola embellished his story to cash in on the caricaturized "native savage" coming from the "dark continent" to the United States where there was a paying audience to hear extraordinary stories from Africa.[6] He also may have been playing into the global anti-Semitic rhetoric and derogatory images that were circulating in the 1920s and 1930s.[7] The exoticisms, along with the way in

[4] This Torah, almost identical in description to the one found in the same decade Lobagola's autobiography was published. Interestingly, the Torah was found in the Ondo Forest of Dahomey, south of Timbuktu, precisely where Lobagola alleged was his birthplace. See Ehav Eliyahu, "Migrations of Jews into West Africa," in *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, ed. Avrum M. Ehrlich, Vol. 2, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 453-454.

[5] ibn Lobagola, 43.

[6] Bernth Lindfors, *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 236-39.

[7] Marie Mulvey Roberts, "Nazis, Jews, and Nosferatu," in *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal*, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2018) 129-178.

which he denigrated his people as "savages,"[8] were clearly appealing to the taste of western audiences who consumed the idea of an inferior uncivilized primitive other. The narrative and orations of LoBagola are attune to the rhetoric that pervaded imaginings of Africa and Africans during colonialism and the first part of the twentieth century and veer from the more realistic accounts from African voices and the less ethnocentric colonial ethnographies. Looking further into the life of this "African Jew" revealed it to be a hoax, with Lobagola merely a pseudonym for Joseph Howard Lee, born in Baltimore, Maryland.[9] Lee's story provides a lens to look at the fascination and imaginings of the African other and the Jewish other by the western world, specifically in the first half of the 19th century where eugenics and racial science created hierarchies that primitivized and criminalized Jews and Blacks (specifically seen in Europe by the Third Reich). LoBagola's story also represents a growing fascination by western audiences with Lost Tribe theories. Ultimately, the realization of the embellishments of Lee's story that played into racial hierarchies and the primitive other obscured a migration narrative that mirrors a historical reality (as will be discussed in the next chapter).

The theatrical narrative of LoBagola provides a framework when looking into the creation of a myth of African Jewry—imagined by the western world via racial inferiority and ritual perception. While Chapter 1 highlighted the millennium of geographical presence of Jews that may have contributed to Jewries in NW Africa and perhaps the fictional LoBagola's migration, this chapter will look at how racial hierarchies created dialects of inferiority for non-Aryan populations. It also will consider how colonial logic as illustrated by colonial anxieties (fear of Jewish persons and/or the "other") and colonial imaginings (the lost tribe narrative)

[8] ibn Lobagola, 24-33.

[9] Lindfors, 236-39.

interpreted rituals practiced by "inferior races" such as Jews and Africans based on Euro-colonial perception of taxonomies of people. Ultimately, the chapter argues how the debunking of this logic in western academies has perpetuated the blindspot of African histories and global interactions before the European encounter that has too often determined any present-day Black Jewish community in Africa as a "phenomenon" of a contemporary import of Jewish interest.[10]

Mythology of Racial Science

Curse of Ham

In the 19th and 20th centuries, colonial logic was largely influenced by racial science and hierarchies of superiority. A central argument in Tudor Parfitt's *Black Jews in Africa and the Americas* suggests that origin stories of present-day Jewish communities were introduced via the European encounter that propagated into local discourse their understanding of racial inferiority paired with a theological perception of the Hamitic hypothesis.[11] The "Hamitic myth," predicated on racist ideology that identified peoples with a Black phenotype as descendants of the cursed son of Noah, justified enslavement and colonial intervention. Scholars such as Ephraim Isaac, David Goldenberg, David Aaron, William McKee Evans, and Robert A. Bennett put to rest the notion of the sons of Ham being Black, as they agree that it was the sons of Kush who were black, and the relation of Blackness with Ham or Canaan is not made evident in rabbinical works (save the Babylonian Talmud).[12] Rather the religious texts point to the curse discussing slavery

[10] Brettschneider, *The Jewish Phenomenon,* 2015; Lis, et al, *In the Shadow of Moses*, 2016; Parfitt and Fisher, *Becoming Jewish*, 2016.

[11] Parfitt, *Black Jews,* 2013.

[12] These scholars refute the Hamitic association with Blackness through analysis of scripture by debunking this racial ideology, clarifying it was the sons of Cush that were dark-skinned, not the sons of Ham. See David H. Aaron, "Early Rabbinic Exegesis on Noah's Son Ham and the So-Called "Hamitic Myth," *Journal of the American Academy*

(which has a long history of justifying slavery of Hamites, not to be discussed here). What is important about this, is that when hearing "Black Jew" and knowing the history of the Hamitic myth in the colonial logic, present-day scholars often ignore any such claims as nonsensical, rooted in colonial mythologies. For Parfitt, the Hamitic hypothesis evolved from justifying the enslavement of Black Africans from ill-formed interpretations of rabbinic exegesis (or explicit in the case of the Babylonian Talmud) that equated the Curse of Canaan to Black-skinned persons to incorporating "Hamites," or lighter-skinned Africans into the colonial structure as intermediaries since they were seen as sharing the same spiritual genealogy.[13] Parfitt argued locals took up this ideology as it was advantageous to be a part of the colonial structure by establishing a "Hamitic pedigree."[14] Although I have questioned the extent of this logic being discussed or even adopted by locals, it certainly may have caught on by colonial officials, missionaries, and other Westerners who interacted with local populations. This, could be the reason why some of the earliest ethnographies, written by Europeans, indicate a Hebraic origin to the rituals, including dietary restrictions, Saturday/Sabbath rest, menstrual seclusion, circumcision, etc., they observed.[15]

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of Religion. 63, no. 4, (1995): 721.; Robert A. Bennett, "Africa and the Biblical Period," *The Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 4 (1971): 483-500; William McKee Evans, "From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the "Sons of Ham," *The American Historical Review.* 85, no. 1 (1980): 15-43.; Ephraim Isaac, "Genesis, Judaism, and the 'sons of Ham?," *Slavery & Abolition.* 1, no. 1 (2008): 3-17.

[13] Parfitt, *Black Jews,* 2013.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Colonial ethnographies are discussed below in the section regarding western projections of knowledge on observations of indigenous ritual. See Pierre Bertrand Bouche, *Sept ans en Afrique Occidentale; La Côte des Esclaves et le Dahomey*, (Paris: E. Plon Nourrit, 1885); E. D. Morel, *Affairs of West Africa*, (London: Heinemann, 1902).; John Leighton Wilson, *Western Africa, its History, Condition and Prospects, by Rev. J. Leighton Wilson*, (London: S. Low, son and Co, 1856); and, Williams 1930.

In confronting a mythology predicated on racial science and theological misinterpretation, the notion of a "Black Jew" should not point to Ham but rather Kush, and thus iterations of the Hamitic myth being projected onto the explanations of these communities is reductive, as there is no evidence that this colonial logic was in fact incorporated into oral narratives. Associating Blackness and Judaism with the Hamitic myth is more reflective of Western education, than African production of memory. The other reason that any debate regarding a physical identity to Judaism or to an "authentic" identity is contentious is the path it leads to eugenics. Some scholars have rallied behind DNA testing to prove one's "Jewishness," and others feel it should be required to inhibit those entering and/or claiming the faith.[16] Jewish scholars have noted that although Jewish identity can be interpreted ethnically, it cannot be defined solely as such as many of the key Hebraic figures of Jewish tradition, converted, and thus were not "ethnically" Jewish.[17]

[16] Parfitt, *Black Jews,* 2013.

[17] On Black Jews who had been in the African colonial territories, children of coastal Jews, and racism evolving in the Netherlands due the encounter with scientific racism and Black Jews in the Jewish community, see Boyarin and Boyarin, 693-725; Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009).

The Hamitic hypothesis and racial thinking linked to civility and enlightenment did impact the European perspective of the colonial empire, its agents, and its subjects. When we look at Jews in colonial spaces where racial systems are operating both formally and mostly informally, the violence of empire and racial science becomes visible through the perpetuation of racial hatred, not just in Nazi Germany, but especially in colonized Africa.[18] It is important to note that Jews were not considered Aryan or white—an identity that was further concretized during the Third Reich that privileged and identified as superior white Western races that were, in the 18th and 19th centuries, colonizing much of the non-white world. As Black Studies have detailed, these tropes and caricatures of non-white populations also tended to produce propaganda and ideologies of criminality and animalistic behaviors—with parallels between Jewish and Black/African depictions. Those who are not strangers to WWII propaganda, *Figure 2*[19] *and Figure 3*,[20] generated by the Third Reich will be familiar with these images showcasing Jews and Blacks as not just an "other" but a dangerous

Figure 2 German propaganda art, from a children's book, that illustrates Jews as a dangerous "other."

[18] Gratitude to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the UCLA Alan D. Leve Center for hosting a workshop on "The Holocaust at the Crossroads of Empire" where I was able to develop these thoughts in conjunction with my own research and how imperial logic impacted African Jewries.

[19] *Figure 2.* Philip Ruprecht, *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud auf seinem Eid* ["Don't Trust a Fox in a Green Pasture Or a Jew Upon His Oath"], (Stürmer Verlag, 1936).

[20] *Figure 3.* "Amerikas Wunschtraum - Europas Schicksal," *Fliegende Blätter,* no. 5125 (1943), University of Heidelberg, online collection. https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.6722#0193. [Trans: America's Dream – Europe's Fate].

"other," not desirable in the lands of Aryan populations based on the belief non-Aryans will corrupt and make inferior one's race via intermarriage, etc. (i.e. push for racial cleansing). This can also be seen in imperial France, *Figure 4*,[21] and colonial Africa where relations with Africans were similarly discouraged (although frequent).[22] Ultimately, with the European encounter and the subsequent colonial enterprise, Jews were not seen as white and all the characteristics often affiliated with whiteness (purity, integrity, superiority etc.) are not at all linked to Jews (who are seen as greedy, tricky, communist, criminal) or Africans.

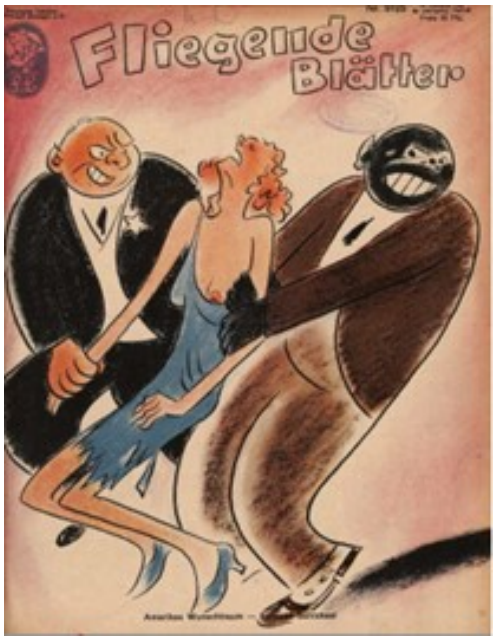

Figure 3 Cover image of German magazine in 1943 warning about the future if embracing an American ideology that flirts with equality of races.

Figure 4 German propaganda poster depicting French use of African soldiers that threaten French women's futures.

These similar beliefs held by Aryan colonialists against Jews and Blacks facilitated an environment of imagining origins that vilified and lessened the achievements of peoples believed to be inferior. Jewish populations understood this and attempted to conceal their Jewishness from empire or distinguish a secular European demeanor, vacant

[21] Figure 4. "La culture française," *Kladderadatsch* no. 25 (June 1940), University of Heidelberg, online collection, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.2320#0300.

[22] Boyarin and Boyarin 1993; Schorsch 2009; and Svalesen, 96-97.

of perceived "primitive" ritual, to gain favor by imperial powers. In other words, parading or asserting a Jewish identity *did not* curry any social currency as Parfitt argued. The next two sections will discuss a racial hierarchy within a ritual (and potentially phenotypical) hierarchy of Jews.

The Jewish Other

Tethering oneself to an Abrahamic religion did prove to be advantageous in the colonial structure, when Muslim or Christian, as these faiths were viewed as more "civilized" being practiced in the West. Scholarship produced at the end of the colonial era and the early independence years does observe a dual religious identity of local practitioners of indigenous religious in either Islam or Christianity.[23] In these testimonies, it is obvious that being seen as a "good Muslim" or "good Christian" was often tethered to notions of good citizenship and loyalty to a colonial entity. Intermediaries, wanting to be seen as a "good Muslim/Christian" often did hold such positions, and through their assertion of their faith in these two Abrahamic traditions, may lead one to conclude that sharing a Abrahamic faith was indeed beneficial. Further, Sandra Greene noted that for the Anlo of eastern Ghana "Christianity…[was] a marker of enlightened civilization. Traditional religious practices were defined as the work of the devil."[24] Textual records produced in the colonial era asserting a Jewish identity by a local, when the Hamitic

[23] Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003; Adeline Marie Masquelier, *Prayer Has Spoiled Everything: Possession, Power, and Identity in an Islamic Town of Niger*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

[24] Greene, "Whispers and Silences," 2003: 45.

myth was vibrant and thus some locals would want to attach themselves to the hegemonic colonial structure, has yet to be discovered.[25]

On the contrary, distancing oneself from Judaism is evident when looking at the lives of Jewish colonialists who were trying to perform a western notion of civility. By the mid 19th century, along the Gulf of Guinea, in the Gold Coast, Wulff Joseph Wulff, a Danish Jew, was keen to the air of anti-Semitism within the Royal Danish Army. Wulff left for Ghana in hopes to quickly advance in the colonial ranks**.** He wrote extensively, via letters to his parents and extended family, about his short time there (battling with sickness and eventually succumbing to it) and conveyed his desire to keep his Jewish identity secret—aware that it would be detrimental to his career goals if it were made known. In a letter dated May 26, 1837, Wulff detailed his fears to his brother-in-law, writing

> Everything is the same here as before, but I am convinced that, in the event of some changes, as first reserve assistant, although entitled to advancement, I would be appointed [only] temporarily to vacancies as they occur, and, on the grounds of my being a Mosaist, [I would be] purposely by-passed and, on top of that, would have to tolerate many insults.[26]

His suspicion proved to be true, when a colleague found out that he was a Jew. Afterwards, he was no longer up for promotions, with junior officers favored to his expertise, and was additionally subject to harassment.[27] Further, his employment was threatened by the February 25, 1838, when a letter to his parents detailed, "..the Board of Trade had decided that I should be sent home because I am a Jew…if I did not make a promise that I would allow myself to be

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[25] While I have not found such a record, I will speak of whispered testimony in Chapter 4. Yet, the whispering intimates a desire to keep secret, not cash in on a "good Jewish" identity for colonial favor. On whisperings, see also Greene, "Whispers and Silences," 2003.

[26] Wulff Joseph Wulff and Selena Axelrod Winsnes, *A Danish Jew in West Africa: Wulff Joseph Wulff: Biography and Letters 1836-1842*, (Legon: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2013), 140.

[27] Ibid., 180.

christened, the Board of Trade could not avoid [retiring me and] giving me a yearly pension."[28] By May 14 of the following year Wulff expresses to his parents that he cannot shake the label of being a Jew, writing "People whom one is not able to please here…have indeed not let their pens lie idle and have *blackened* me as well as they could. And finally there is this: I am and will always be a Judas."[29]

By the 20th century, being Jewish in West Africa was not to be paraded by the British Empire, although service to the British Empire was regarded in Jewish circles.[30] In the remaining months of 1900, Matthew Nathan who had been serving as governor of Sierra Leone was appointed Governor of the Gold Coast colony by Queen Victoria and would serve there for 3 years before his services were requested in Hong Kong.[31] According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia,* a 12-volume work that captures notable Jewish activity up to the 20th century published from 1901-1906, Matthew Nathan was "the first appointment of a Jew to a distant English colonial governorship."[32] His service in the Gold Coast started with the quelling and resolution of the Yaa Asantewaa war that had been instigated by his successor, Gov. Hodgson's, quest for the golden stool. Within a month of his appointment, he had ended the war, sent the queenmother into exile,

[28] Ibid., 197.

[29] Ibid., 197. "Blackened" italicized for emphasis.

[30] Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler (eds.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Vol. 9, (New York: Funk & Wagnells,1901), 184. http://d2b4hhdj1xs9hu.cloudfront.net/RM9M184P.jpg

[31] The London Gazette, 9 November 1900. Issue:27245, Page 6854. https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/27425/page/6584; See also, Matthew Nathan, *Jewish Times Asia*. http://www.jewishtimesasia.org/contributed-articles-topmenu-39/374-2010-10/1527-sir-matthew-nathan-hong-kongs-jewish-governor.

[32] *The Jewish Encyclopedia,* 184.

and showed mercy by not executing the anti-British Asante soldiers as had been advised.[33] Graham Dominy, who has biographed Matthew Nathan, noted how Nathan dealt with antisemitic sentiments throughout his colonial tenure, with his decisions being undermined and his experience challenged. When posted to Ireland, he was accused of being a "Mason and a Jew" two identities that for centuries were deprecatory.[34] "Nathan's assumed identity as an English gentleman," Dominy noted, allowed him mobility within the colonial enterprise, as "his Jewish background, [made him] an outsider to that caste."[35] Like Wulff Joseph Wulff, a little over half a century before, Nathan was mindful of the challenges his identity posed to his occupational progress. While European fixations on local Jewish heritage predicated on observances of indigenous practices with Hebraic semblances were identified and perhaps romanticized (as will be discussed below), at this time in the first half of the 20th century, Judaism and markers of such were still a pariah in the metropole.

Alliance Israelite Universelle: Distinguishing a Black Jewish Other

In addition to individual Jews working on behalf of empire, Jewish institutions, such as the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU), too, attempted to distance themselves from a perceived "primitive" Jewish identity where a geographical distinction of a North African Jew could be represented as a superior more enlightened person to Jews of "sub"- Saharan or even adjacent-

[33] Graham Dominy, "'Not a Position for a Gentleman': Sir Matthew Nathan as Colonial Administrator: From Cape Coast Castle to Dublin Castle via Natal," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46, no. 1 (2018), 93-120: 97-99.

[34] Ibid., 106.

[35] Ibid., 94.

Sahara.[36] Established in the last half of the nineteenth century, the AIU's goal was to modernize Jewish life in North African cities, through secularization programs, in order to gain French citizenship and thus more rights while living in colonized North Africa.[37] The AIU recognized that many Jews and Jewish rituals had been criminalized and seen as inferior by European imperial logic.[38] In attempts to shift the perception of large Jewish populations in northern North Africa, Mikhaël Elbaz explained the goal of the AIU was to "emancipate Moroccan Jews by teaching them the narratives and manners of Western civilization."[39] Daniel Schroeter furthered this sentiment, acknowledging that performing "manners of Western civilization" could pivot Jews away from being perceived as inferior and into a better socio-political position. Schoreter writes, "…hierarchy of identities that, from the northern Mediterranean, increasingly placed the Judeo-Arabic tradition of the post-expulsion era lower on the ladder."[40]

Northern Moroccan Jewish populations adopted an attitude of superiority when it came to the authenticity of their faith as compared to southern communities, and in doing so the caricaturized and feared Jewish other was able to be maintained in European minds while eliminating "civilized" Jews in the north as such. Daniel Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit point out

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[36] Historian Ghislaine Lydon has raised attention to the mistreatment of Africa as two distinct Africas: North Africa and "sub-Saharan Africa," where the southern notation of "sub" could also imply a subpar/inferior Africa. See Ghislaine Lydon, "Writing Trans-Saharan History," 2005: 293-324; and Zartman, 1963.

[37] Michael Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria*, (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

[38] Belief that Jewish ritual, especially regarding use of blood for Passover, has long been criminalized in European Christian settings, with rumors that Christian blood was preferable and often tethered to a sentiment held that Jews were "Christ-killers". See Roberts, "Nazis, Jews, and Nosferatu, 2018 and Ingram, "The *Converso* Phenomenon," 2012: 15-20.

[39] Mikaël Elbaz, "L'exil et la demeure," *Présence juive au Maghreb: hommage à Haïm Zafrani*, ed. Haïm Zafrani, Nicole S. Serfaty, and Joseph Tedghi (Saint-Denis: Bouchene, 2004), 112. My translation. Original "d'emanciper les Juifs marocains en leur apprenant le récits de la civilisation occidentale."

[40] Daniel J Schroeter, "The Shifting Boundaries of Moroccan Jewish Identities, "*Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 157.

that Jewish populations living in the "rural south" of Morocco were largely, if not fully, ignored by the AIU.[41] This furthered the marginalization of small communities, geographically closer to the Sahara and trading communities with the Western Africa, whose continuation of faith practices, which were more closely aligned to Mosaic Law and more common pre-expulsion, were increasingly seen as a non-Westernized Judaism.[42] This was undoubtedly one of many steps toward the divide of normativized and "antiquated" communities. As attention was focused on cities with a larger demographic of Jews in Morocco and the Mahgrib more largely, the communities that harbored smaller percentages of Jews quickly fell away from the global/normative gaze, were further ostracized, and consequently forgotten. This lack of attention, led by the AIU, set a trend in focusing attention to Jewish communities in the north. Schroeter and Chetrit also acknowledge the role of colonialism in creating the divide between the north and "rural south." The north, whose urban centers were largely affected by Western rule, ideologies, and shifts in religious praxis conflicted with the neglect of colonial officials of the "rural south," who maintained their practices and system of religious governance.[43] This divide between the "rural south" and urban, or perhaps "westernized," north became internalized in the treatment of Jews from these regions. These institutional efforts provided a social makeover of Northern Moroccan Jewish communities in order to position them as more civilized and

[41] Schroeter and Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents," 2006.195. See also, Pierre Cohen, *La presse Juive editee au Maroc: 1870-1963* (Rabat: Edicions & Impressions Bouregreg Communication, 2007), 38-9; Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle,* 1984.

[42] This is also seen with the Beta Israel of Ethiopia, who were admitted into Israel under the Law of Return. They are seen as both authentically Jewish, based on their biblical obedience, but at the same time non-Jewish, as their practices are not "current" to normativized Judaism.

[43] Schroeter and Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents," 172-175.

European than the perceived "primitive other" that Jewish populations shared with colonized Africans.

Mythology of a Lost Tribe

Hebraic Excellence vs. Aryan Excellence: a Lost Tribe Explanation for Africa's achievements

Key arguments discussing the notion that Judaism in Africa was imported is rooted in both the legend of the Lost Tribes, and the "Curse of Canaan." With the lost tribe theory, scholars such as Nahum Slouschz engineered a Berber theory that indicated that Berbers were in fact Phoenicians, formerly known as Canaanites, who after the destruction of the second temple (and arguably before then) worked their way through Egypt and to the West due to their navigational technologies on the Mediterranean and trading acumen.[44] Emanuela Trevisan-Semi argued that Slouschz was motivated to construct a Berber theory and their Hebraic contributions to the world to compete against the rising Aryan "super" race tethered to the achievements of Greek and Rome.[45] Tudor Parfitt also engaged the Lost Tribe theory as well as the Curse of Canaan and suggested that colonialists concluded that the descendants of Ham were the peoples in Africa responsible for any great achievement.[46] These racist and ethnocentric paradigms wrangle history away from indigenous Africans therein contributing to a literature that has robbed Africa as history producers or as capable of contributing to global technologies or religious exegesis.

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[44] Slouschz, *Étude sur l'histoire*, 1906; Slouschz, *The Jews of North Africa*, 1944; Slouschz*, Un voyage*, 1913; Slouschz, *Travels in North Africa*, 1927.

[45] Emanuela Trevisan Semi, "Slouschz and the Quest for Indigenous African Jews," in *African Zion: Studies in Black Judaism*, edited by Edith Bruder and Tudor Parfitt, (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012): 192-203. However, again, one must question the extent of Slouschz's influence on local populations, especially as he may have aided in the design of a Berber-Hebraic past, but the oral interviews he, and many other scholars, received articulated a past to Davidic kings and Hebraic origins.

[46] Parfitt, *Black Jews,* 2013.

Although I agree with Dierk Lange that these legends have to be critically analyzed as he himself looks at Hausa king's list before the introduction of Islam or Christianity acknowledging their Hebraic names and affinity towards Israelite leaders, it is contentious when using the argument to deny African contribution.[47]

Colonial Ethnographies and Travel Writings

In colonial and church archives, many Europeans documented the practices and ritual of the indigenous peoples they interacted with and sometimes ascribed a meaning to the practices, largely suggesting an affinity to Islamic or Hebraic origins.[48] As Andrew Apter (2017) points out, these rituals oftentimes serve as a "generative locus" where ritual produces a multitude of meaning that serves the present need.[49] Thus, rituals not necessarily unique to Judaism can generate a Jewish pre-colonial origin. Interpreting and reinscribing African ritual with meaning based on a familiar knowledge of Hebrew practices from an anti-Semitic worldview may have been utilized to make foreign peoples inferior, and thus justifying colonization by European imperial forces. Meera Venkatachalam in her study of the Anlo in Southeastern Ghana similarly takes this approach and suggests that ritual not only allows for new interpretations based on the temporal context but also is a space in which one can see how Christianity and other beliefs have been "indigenized" into local practice as reflected in costume or movement.[50] Thus, not only do

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[47] Dierk Lange, "The Bayajidda Legend and Hausa History," in *African Zion: Studies in Black Judaism*, edited by Edith Bruder and Tudor Parfitt, (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), Pp. 138-174.

[48] Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Wilson 1856, Williams 1930, Bouche 1885, Newitt, 2010; Slouschz, *The Jews of North Africa*, 1944; Pierre Flamand, *Diaspora en terre d'Islam: l'esprit populaire dans les juiveries du sud marocain*, (s.l: s.n, 1958); Chouraqui, *Histoire des juifs,* 1998.

[49] Apter, "History in the Dungeon, 2017: 49-54.

[50] Meera Venkatachalam, *Slavery, Memory and Religion in Southeastern Ghana, C.1850-Present*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

written sources discuss ritual, but observation too of material culture and artifacts can shed light on the observer's belief and religious influences.

Practices such as eschewing work on Saturday, dietary restrictions and butchering techniques, seclusion of the ill and menstruating women confirm, for present-day Jewish communities, a Jewish heritage and will be taken up in Chapter 4.[51] But is this the projection of European notions of antiquated customs, or is it the embodiment of a religious past that could no longer be articulated for fear of a backlash? Are these the practices of *conversos*, *crypto-Jews*, and/or *New Christians* that have become habit to perform, but the meaning and origin lost?[52] This section investigates ritual as a "generative locus" for a potential narrative production of a pre-colonial past by the colonialists themselves.[53] It is through practice that colonial ethnographies informed their own understanding of the populations they encountered, recording what they believed were to be Hebraic customs. Although, it is likely that a Jewish identity was simply projected onto African and/or universal ceremonies, they must be critically engaged. Afterall, creating meaning of these rituals in these colonial ethnographies informed a narrative throughout the twentieth century, that arguably further obscured Africa's history of migration and global interaction before European contact.

In the mid-nineteenth century a missionary serving West Africa for eighteen years, Rev. J. Leighton Wilson, observed similarities in the customs he witnessed, specifically in Guinea and

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[51] More on the indigenous interpretation of ritual in Chapter 4. See also, Remy Ilona, *The Igbos,* 2004; Lis, *Jewish Identity Among the Igbo*, 2014.

[52] Connerton, 1989.

[53] Apter, "History in the Dungeon, 2017.

Senegambia, to those of Jewish heritage. While observing practices in Northern Guinea, he wrote:

> Judaism is more prominently developed; some of the leading features of which are circumcision, the division of tribes into separate families, and very frequently into the number twelve;…bloody sacrifices, with the sprinkling of blood upon their altars and door-posts, the formal and ceremonial observance of new moons[54]…Although the natives of Africa retain these outward rites and ceremonies with the utmost tenacity, they have little or no knowledge of their origin, or the particular object which they are intended to commemorate…they are attended to merely as a matter of habit; and the only reason assigned for observing them, is that their ancestors did the same before them.[55]

Wilson correctly discusses the possibility of Islam influencing some of the customs, especially circumcision, but indicates that Islam is not evident in the region with no practitioners present. Thus, it is Judaism that serves as the explanation for such behavior.

Another missionary, Pierre Bertrand Bouche, also recognized Jewish customs through his travels in Dahomey in the 19th century. He was impressed by the customs of those he encountered, including circumcision rituals and female seclusion during menstruation, which he labeled as "usages judaïques."[56]

British journalist Edmund Morel, who observed the Fulani in West Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century, attributed their knowledge of Hebrew history to past interactions with the sons of Israel. He credits a Hebraic origin to various practices of the Fulani dismissing Qur'anic knowledge as a source of instruction. He recognizes that Fulani regard Moses as second to Mohammad, and recounts some acts, such as the slaughtering of animals, a Jewish rite, ignoring the similarities in Islamic dietary laws. Drawing parallels to physical

[54] Perhaps referencing Rosh Chodesh and the Jewish calendar.

[55] Wilson, 221.

[56] Bouche, 268.

features commonly associated with Jewish profiles, he further solidifies his conclusion of an Israelite heritage and additionally explains any enigma, such as the relation Fulani have towards their firstborn,[57] as an ancient Jewish custom.[58]

Joseph J. Williams, a Jesuit missionary, who largely travelled in present-day Ghana during the early 1900s, created a substantial text on Jewish affinities in Ashanti ritual. His text, *Hebrewisms of West Africa: From Nile to Niger With the Jews*, coins the very term "Hebrewism" in response to the observed "doings" of the Ashanti by Williams himself.[59] His account notes the many practices of the Ashanti in contrast with known Jewish rites. Additionally, Williams compares the political structure of the Asantahene in relation to priestly hierarchies in Judaism. Furthermore, he provides a detailed, and often far-fetching, analysis of the Akan language as a derivative of the Hebrew language, in other words arguing the Akan as a Semitic language.

Williams' emphasis on practice, or *Hebrewisms*, further supports his theory of a Jewish origin amongst the Ashanti. The *Hebrewisms* he discusses are cultural traditions that have a Jewish semblance among the Ashanti peoples of Ghana, i.e. birth, marriage, and funeral rituals, menstrual seclusion, etc.[60] For the latter, Williams states, "the restrictions and taboos of the Ashanti woman at the menstrual period, even to the retirement to the bara hut, read like a page borrowed from the Book of Leviticus, and the system of Ashanti ablutions to prevent legal

[57] Numbers 8:16-19 NASB.

[58] Morel, 148-151.

[59] Herskovits 1941 and Williams 1930.

[60] Williams, 61-64, 100-03.

uncleanness constantly brings to mind similar practices which were common among the Hebrews."[61]

Perhaps flirting with ideas of a lost tribe status, Williams makes efforts to create a linguistic argument to attempt a theory of migration in order to connect the Hebrewisms to a legitimate Jewish establishment in past generations. For Williams' explanation for the word Ashanti, he explains that the suffix 'ti,' in Ashanti, translates to "the people of" or "men of" in which Ashanti would translate into "the people of Ashan." Williams goes on to explain that 'Ashan'[62] was once a city in the land of Judah. Thus, with the translation of the Hebrew *Ashan* into "smoke," Williams correlates, through interpretive gymnastics, the naming of the Ashanti to the people of smoke, which indicates they are harkening back to the destruction of the temple where they escaped and fled to find residence in sub-Saharan Africa.[63] Williams' most persuasive linguistic analysis is the vocabulary of the Tuareg *Kel Tadek*[64] whose designation for God, *Amanai*, has the same rhythm as *Adonai*, the Hebrew term. [65] Here, Williams' reliance on language harkens to Anderson's imagined community, which needs language to crystallize the nation. From Williams' observations, we see him constructing a Jewish community and past through the belief of ritual understanding and language commonalities.

Conclusion: Mythology of Import or Import of Mythology?

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[61] Ibid., 63.

[62] Ashan is mentioned in the Bible, located in Joshua 15: 42, Joshua 19:7, 1 Chronicles 4:32, and 1 Chronicles 6:59 NASB.

[63] Williams, 60-61.

[64] Jacob Oliel, *Les Juifs Au Sahara: Le Touat Au Moyen Age*, (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1994), 123. Most likely the same as Oliel's *Ida Houssaq*.

[65] Williams, 220.

The long-held misbelief that Abrahamic faiths are imports to Africa, with religious praxis and ideology taught or adopted through hearsay and global transmission, is perhaps the largest contributor to the investigation of African Jewries as illegitimate. Christianity has had a long tradition in North and Eastern Africa, even preserving some sacred texts and apocrypha, yet the western world emphasizes Christian thought established by colonial missions. Similarly, Islam, which has had massive contribution to exegesis and juridical thought from the continent, is seen as entirely imported from non-African spaces. With a well-documented and still largely held mishistory of Christianity and Islam as import in Africa, today's scholars have also attempted to determine how Judaism was imported. For those more familiar with the influence of these newer Abrahamic faiths, Edith Bruder points out that present-day Jewish populations have been quickly explained away through the lens of Islam and Christian influences. She encourages scholars to deal critically with the histories of Jews in Africa, south of the Sahara, as well as their legends.[66]

Due to the lack of knowledge of Africa's past, the colonial project also attempted to assign origin to rituals and peoples unknown to them. The ignorance of Africa's history allowed imaginations to arrogantly concoct pasts that under scholarly investigation have proven to be erroneous and oftentimes racist. The "import" of Jewish origin required imagination (lost tribe theories) and intellectual somersaults to pinpoint the "phenomenon"'s genesis—all of which was tethered to the mapping of racial hierarchies. These mythologies fall apart with the critical unpacking of imperial racial systems that used their observances of indigenous ritual as a "generative locus" for racial myth making. Due to this, scholars have largely dismissed an African Jewish past as make-believe and have begun to find contemporary catalysts for today's

[66] Bruder, *The Black Jews of Africa*, 2008. Arguments by scholars such as Tudor Parfitt and Nathan Devir elide the historical record of Jews in the area and Jews who had lived there prior to Islam or Christianity. See Parfitt, *Black Jews,* 2013.; and Devir, 2017.

African Jewish communities. Yet in doing so, scholars perpetuate the epistemic violence of failing to investigate and/or acknowledge the African past, pre-European contact, like the scholars and ethnographers before them.

CHAPTER THREE

Esa Hie: Forging Refuge in the Forests of Western Ghana

The interior of Northwest Africa underwent substantial transformations in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with explosive trade routes, expanding empires, and violent encounters from the north and coast resulting in the movement of its peoples. The distress of Islamic persecutions on the peoples of West Africa who adhered to indigenous religions and philosophies was the primary reason for southern movement. Skilled labor and geographic knowledge possessed by these refugees contributed to their adaptability in southern lands and eased their ability to survive. During this great turmoil and massive exodus, labelled as a "Volker-wandering," by W. E. F. Ward, tradesmen in gold utilized the trade routes bridging the Sahara in the early medieval period, and from Timbuktu to the gold fields in central and southern Ghana in the 17th century.[1] While the existing trade routes expedited the southern flight of refugees, it was the skilled labor and access to popular goods along these same trade routes that garnered interest from local rulers to consider incorporating these migrants into their communities. By facilitating this relationship with the kingdoms they encountered, where one's contributions could aid in the communities' wealth and prestige, paved a way for refugee survival, especially as seen for Jewish émigrés across Northwest Africa.[2]

[1] W. E. F. Ward, *A History of the Gold Coast*, (London: G. Allen & Unwin. 1952); Clive Whitehead, 'The admirable Ward': a portrait of W. E. F. (Frank) Ward, CMG, colonial educator, administrator, diplomat and scholar, Journal of Educational Administration and History, 25:2 (1993), 138-160, DOI: 10.1080/0022062930250203; K. Nkansa-Kyerematen, *The Story of Kwawu*. Accra: Presbyterian Press, 1990), 8.

[2] See Chapter 1.

The Sehwi, an ethnic group in western Ghana, claim a history of migrancy and refugeeship from the north.[3] Sehwi ancestors were keen on forging relationship with local chiefs and eventually Ashanti kings upon their migration into present-day Ghana. Notable Ghanaian historian Osei Kwadwo, who was the first curator at the Asantehene's home of Manhyia Palace in Kumasi, informed that these refugees who settled into the forested region now known as the Sefwi-Wiawso Municipal District, later received the moniker of *esa hie*, written phonetically by colonial administrators as Sefwi, Sefwhee, and Sehwi (the latter being the preferred spelling by locals)[4]. *Esa hie*, translated from Twi to "war is over,"[5] recognizes the history of movement of this refugee population who migrated due to war and were able to settle in peace upon learning that they were no longer going to be persecuted. Ghanaian scholar Kwame Yeboah Daaku who conducted a multitude of interviews regarding the oral traditions of the Sehwi in the middle of the 20th century, concluded that Sehwi was a more modern label applied largely by Europeans whereas before the land and its peoples were identified as Inkassa.[6]

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[3] There are also some Sehwi who claim Jewish ancestry, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

[4]Poll of Sehwi locals. Also, Felix Ahorsi, head librarian at the Sefwi Wiawso public library (9 Sept 2018). These three are the most common, but also spelled Sephwi, Sauee, Sahee, Sawee (Bowdich 1873), and Showy (Dupuis 1824) among other spellings. See T. Edward Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee; with a Descriptive Account of That Kingdom, with Introductory Preface by His Daughter Mrs. Hale,* New ed., (London: Griffith & Farran, 1873); and Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee*, (London: Henry Colburn and Shackell and Arrowsmith, 1824).

[5] *Esa* meaning fight and *hie* meaning ended, or "the fighting has ended" is colloquially translated by various individuals I spoke with as "the war is over." Ofori articulated that it implies that people had left it, escaped from it, and were finally done.

[6] Enkassa, Nkasa, Ankasa, Enkasser and Cacres are alternate spellings. Daaku says that Thomas Bowdich, an English traveller was the first to employ the term in 1819, with the spelling Sauee. See K. Y. Daaku, *Oral Traditions of Sefwi*. (Legon: Institute of African Studies University of Ghana, 1974), Vol. 1, vi;. Albert van Dantzig made note of this term in discussing the Danish presence with interest in the gold trade. Enkasser, in Danish means "to collect." See Albert van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana*, (Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited, 1980), 32; A 1607 map "Guinea Nova Descriptio. Inset: I. S. Thomae" by Gerhard Mercator and Jodocus Hondius identifies the area with 'Caceres.' See, René Baesjou, "The Historical Evidence in Old Maps and Charts of Africa with Special Reference to West Africa." *History in Africa* 15 (1988): 1–83. https://doi.org/10.2307/3171856.

Inkassa, Enkassa, Nkasa, Ankasa were various spellings of those who were living in the forested region that would later be the Sefwi districts. Dutch historian Albert van Dantzig said of those living in the area that it was "difficult to identify this people—no state of such name any longer exists, but in Wassa there is still a memory of the 'Ankasa' or 'Nkasa' people 'who do not speak' —*nkasa* in Akan. These people were not allowed to speak of the gold-mines they worked."[7] Van Dantzig goes on to suggest that while the knowledge of this area is "vague" that perhaps the location references "gold mines" and the people "gold-traders."[8] René Basejou, too, noted the ambiguity of the term of the "Caceres Anguines" and "Incassa Iggyna" from a Dutch produced map of the Gold Coast in 1629. He suggests "from this map it may be inferred that in the latter part of the sixteenth century the Petirees[9] were expelled from the present region of Ahanta by the Inkassa (Cacares Dampago) and subsequently settled down near the Tano river."[10]

Overtime, those living near the Tano river and adjacent regions that makes up the now Sefwi-Wiawso Municipal District;[11] became identified with the overarching term Sehwi; yet, the population is heterogenous with many ethnic groups traversing through and settling due to economic opportunities in resource extraction and, the focus of this chapter, as a place of refuge. Sefwi-Wiawso Municipal District is one of 9 districts in the newly established Western North region of Ghana, which finally came into being in 2019 after over 50 years of advocating for

[7] Van Dantzig, 32.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Petirees are believed to be another ethnic group, living in what is now Ivory Coast "destroyed" by the Inkassa. See, Pierluigi Valsecchi, *Power and State Formation in West Africa: Appolonia from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, 1st ed., (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[10] Baesjou, 81.

[11] As mentioned previously, I utilize "Sefwi" when referring to geographic places, and Sehwi when speaking to the peoples of Sefwi-Wiawso, the main focus of this chapter, as well as those who have made claim to Sehwi origins.

their own region, separating from the Western Region to which they belonged.[12] With its former administrative capital over 150 miles south in Takoradi, the Western North largely comprised of Sehwi were being underserved and the conditions of roads, schools, and medical facilities evidenced this claim.[13] To its east, is the Bibiani/Anwhiaso/Bekwai District, with the latter being at times conflated with Sehwi persons as they are referred to as Sefwi Anwhiaso and Sefwi Bekwai. However, the histories of these two settlements differ from the history of Sefwi-Wiawso, and arguably comprised with a more homogenous population although, too, impacted by the migrations of laborers.[14] Scholars have conflated Sehwi persons as one solitary group with a singular history; yet the history of this land and the peoples it houses is complex and multivocal.[15] Daaku's two volume work on Sehwi Oral Traditions published in 1970 attempts to tease out these complex histories.[16] In his research of the Sehwi Elluo festival, scholar Joseph Obi, opened his master's thesis acknowledging these complexities articulating the study of Sehwi "is an inter-ethnic one" nodding to the diversity of persons in the region.[17]

[12] During my research in 2018-19, there were banners stretched across roadways advertising the upcoming ballot to get citizens to vote for the creation of the Western North, along with it being the talk of the town.

[13] WRG 3/10/591, WRG 62/1/180.

[14] Industries in gold, rubber, timber, and cocoa.

[15] The latest scholarship on the Sehwi that at times interweaves varying traditions is Devir's *New Children of Israel* (2017). This is especially problematic when cherry-picking a history of Anwhiaso for the history of Sefwi who later established Wiawso as their refuge, and the originators of the House of Israel (with the founder from Sui, in the Wiawso region, not Anwhiaso).

[16] A two-volume work, volume 1 is dedicated to the oral histories of Sefwi Anwhiaso and Sefwi Bekwai. Volume 2 covers the oral history of Sefwi Wiawso. The overview of the early history of Sefwi is duplicated in both volumes. K. Y. Daaku, *Oral Traditions of Sefwi*. Vols 1 and 2, (Legon: Institute of African Studies University of Ghana, 1974).

[17] Joseph Obi, "The 'Elluo' Festival of the Sehwis a Drama," Master's Thesis (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, June 2003).

This chapter will center on the history of Sefwi-Wiawso and its Sehwi inhabitants. I argue that the Sehwi in the Wiawso settlement were "strangers" in the land that became dominated by the Ashanti, who incorporated them into the Akan ethnic milieu in the 18th century. In this, they were given land which became the Wiawso settlement and transformed into a space of refuge for Sehwi in addition to others including captives and enslaved persons running from Europeans, recruited slave-raiders, and later administrative allies. The ruling philosophy of the people was one of tolerance, indicative of the Suwarian Tradition of the Wangara (also known as Dioula), arguably a community of traders that sheltered the Sehwi ancestors from Islamic extremism prioritizing their economic and trade interests from the north of Ghana into the gold fields in the soon-to-be Sefwi region.[18] While a history of assimilation as survival was part and parcel of the Sehwi past, clinging on to specific rituals and beliefs that nearly vanished after the multi-century encounters with imperial forces of Islamic extremists, Ghanaian kingdoms of the Denkyira and Ashanti, and eventually European missions, colonial enterprises, and Nkrumah's Convention People's Party antics.

Southern Flight: Fleeing Intolerant Lands and Finding Refuge

The migration of peoples fleeing war and finding protection amongst locals along their journey is a repeated theme among Sehwi inhabitants and surrounding neighbors who suggest their ancestors transmitted such a history to them, orally. Joseph Armah, who has lived in the Sefwi Wiawso district his entire life stated:

[18] The Suwarian Tradition, thus, allowed for the maintenance of ancestral practices and traditions. The Suwarian Tradition moreso tolerated unique ethnic identities and rituals to exist in tandem with Islam. According to Nehemia Levtzion, this "accommodationist Islam" contributed to the preservation of distinct ethnic identities and traditional religions, Dioula identity being an example. Nehemia Levtzion and J.O. Voll (eds.), "*Eighteenth Century Renewal & Reform in Islam*", (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1987).

> You see, what I know is that my grandmother told me that the majority of the Sehwis come from Mali and a lot of them too come from Ivory Coast.[19] They came through wars. At first, because of war they were separated and some of them come from Ivory Coast to this place and some of them too come from Mali to stay here. At first, they were going through all this loss.[20]

Osei Kwado further elaborated on the "wars" faced by migrants from the north. In an interview with Kwadwo in 2019, he stated that those who first settled in the Sefwi area were not merely migrants, but refugees, who were displaced by Islamic persecution. When Islam entered Northern Africa (meaning North Africa through the Sahara into the Ghana Empire), Islam impacted the populations and over time became more invasive into their practice of indigenous beliefs. Islamic conquests, possibly sparked by reformists travelling through West African empires, and "were forcing people to be one of them."[21] This new, less accommodating Islam, from what was experienced under rulers such as Sonni Ali and Mansa Musa, was harsh on practitioners who maintained indigenous beliefs alongside an Islamic interest. To be "one of them" was to eradicate idolatry, or the simultaneous practices and rituals of ethnic beliefs. Thus, according to Kwadwo, Akan ancestors "migrated into the forest belt to have religious freedom."[22]

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[19] Women, specifically queenmothers or the matriarchal political authorities, National Archive, London, CO 96/724/8; are key holders of local traditions and history, Alex Armah, interview by author, Accra, Ghana, 8 Sept 2016; Also see, WRG 62/2/2/ Queenmother, "They are traditional historians of their stools and area of authority"; Also, these women are able to disclose histories, often transmitted in domestic spaces. And, Flora S. Kaplan, *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power Case Studies in African Gender*, (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 2006).

[20] Joseph Armah, interview by author, New Adhiembra, Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, 25 Aug 2010.

[21] Osei Kwadwo, interview by author, Manhyia Palace (Kumasi, Ghana), 23 Jan. 2019. On Islamic reform, see Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa*, (London: Published for the University of Glasgow by the Oxford U.P., 1970).

[22] Sehwi were incorporated into Akan and many people living in the Sefwi are are Akan as will be discussed throughout this chapter. This statement demonstrates Kwadwo's understanding of the intermixing of people that would make up the Akan group and some of their shared histories of migration. Osei Kwadwo, *An Outline of Asante History*," Part 1, 3rd edition, (Kumasi: Cita Press Ltd., 2004), 1.

Northern Ghana conducted trade with Western Sudan with Mande and Wangara[23] traders dominating the routes and bringing with them Islamic influence in trade centers in Wa, Bole and Begho.[24] As the Mali empire declined in the 15th century, the Wangara moved south into the Songhai empire and were instrumental in establishing trade with the Akan into the 16th century. Djenne served as an entrepôt for the Akan trade[25] with goods flowing into towns in Ghana facilitating the growth of the Asante at the end of the 17th century. Operating in the northern parts of Ghana, the Wangara facilitated trade further south utilizing their skills in gold and forest agriculture to grow their trading influence. Although coming from the north where a more extreme Islam was sweeping through the lands, the Wangara were not known for implementing or forcing Islamic ideologies. Osman Bari writes, "the proselytization of Islam was not their main objective in their travels away from home that was why they did not make any serious impact on the people of Dagbon, as far as the spread of Islam was concerned."[26] This leniency on cultural practices and ability to build rapport with chiefs supported interactions with leadership so that trade could be conducted—the main aim of these Wangara merchants. With trade and commerce being the central goal, Bari argues that these Muslims were not very influential in the spread of Islam in Northern Ghana. In fact, Bari suggests the Wangara were at odds with the

[23] It should be noted that Wangara for al-Idrisi was a land rich with gold, versus a distinct ethnic group. While Wangara traders, arguably stretching the TransSaharan trade routes and gold markets, handled the precious metal. Perhaps, handling this haram substance was one such reason for not adhering to a stricter form of Islam.

[24] Seth Kordzo Gadzepko, *History of Ghana: Since Pre-History*, (Accra: Excellent Publishing and Printing, 2005), 29. Wilks states that scholars such as Ibrahim bin al-Mustapha and Sa'id bin Abd al-Qadir operated in Wa, Ghana and Al-Amin bin Muhammad al-Abyad Kulibali in Kong, Côte d'Ivoire. See, Ivor Wilks, *Wa and the Wala: Islam and Polity in Northwestern Ghana*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[25] Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante*, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1993).

[26] Osman Bari, *A comprehensive history of Muslims & religion in Ghana: covers leadership & its perceptions, advent of Islam and growth of Muslim communities in Ghana*, (Accra, Ghana: Dezine Focus, 2009):125.

Hausas who were more ardent in spreading Islam.[27] The Hausa emphasis on Islamic jurisprudence and behavior ran contrary to the ethos of Wangara who were seemingly amenable as they acclimated to various cultures along trade routes.

As a more strict Islamicization moved further south and took hold to the Northern Ghanaian trading areas the Wangara were operating in, the Wangara were not keen on pushing Islamic ideologies on locals and thus looked further south where markets were already proving to be profitable. While they did not impact how Islam was practiced due to not having the desire to proselytize, they are said to have impacted burial traditions (burying bodies in white cloth), and the circumcision of male infants.[28]

The Wangara who were adept in forest agriculture had the skill to maneuver the dense woods of the growing Asante lands in the south[29] and were further incentivized to go where in-demand resources were plentiful, specifically the gold fields.[30] So much so, the Wangara were eventually used to clear the "virgin forests" in southern Ghana.[31] The Wangara were also aided by the labor of enslaved persons, both in their trading operations and forest agriculture.

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[27] Ibid.

[28] On influence to Dagomba with the funeral cloth, Bari, 126. On circumcision, 135. It should be noted that while these are Islamic practices, they are also Jewish practices. If these southern moving Wangara traders were crypto-Jews, who had converted under duress, this could explain why they were not interested in proselytizing but ritual practices were still maintained and transmitted.

[29] Wilks, *Forests of Gold*, 1993: 10-18.

[30] Bari, 125.

[31] Stefano Boni, *Clearing the Ghanaian Forest: Theories and Practices of Acquisition, Transfer and Utilisation of Farming Titles in the Sefwi-Akan Area*, (Legon: Institute of African Studies, 2005), 39.

Undoubtedly, enslaved persons migrated with them from the north[32], while also purchasing enslaved laborers from Sao Tome.[33] Salaga, located in central Ghana, was the site of a large

Figure 5 A map of Wangara (1824)' composed by the British consul Joseph Dupuis, indicated an area identified as Sefwi, identified on the map as Showy. Like many mapmakers in medieval Northwest Africa, Dupuis relied on African merchants and travelers to compose.

[32] Dupuis, who believed the Ashanti were once Wangara, specifically from LamLam. See*:* W. Walton Claridge, *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti from the Earliest Times to the Commencement of the Twentieth Century*, (London: J. Murray, 1915). For Dupuis map: Joseph Dupuis, A Map of Wangara... its political sections, ancient kingdom the courts of its rivers and the routes: from Ashantee to the Joliba, Ghul by and Kuara rivers, compiled from MSS and other informations collected at coomassy during a mission to that Kingdom, 1824. Accessed from Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, ID/Cote : btv1b84401060.f1

[33] Wilks, *Forests of Gold*, 1993: 74-76. On Jews of Sao Tome, see Newitt 2010. On Cape Verde, see: Alma Gottlieb, "Crossing Religious Borders: Jews and Cabo Verdeans." *Mande Studies* (2015) 31–68.

slave market "connected with both Trans-Saharan and the West African Slave Trade."[34] Migrants from the "generic Mande tribe" who came via the slave and trade routes, perhaps with the Wangara or assimilated into the Wangara community, brought skills that were employed such as "architectural skills...especially in the field of building technology and the art of Arabic calligraphy."[35] With these skills, labor, connections to trade, and ability to curry favor with local rule, establishing settlements in the forested regions became desirable to be able to operate more freely without strict Islamic oversight and contestation of practice. While forest zone states rose between 1300-1700, knowledge that the "forest abounded in gold" expedited interest. Growth took off in the forest after iron technology was more developed in the area and solutions to the tsetse fly, but before then only smaller chiefdoms like Tekyiman and Sefwi were settlements, and largely tied to family groups.[36]

The Wangara, who were matrilineal, moved into this forested area, cultivated it, and relied on uterine transmission of the lands they inhabited.[37] According to Stefano Boni, an anthropologist who has written the largest body of works on the Sehwi, discussed the origins of Sehwi by a group called the Asankera, who articulate a history in Techiman before settling in the forested area. Boni writes:

> The family name "Asankera" is currently used as a matrilineal idiom belonging to a privileged group of uterine segments holding the most prestigious and influential chiefly office of the Sefwi area, that of Wiawso. The matrilineal purity of the Asankera is

[34] Bari, 151.

[35] Bari, 152. While not specified, it is possible that masonry was one such skill and aided in building irrigation. See also, Michelle Apotsos, *Architecture Islam and Identity in West Africa: Lessons from Larabanga*, (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

[36] Gadzepko, 30. Note: Tekyiman lies just southeast of Sefwi Wiawso, not to be confused with Techiman, north of Sefwi Wiawso.

[37] Boni, *Clearing the Ghanaian Forest*, 2005.

> doubtful: most likely matriliny is a discursive device used to cement groups' political allegiances, as some *whispered* narrations suggest.[38]

Boni's research which looked at the "Sefwi area, an 'ethnic' variant of the Akan civilization of West Africa" focused on a shift from a ritual center to a political capital that could operate under colonial rule.[39] Before colonial interference, however, it is important to note that ritual was an organizing force as much as a mnemonic device that maintained community. In this instance, it can be argued the "whispered narrations" served as a "discursive device used to cement group" allegiances based on ritual genealogies.

Nana Aduku II, the chief of Tano, articulated similar narratives regarding the Sehwi ancestors. Tanoso, a town just north of Wiawso across the Tano river is made up of mostly Anyi peoples,[40] and have had a long-standing relationship with the people of Sefwi Wiawso. Nana Aduku stated that the Tanoso (Anyi) were already near the area, across the river, when the Sehwi came near. He stated that at first the town was "secret."[41] He went on to say that peoples from

[38]My own italics for emphasis. From footnote 46 in Boni, "History and Ideology," 2007. The name 'Asankera' is noted in F. P. Holtsbaum, *Sefwi and its People*, in the Gold Coast Review 1: 1 (1925), 82.

[39] Boni, "History and Ideology," 2007: 25, 31.

[40] Also incorporated in the Akan, the Anyi similarly have stories of coming from Egypt and Ethiopia. These stories are quite common in the Akan, as well as Ewe an Ga-Adagmes. You can also find such utterings across internet discussion boards across Ghana's many ethnic groups. However, these claims are more difficult to historicize considering the mythology that has surrounded Egypt in discussions of racial superiority in league with Aryan mythologies tethered to Greek and Roman histories (See Slouschz and Emmanuela Trevisan Semi), and also as my Joelle Bahloul once said to me when working on my master's thesis, proving a connection to Ancient Egypt and Israel "is like looking for a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow." Thus, this study has stayed focused on historical connections to known Jewish communities that converted and/or disappeared during Islamic persecution in Northwest Africa in the medieval period. See*,* Trevisan Semi, "Slouschz and the Quest." 2012, 192-203; See also Slouschz, *Étude sur l'histoire*, 1906; Slouschz, *The Jews of North Africa*, 1944; Slouschz*, Un voyage*, 1913; Slouschz, *Travels in North Africa*, 1927.

[41] He indicated that its location being unknown was because "God created it" implying that it was not to be known by the peoples of Tano. Nana Aduku II, interview by author, Tano, Ghana, Jan 9, 2019.

there were trading, but did so silently, exchanging not only gold but also cloth,[42] and later guns.[43] Of what he knew of the Sehwi, Nana Aduku that the Sehwi had always been fairly isolated and didn't engage much if able to avoid being involved in any problems.[44]

While the Nkasa, of 17th century western Ghana, "do not speak,"[45] the ritual drum given to the Sehwi did, in the way of a talking drum. One of the drums that is beat in rituals, the Twinisini drum, celebrates the bravery of the Sehwi ancestors and is beaten in reverence to them. The drum's message is "ka be se yeko."[46] This translates to "I can speak, you can speak" in Diola, a Bambara/Manding dialect,[47] arguably representing a time when Wangara traders protected Sehwi ancestors and tolerated their unique customs and once in Sehwi a celebration that, now, they could freely speak of their heritage once more.

Establishing Autonomy

The Sehwi migration routes mirror those documented of the Wangara, with incentive to move south due to skills in the gold trade, and to flee Islamic persecutions and strict ideologies. Echoing this oral history is Harrison H. Ofori, headmaster at Asawinso Senior High in the Western North region of Ghana[48] who has spent much of his adult life penning the history of the

[42] The Wangara, later known as the Dyula/Dioula (Mandinga traders) from Mali are known to make a special blue and white cloth, known as *kyekye*. Sehwi ancestors continually connected with Wangara traders in order to acquire this particular cloth (Daaku vol. 2, p. 60, also spelled "quaqua;" and, van Dantzig, 24).

[43] This most likely in reference to the "silent trade." See Chapter 1.

[44] Chief Nana Aduku II, interview by author, Tano, Ghana, Jan. 9, 2019.

[45] Van Dantzig, 32.

[46] Daaku ,vol. 2., 57.

[47] My translation.

[48] Located in Kojina, Ghana

Sehwi and has published some of his findings with a local publisher while still refining his final manuscript for more widespread distribution. His work corroborates the migration of the Sehwi from the north and the settlement of Sehwi ancestors in an isolated and uncleared forested area where a settlement of these foreigners could be achieved without provoking any existing inhabitants. When speaking directly to Mr. Ofori from his headmaster office, he articulated that the large area that is now Sefwi (which is geographically quite large)[49] was mostly uninhabited. The Sehwi ancestors, from what he has gathered, came from a savannah area near Timbuktu (*Figure 6*).[50] Ofori guessed that it would have been sometime after the 14th century that more permanent migration south commenced, "running from insecurities," and eventually after travelling through Burkina Faso and parts of the Ivory Coast, then settled in the forested and unkempt lands that now makes up Sefwi.[51] The Sehwi peoples, who remained together as one "house," migrated specifically through Techiman before making their way to their present location in western Ghana.

[49] Now broken up into multiple districts, the original Sefwi region is approximately 1,864 square miles, a bit larger than the US state of Rhode Island. Due to its size, it has since been broken into 3 districts: Sefwi Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai, Sefwi-Wiawso, and Sefwi-Akontombra.

[50] While Tindirma (Chapter 1) is in a savannah area near Timbuktu, Ofori did not specify a town name. What is known is that Techiman, directly south of Timbuktu was connected via trade routes. Image from Raymond Mauny, *Tableau Geographique De L'ouest Africain Au Moyen Age D'apres Les Sources Ecrites, La Tradition Et L'archeologie*, (Dakar: Institut Francais d'Afrique Noire, 1961).

[51] Harrison H. Ofori, interview by author, Kojina, Ghana, October 9, 2018.

Mr. Anthony Kwaw, a Sehwi elder and historical contributor to Liberty 92.7, a regional radio station that hosted a program that encouraged listeners to call in with questions regarding the Sehwi past, further elaborated on this desire for peace after years of violence and running and

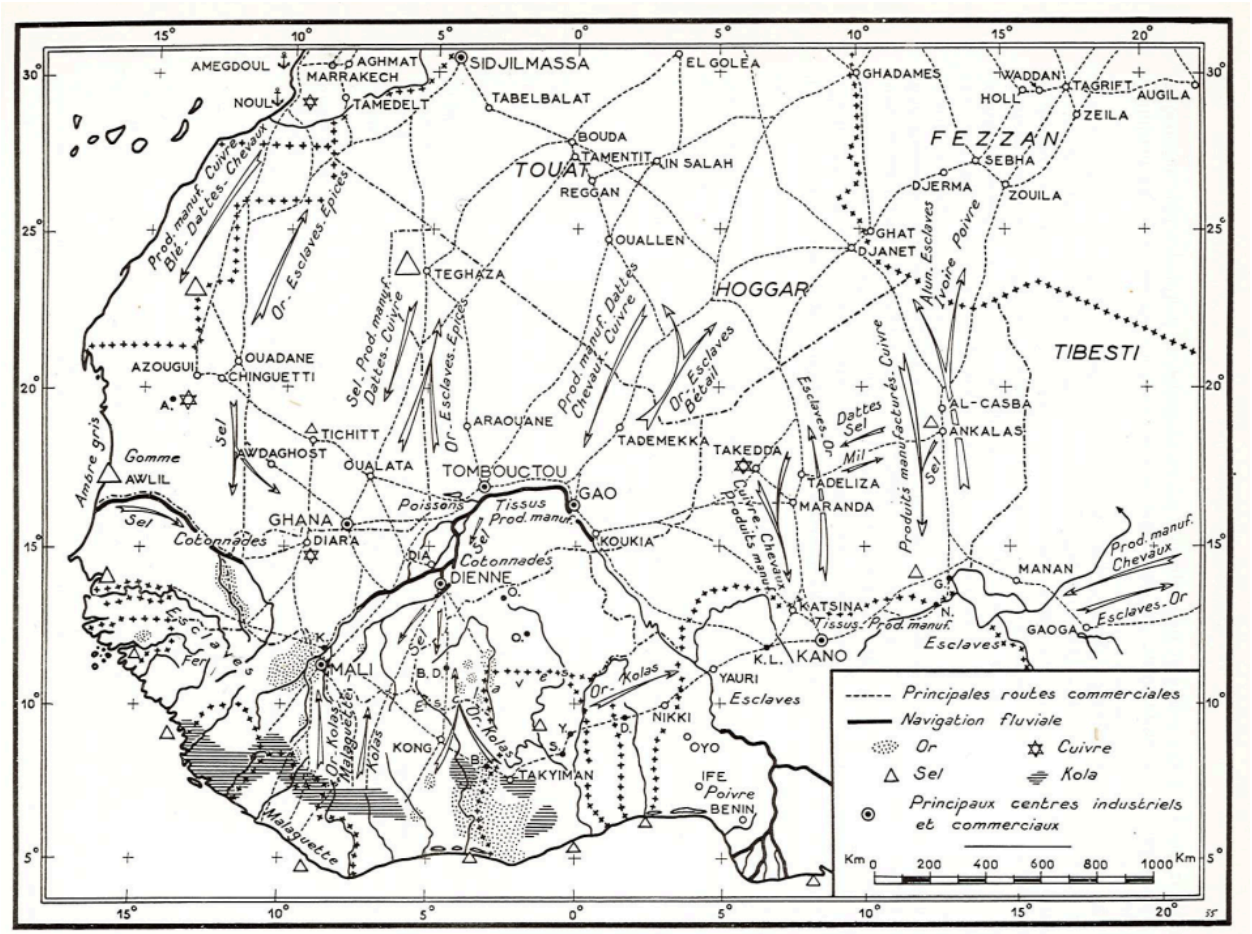

FIG. 55. — L'Ouest africain médiéval au point de vue économique. On notera la multiplicité des routes commerciales, dont la plupart aboutissent en définitive aux régions aurifères ; l'importance du bief fluvial Dienné-Koukia ; l'arrêt de la navigation maritime vers le sud à Noul ; le groupement des principales villes industrielles et commerciales dans le Sahel et le Soudan ; l'importance des produits miniers (or, sel, cuivre) et du commerce des esclaves.

Figure 6 Techiman is located almost directly south from Timbuktu, connected by trade routes, in this map provided by Raymond Mauny. While written as Takyiman, its location is that of Techiman (not Tekyiman, further south).

finding refuge in the forested area of western Ghana.[52] Kwaw explained that the ancestors of the Sehwi inhabited the Gonja empire of northern Ghana in the 17th century, finding refuge from

[52] Mr. Anthony Kwaw, who was 78 at the time I interviewed him, also carried around a well-read copy of Ofori's local publication of the "History of the Sehwi." However, his personal experience of seeing Sehwi traditions disappear during the colonial years and post-independence, when missionaries flocked the region, were also incredibly informative. Anthony Kwaw, interview by author, Dwinase, Ghana, 11 Oct. 2019.

wars further north (Songhai Empire) and extreme Islamic conversions. They participated in the gold trade with Akan states in the south and primarily moved to the Begho area, near Techiman to engage in that trade and outside of the Gonja capital where they were not fully recognized in the community.[53] Not ever fully being able to find peace, Kwaw stated that Sehwi ancestors wanted a space where they could end their fight and stay, looking for a place to settle. From there some moved further south along trade routes and into more densely forested lands, some of which was east out of the Gonja territory into present-day Côte d'Ivoire where Aowin and Anyi peoples lived.[54]

Settling in forested lands was ideal, being a people who were not intimidated by the thickets which also provided isolation and concealment. The forested area (that would become Wiawso) inhabited by these refugees from the north during the contest for power in the early 17th century between the Denkyira and Asante. The eventual defeat of the Denkyira in 1701 resulted in the Asante becoming the most powerful of the Akan groups. The forested lands then fell under the control of the Asantehene, and was used as hunting grounds. This, caused animosity between the Aowin resulting in the Aowin-Asante War of 1715, a war to establish control over a gold-rich area but also dominance between two growing kingdoms.[55] The Sehwi loyalties were first to those residing previously in these forested spaces, who were from the southern Aowin rulers who welcomed newcomers to grow their own kingdom and influence, as well as cultivate the forest and its resources.[56] However, never being fully incorporated into Aowin, when the Asantehene

[53] While Begho was less referenced, Techiman always came up in oral histories.

[54] Anthony Kwaw, interview by author, Dwinase, Ghana, 11 Oct. 2019.

[55] Daaku,vol. 1, vi.

[56] Gadzepko, 30.

offered his hunting lands for loyalty, the Sehwi, who were already taking refuge in the wooded areas, took the opportunity. The uncultivated grounds had provided added protection from a Gonja cavalry — fierce warriors on horseback who would be challenged in navigating the dense forest. In addition, the land could be mined for gold thereby allowing the refugees to rely upon already honed skills that could support their own community while contributing to the royal purse of their new protectors. Not wanting to lose the protection the area had been providing and having never been fully incorporated into the Aowin, Sehwi allied with the Asante to defend the Asante border to the Aowin.[57]

The Aowin, who had been (and continue to be) the Sehwi neighbors to the east and south, most notably impressed linguistic influence on the Sehwi dialect, a dialect incomprehensible to Twi speakers[58] Yet, as Daaku points out, while there was at one time an alliance with the Aowin and are linguistic commonalties with the Aowin, the Sehwi are distinctly not derivative of Aowin peoples.[59] Additionally, the Sehwi were never fully included within the Akan even though they have integrated various cultural elements of the Akan.[60] Daaku explains that the area inhabited by the Sehwi "since the middle of the seventeenth century…served as a centre of refuge for people escaping from the political centralization policies of their neighbours to the north and

[57] Daaku, x-xii.

[58] Whereas Twi is understood and spoken by Sehwi speakers, a result of the imperial legacy of the Ashanti empire and Akan influence.

[59] Daaku, vii.

[60] See Nkansa-Kyeremateng 1990. While the history is regarding the Kwawu, it speaks to various identifiers of Akan groups including a holy day, totem, and food restrictions.

east," including those residing in Techiman.[61] While Awowin did own part of the "vast" land, after the Awoin-Asante War, Sehwi were given part to inhabit. [62]

Locating Sefwi

Sefwi Wiawso and Bibiani/Anwhiaso/Bekwai were originally uninhabited lands. Overtime, Sefwi developed into three distinct regions: Anhwiaso, Wiawso, and Bekwai; with Sehwi associated mostly with Wiawso. Anwhiaso was the first area, in the forested region of Bibiani and Wenchi—regions teeming with gold. Per Ofori, Anhwiaso was first settled by a few migrant families, then others, largely Sehwi, came to join the emerging settlement. Upon the development of Anhwiaso and the growing Sehwi population, Wioso was established as a Sehwi locale, a product of being asked by those first in Anhwiaso to settle elsewhere and being specifically pointed to the Wiawso area. While Wiawso did have some indigenes (most likely Anyi), the collective move of the Sehwi to the hilltop of Wiawso resulted sometime after the establishment of Anwhiaso, with some inhabitants there sometime before the 17th century.[63] Now having a place of their own, the Sehwi increased their settlement and reputation becoming known for being strong and a place of refugeeship for others who sought protection. Their strategic location on a hilltop with 360-degree views of the valleys and landscape below allowed for ideal surveillance and the offensive upper hand to any encroaching attacks. This capacity to prevent attempted coups and land seizures generated a reputation of an impenetrable fortress

[61] Daaku, vol.1, v.

[62] Daaku, vol. 2, 2.

[63] Harrison H. Ofori, interview by author, Asawinso Senior High (Kojina, Ghana), Oct 9 2018.

protected by strategic and skillful warriors.[64] So much so, that the legendary Ebiri Moro was believed to have been Sehwi due to his military prowess…a belief that was later revealed to be rumor with his origins in Aowin, and he Anyi.[65] Yet, the security and peace that the geographically advantageous settlement harnessed, as well as a culture of protection and acceptance of refugees, attracted other Akan peoples who came to live there. But, after some fighting from non-Sehwi peoples regarding rules and customs, non-Sehwis broke away and moved to a third region: Bekwai. While Bekwai is a part of the geographical region of Sefwi, it is described by Ofori and others as not "really Sehwi" based on the populace who ended up settling there after breaking away from the Sehwi of Wiawso.[66]

Sefwi Wiawso became a place for migrants and refugees who did not interfere with the majority of the Sehwi, although they did have an impact. F. P. Holtsbaum, a colonial official wrote of Wiawso, "the social and political systems of Sefwi have been much influenced by the immigrants."[67] As seen above, those who had allegiances to Akan culture were not compatible with the Sehwi haven that was being established. This resulted in the Sehwi settlement of Wiawso which did not comply with the dominant Akan culture of Anwhiaso, and resulted in the later Bekwai

Figure 7 Image of Hendrik Vroom, who travelled to the Sefwi Wiawso in 1892.

[64] The Denkyira are known to be warriors. Daaku, vol. 1, x-xii.

[65] Daaku,vol. 1, xii. Ebiri Moro was Anyi, but took refuge with the Sehwi. See also, Claude-Hélène Perrot, "Le raid d'Ebiri Moro contre Kumasi, la capitale ashanti," Cultures Et Développement : Revue Internationale Des Sciences Du Développement Vol. 16 No. 3/4 (1984), 537-552; also ,Claude-Hélène Perrot, "Ebiri Moro was a great Anyi warrior at the beginning of the 18th century," Afrique Histoire U. S: The Quarterly Magazine of African History, vol. 4, no. 3 (1989), p. 26-32.

[66] Harrison H. Ofori, interview by author, Asawinso Senior High (Kojina, Ghana), Oct 9 2018.

[67] Holtsbaum, 76-94.

residents to leave Wiawso. In order to facilitate the preservation of their own unique customs as well as a place of protection for those without community, the Sehwi living in Wiawso were keen on keeping their town inaccessible. Lack of access meant greater ability to avoid a physical or cultural overtake. In 1967, historian A. K. Mensah-Brown wrote:

> Sefwi Land has always preserved its cultural traditions substantially unadulterated, in spite of its contact with the West, especially through colonial administration, for more than fifty years… In the past, for over forty years, progress and trade had been greatly hampered by lack of transportation and adequate means of communication. Everything coming into or leaving the district had to be headloaded… They guard their culture jealously[68]

Complaint of Wiawso's accessibility emerges in the archival record for over a century. Hendrik Vroom (*Figure 7*), was a Euro-African born in Elmina (southern Ghana coast) who served as a District Commissioner throughout the now Western and Western North regions of Ghana.[69] During his tenure as the District Commissioner of Tarkwa (and Eastern Wassa) from 1889-1893, Vroom travelled throughout the Sefwi area and wrote a detailed account of his observations there.[70] In a letter dated Sept 6, 1892, Vroom described the "three chiefdoms" of Sefwi: Bekwai, Anwhiaso, and Wiawso.[71] He distinguished the differences between the three townships based on their history, loyalties, and visibility via access with roads (*Figure 8*).[72] He writes:

[68] A. K. Mensah-Brown, "An African Chiefdom in Modern Ghana." *Présence Africaine*, no. 62 (1967): 94–120, 94-95.

[69] Doortmont Michel Doortmont and Charles Francis Hutchison, *The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities by Charles Francis Hutchison: A Collective Biography of Elite Society in the Gold Coast Colony*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 429.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Vroom spells Wiawso as "Wyawusu" PRAAD ADM 11/1130.

[72] Image from 1948, where one "Class 1" road provides access, from file regarding concession lines for timber extraction between Glikstens West Africa Limited and The Caribbean Lumber Co., WRG 3/10/581.

> Although our treaty[73] with Sefwhi was apparently signed with Wyawusu only, the Bekwai and Awiansu recognize our supremacy…In ages gone by, Sefwhi was under the sway of Denkira; with the fall of Denkira it became part of Ashante Kingdom until its breaking up after the defeat of Ashante in 1874. The present interference of King Inkwantabisa[74] with Sefwhi matters is an attempt to recover renewed influence in the country.[75]

Vroom's complaint about Sefwi is also its visibility and access, making note of the density of the forest and the precipitousness of its elevation, "Towards Sefwhi the country gradually becomes more difficult Near Wyawusu it consists for the most part of hills several hundred feet in height. The forest is thickly wooded and the undergrowth almost impenetrable."[76] Beyond the reclusive location of Sefwi Wiawso, Vroom also noted those who inhabited the township. He writes:

> I wish here to call attention to the desirability of some steps being taken by the Government to protect trade coming from countries behind Sefwi. The present trade route is infested by certain doubtful characters (Ashantee refugees and half-educated natives) who taking advantage of the ignorance and cowardly natives of the traders from the interior go about panyarring or seizing persons and their goods to settle claims most imaginary and which these have nothing to do with."[77]

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[73] This is in reference to the Sefwi Treaty of 1887. Similar treaties, like the Treaty of Adanse, were signed in Europe with no participation by local actors (similar to Berlin Conference). Neighboring Gyaman attempted to make agreements with the French and British, where they contested rule until the region was split between the two in 1895. See, Jonqil Van, "The Rise of British Jurisdiction," *African Diaspora ISPs,* Paper 39 (1998), http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/african_diaspora_isp/39; See also, Okrah Yaw Kennedy, *A History of British Gyaman 1874-1957*, Dissertation, University of Cape Coast, 2012.

[74] This is in reference to Nana Nkwantabisa who later fought in the Yaa Asantewaa war for Ashanti independence from British colonial rule. See Agyeman-Duah J, and Ivor Wilks, *Ashanti Stool Histories*, (Legon: Institute of African Studies University of Ghana, 1963-67).

[75] PRAAD ADM 11/1130.

[76] PRAAD ADM 11/1130. Interestingly, descriptions of Wiawso both quoted above" were bracketed with a note to retract from the record. Along with complaints of the density of the lands were tethered to disappointment in the ease of access, where Vroom was highly critical of the road that was to be used — an artery that could not be traversed by any vehicle and required him to access Sehwi by foot. Perhaps, these descriptions reflect the failure of British influence both politically and infrastructurally compared to the other Sehwi townships that were better examples of colonial victories.

[77] PRAAD ADM 11/1130.

Vroom's mention of refugees of the Ashanti, who at this time were still vying for their independence from British colonial rule, can be read here as those under the protection of the enemy Ashanti and more importantly currying allegiance. Noting this isolated place as a location where refugees operate is consistent with the history of refuge articulated by many in the historical record as well as oral histories provided presently. It also conveys the transmission of Sehwi in a dense and hilly area that was difficult to access, a strategy to avoid detection and capture.

Roadways were a thorn in the side of colonial administrators and companies that were operating in the area trying to move resources (mainly timber), quickly, from the hinterlands to the coast to load on ships. P. A. Roberts wrote that Wiawso was mostly isolated and poor because of lack of roads from 1914-1930.[78] By 1947, colonial records capture the frustration articulating that because the roads are only used to transport goods, not people, locals are of no help in contributing to the building and maintenance of the road out of Wiawso.[79] The colonial records do nod to the pedestrian network of footpaths, and "bush tracks" that covered the

Figure 8 From Vrooms account of the arteries for movement in the Wiawso area. The solid brown line is a "class 1" road. The dashed lines are known footpaths.

[78] P A Roberts, "The Sefwi Wiawso Riot of 1935: The Deposition of an Omanhene in the Gold Coast," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 53, no. 2 (1983): 25-46, 31.

[79] PRAAD CSO 21/4/67.

area and utilized by Sehwi and other migrants.[80] This system of transportation, known by locals and slowly mapped by colonialists, were utilized by the Sehwi to move goods and peoples, much to the chagrin of British and French officers, but also the Ashanti —all of which the Sehwi precluded absolute control and influence. One such footpath, known as the "Ankaso Footpath" fed into the Sefwi area and used as late as 1951 per the archival records.[81]

Refugees also came by way of colonial conscriptions in the Great War. Being near the Ivorian border[82] many Africans attempted to avoid being drafted into a war not of their doing by crossing colonial boundaries, and if caught claiming indigeneity in British lands (to avoid French conscription) while also sharing their fears with British agents regarding abuses by the French to acquire soldiers. The District Commissioner of Sehwi, Howard Ross, on January 30, 1917 confirmed his insistence that refugees not be protected, writing:

> Active measures were taken to cope with this immigration directly it started. All chiefs and headmen of villages were informed through the Omanhin that the offering of facilities to these people evading their military obligations was tantamount to aiding the enemy. Patrols of civil and Preventive Police have been moving all along the frontier villages distributing instructions and prevailing upon natives to return. I have received a letter from the French Commandant at Indenie asking me to return 9 able-bodied young men who were hiding at Yakrakokrom and have sent police together with a native to demonstrate to these misguided people the error of their ways and to persuade them to return to their native land and national obligations. The whole movement into Sefwi has been checked.[83]

[80] Roberts does not acknowledge these transportation networks.

[81] WRG 3/5/1897. It is unknown if the "Ankaso" is a colonial spelling or derivative in Enkassa, as van Dantzig made note that one of the spellings of the Enkassa was Ankasa. If Manding/Dioula influence, this would translate to "our house" reminiscent of Ofori's comment of the Sehwi ancestors moving as a "house" and group. See van Dantzig 1980.

[82] Sefwi Wiawso is approximately 100 km from the Ivorian border.

[83] ANS 5/F/9.

In a letter dated February 9, 1917, John Maxwell, the commissioner of the Western Province, detailed the testimonies of elder Ivorians who fled as well as conveying that many persons of interest were unable to be found as local leadership, who were advised to not provide refuge for such migrants, such as those discussed by Sehwi District Commissioner Howard Ross. Maxwell would go on to explain that police could not find the individuals who were listed in French telegrams. Maxwell reports that the local chiefs surmised that "they (refugees) have possibly changed their names for a while" in explaining their inability to locate such persons. Maxwell reported to the French that under his authority he told local leaders "that the people (refugees) cannot be permitted to settle in the District."[84] Yet, he explained there was not much he could do to enforce the return of individuals, stating "it is of little use deporting these men across the frontier (they will not go willingly), unless the French are going to be there to receive them as they would merely return by one of the countless bush tracks."[85]

The language and questioning of native and indigenous was quickly used by colonialists to determine if true desertion was taking place. In a 12-page hand-written "petit memoire" included in a colonial file from 1918 at the Archives National du Senegal regarding the "Exodes en Gold Coast" an unknown (not signed) author takes up the question of origins to consider the responsibility of descendants of various ethnic groups to fight on behalf of the French. In the account dated 6 November 1918 from Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, this "little essay" describes the heritage of a group of refugees that were incorporated into the Ashanti having migrated from

[84] ANS 5/F/9 and ANS 5/F/14 (on conscription concerns and English-French tensions on borders).

[85] ANS 5/F/9.

elsewhere, remaining as an indivisible group and practicing uterine transmission, later moving to the Sauwi area of Southwestern Ghana, before being split into two due to colonial boundaries.[86]

Policing the area was difficult, as the file indicates Sefwi was a contested area between the French and English with the English stating that there must have been a miscommunication from the Anglo French Boundary Commission of 1892, where colonial agents must have been confused, blaming a "misapprehension that Aowin and Brissam are interchangeable terms, and that Indenié and Assikaso are independent territories, must have existed in the minds of the English representatives who drew up the Agreement."[87] In addition to determining whose law should be abided in the area, it was agreed that Sehwi took actions "outside the law" where the District Commissioner had to result in "taking forcible measures to deport" as "local feeling is opposed to the immigration."[88] Meanwhile, the Sefwi, housing these runaways and thus keeping soldiers from the war front made them, in the mind of colonialists, aiding and abetting their enemy.[89] Yet again, the "bush tracks" and foot paths that led into and out of Sefwi were instrumental in evading detection and the grasp of an imperial force.[90]

Ultimately, Sehwi was a place of "strangers" the vocabulary for non-Akan persons living in the British Gold Coast and former Ashanti empires. Colonial records would classify these

[86] ANS 5/F/9. This long document has discussions of many areas bordering Ivory Coast. Written in cursive, the writing appears to say Sauwi at times and other Sanwi, both regions and peoples would be of interest to French colonialists. In a document dated July 1917, it is typed as Sauwi. For the reference above, I determined it was also Sauwi due to the descriptions used, including the proximity to the Tano River, presence of Dioula and Anyi, as well as the symbol of elephants.

[87] Accra PRAAD MFA 4/8.

[88] There is complaint of those they are sheltering being forced back across boundaries. Ibid.

[89] From Howard Ross "ces facilités offertes aux émigrés équivalent à une aide donnée à l'ennemi" (*trans.* "the facilities offered to immigrants are equivalent to aid given to the enemy"). PRAAD MFA 4/8.

[90] The "silent trade" is discussed in some detail in Chapter 1.

persons, as “aliens” and the files on “alien communities” cover known migrants who often were coming to the colonial courts for housing and labor protections.[91]

Threat to Sehwi Customs

In spite of being incorporated into the Akan lands and adopted into the Asante ethnic group, the Sehwi still maintained facets of their ancestral heritage. This, as addressed earlier, resulted in the creation of Sefwi Wiawso after being given Sefwi Anwhiaso as Sehwi ancestors did not want to comply to Akan customs. Those who remained in Anwhiaso are understood to be Akan migrants, with Wiawso being Sehwi. Having a majority Sehwi, influence from Akan dwindled and customs of Sehwi ancestors were more easily able to be maintained. Yet, as part of Asante lands, the Asantehene was involved in determining who would be the Omanhene of Wiawso. At times given the recognition of the “son of the Asantehene”[92] it is unlikely that the Asantehene sired the Omanhene by birthright, but would have by custom. The Omanhene of Wiawso would protect the interests of the Asantehene all the while maintaining peace and protection with the townspeople of Wiawso. In facilitating loyalty to the Asantehene, land was given before a stool, with the stool being in the hands of someone the Asantehene could trust.[93] The Sefwi Wiawso Traditional Council identifies six Omanhene that were appointed since Sefwi Wiawso was

[91] Sekondi PRAAD has many records on alien communities in Tarkwa, which was a buzzing area of international and intranational trade. Migrants from other British territories such as Lebanon and Syria worked in Tarkwa along with Nigerian, Malian, and others from across the West African landscape. Tarkwa was also a prime destination for international visitors, where Sekondi received more diplomats than Accra, and Tarkwa as always part of the Gold Coast tour. Colonialists wanted to take visitors and diplomats into Wiawso, but the roads prevented the travel. So, Bibiani Gold Mines were often the point of destination en route to Kumasi to show gold mining in the region (where many Sehwi labored). WRG 24 files,.

[92] son of Asantehene” ARG 6/3/31.

[93] WRG 62/1/180.

recognized as a state in 1705 until recognizing British sovereignty.[94] While British rule was being acknowledged by those in Sefwi districts, Sefwi Wiawso still showed some loyalty to the Asantehene, and this was representative by giving the Asantehene voice in who was in possession of the stool.[95] The seventh Omanhene of Sefwi Wiawso, Kwanim Tano I, who popularly ruled from 1900-1932, sent a letter in 1922 to British District Commissioner to convey the history of the land he governed to aid in the decision over an ongoing land dispute. He acknowledged the land was indeed given to Sehwi ancestors with someone representing the Asantehene to govern. Kwanim Tano I relayed how the Sehwi of this town[96] came to Sefwi for protection, where "these strangers were received" before then "Sefwi Wiawso was subordinate to Ashanti" with a "son of the Asantehene was on Sefwi Wiawso stool and that was customary practice."[97] This arrangement resulted in over 200 years of peace, until 1932 when the installment and rule of Kwanim Tano II caused much grief amongst the Sehwi townspeople of Wiawso.

"On Saturday we don't beat the drum," said Samuel Mintah a Sehwi elder on the southwestern base of the hillside of Wiawso.[98] Saturday, was the Sehwi holy day, a day that was

[94] The latest, the 13th Omanhene of Sefwi Wiawso is Katakyie Kwasi Bumangama II, being enstooled in 2014.The Sefwi Wiawso Traditional Council (SWTC) also recognize other leaders of the Sehwi, before the recognition in 1705, but are not officially appointed by the Asantehene. The Appendix has a list from the SWTC of the chiefs of Sefwi Wiawso since the creation of the state.

[95] Recall Hendrik Vroom's letter that complained that Wiawso, even though the treaty of 1887 recognized British rule, Bekwai and Anwhiaso were the only townships that acted upon it, with Wiawso still withholding absolute support. PRAAD ADM 11/1130.

[96] The letter is referencing the smaller town of Sefwi Debiso, just west of Wiawso, and under its authority. ARG 6/3/31.

[97] Ibid. The document also mentions the "caretaker of lands was always appointed by the Asantehene." And in 1935, during a land dispute the Asantehene was attempting to claim the land was attached to the stool, not just in governing, but in, essentially, owning it, attempting to say that it was given by the government once Asantehene Prempeh was captured. Another reason, Kwanim Tano II was despised by the Sehwi.

[98] Samuel Mintah, interview by author, New Adhiembra, Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. 24 Aug 2010.

to be observed. Colonial ethnographers and administrators, as well as Ghanaian historians have acknowledged this is the day the Sehwi observe. Others identify the river Sabore as the local deity, with Saturday being Sabore's day.[99] F. P. Holtsbaum discussed Saturday being special to the people of Wiawso from its inception. Wiawso, per Holtsbaum means "to be on the sun" from when the origins of the townspeople planted seed on the hill Wiawso presently sits and asked for favor, where the sun shone directly on the hilltop, while the valleys that surrounded remained in darkness. The tale also states that God had favor on the people of Sehwi and commanded that Saturday be set aside as "his special day" where offerings could be made.[100] On this day, there was to be "no travel on Saturday, no adorning of oneself, no playing of drums/music."[101] So sacred is the day in Sehwi tradition that when Kwanim Tano II attended a funeral on Saturday it was noted in the list of grievances as to why he was no longer fit to rule at Sefwi Wiawso having offended those he was sent to represent.[102] Although he was on the stool for a short three years,

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[99] There are many discussions about the Sabore. I, too, asked about the Sabore's importance and while it was recognized as a place where fetish was given and important to ancestors there were varying stories as to its significance and continual usage. The river Tano, too, is very important to the Tanoso and Anyi and it is possible that the Sabore became the Sehwi equivalent. Others such as filmmaker Gabrielle Zilkha and historian Nathan Devir have have inquired if it is like the Sambation river, which is believed to be the boundary of which the Lost Tribes were exiled beyond, with no convincing results. Discussions of such presently seem to be a matter of feedback from this idea being introduced by outsiders. Ultimately, it is a significant river in Sehwi customs and landscape and has taken on a variety of meanings to the interethnic population that now lives in the Sefwi region. Most likely, it's reverence started amongst the peoples who would later establish Sefwi Bekwai who settled near the river, and also have a story of coming from the ground. They are not Sehwi. See, Daaku, ix.

[100] Holtsbaum 1925.

[101] Holtsbaum, 87.

[102] Kwanim Tano II only ruled for 3 years (1932-35)—was he the controversial figure, sometimes identified as "unpopular," "wicked" and "unpatriotic." WRG 62/1/180. In fact, one of the charges against him when calling for his destoolment was for attending a funeral on Saturday. Charge 6 of 15. "For attending funeral custom on Saturday. A holiday on which you as Paramount Chief are forbidden by Sefwi native customs to go out." 29 Oct. 1935. PRAAD CSO 21/23/29.

after being removed in 1935, his name is recalled often by Sehwi who make note of his impact on Sehwi customs. Joseph Armah recounted:

> the older chief was called Nana Kwanim Tano[103] in this place and after he died his nephew succeeded him as the king. He is called Nana Kwanim Tano II, he was a Roman Catholic, yes, he was a Christian. So, when he became the chief, he said that this time, once they are Christians,[104] it was said in their New Testament that if you are, if you are the followers of Jesus Christ you can do whatever you like so that this time you have to go to farm on Saturdays, they have to celebrate their funerals on Saturday, they have to do whatever they like on Saturdays. It's not because of that paramount chief, these laws are not still there, but because he was a Christian he let them stop all these.[105]

This disturbance caused by Kwanim Tano II allowing persons, arguably non-Sehwi to break the observance of Sehwi descendants, in Sefwi Wiawso is still remembered as a time that severely threatened the customs of Sehwi. This would be further and more radically jeopardized when Nkrumah's Convention People's Party used Christianity to build camaraderie amongst Ghanaians.[106]

Kwanim Tano II's antics reverberated to the colonial offices raising an eyebrow as Sefwi Wiawso had not required much attention regarding local politics. **"**Until recently, Sefwi Wiawso has been one of the most peaceful, albeit, primitive States in the Colony" reported Arnold Hodson, who served as Governor of the Gold Coast from 1934-41.[107] The decision to destool Kwanim Tano II was surprising and historically unprecedented, as "the customs of Ashanti, of which Sefwi at one time formed part, forbade a deposition."[108] While Hodson seems to believe

[103] Nana Kwanim Tano I protected the Sehwi customs and was seen as one of the best rulers, especially based on the disruption of what would come after. He was on the stool from 1900-1932.

[104] Others stated that when Kwanim Tano II converted, he made all the Sehwi convert.

[105] Joseph Armah, interview by author, New Adhiembra, Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, 25 Aug 2010.

[106] PRAAD CSO 21/23/213.

[107] Letter dated 20 December 1935. PRAAD CSO 21/23/38.

[108] Ibid.

this was a result of Ashanti custom alone, it also is illustrative that the Asantehene had power over who was appointed to the stool of the lands he conceded to the Sehwi.

In calling for the destoolment of Kwanim Tano II, Sehwi persons identified all of his shortcomings and how he failed to be eligible for the position both on Sehwi terms and Ashanti. As mentioned previously, his attendance of a funeral on a Saturday was gravely offensive. The Asantehene had a certain responsibility to be respectful of those he governed as well as their customs.[109] However, part of being an Omanhene by Ashanti customs required the individual to be fully whole, that meant he could not be missing a digit, even a cut of the finger per some records, and certainly not circumcised. Thus in the list of reasons why he should be removed from the stool, petitioners[110] claimed that Kwanim Tano II had been circumcised, proving he was not a fit to be an Asantehene, even implying he was a "stranger" as it was migrants who observed such a custom and not Akan or the "son of the Asantehene."[111]

By 1935, Kwanim Tano II was removed by two of his most vocal opponents. First, Nana Kwame Nkuah who ruled from 1935 to 1945 and then Nana Kofi Ahenkorah who ruled from 1945-1952 and saw the biggest challenge to Sehwi practices not via Europeans proselytizing but members of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party.

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[109] PRAAD CSO 21/23/29.

[110] Kofi Wuo, identified as the "Chief of Strangers" was a large advocate amongst the petitioners and was a dear friend and advisor to Kwanim Tano I. It is this relationship that undoubtedly kept the Omanhene appointed by the Asantehene accountable to the Sehwi during his reign. PRAAD CSO 21/23/29. PA Roberts identifies him as an Asante man, he is also reported to be "nothing" amongst convicts of Kumasi. Strangers are seen as second-class citizens, where oaths cannot be made in their presence and they have less rights than those Akan. Roberts, "The Sefwi Wiawso Riot," 31-33. For more on strangers, see WRG 3, 8, 15, and 24 files (Sekondi PRAAD), and ARG 1 (Kumasi PRAAD).

[111] PRAAD CSO 21/23/29. On circumcision amongst strangers, see MAG files (Sekondi PRAAD), and CSO files (Accra PRAAD). On circumcision observed by Sehwi, see Daaku. Also, Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

The spread of Christianity in Ghana spread slowly. C P Groves, in *The Planting of Christianity in Africa,"* states that the "third opportunity of Christianity in Africa" was in the nineteenth century when two other missions were not successful.[112] Harris W. Mobley who has written about Ghanaian Christianity identifies these three attempts: the first wave of Christianity from 1471 (marking the arrival of Portuguese on the southern Atlantic coast) and the second , from 1737 to 1828.[113] The Portuguese established relations with the Ghanaians, specifically by Diogo de Azambuja and made efforts to proselytize the faith, but their business interests paired with their methods were not amenable to Ghanaians.[114] The Dutch never attempted to convert, only providing faith services and resources to Dutch subjects. The second attempt within this period came from the French Capuchins in 1633, but to no avail.[115] Ghanaians were well aware the main interests of Europeans were political and economic: primarily access to gold and humans, of which Ghanaians "remembered that the Church had legitimated this traffic."[116] The second wave, Mobley identifies, was the "Protestant Pioneers" of the mid 18th to mid 19th centuries. However, the church, primarily the Anglican Church, and its representatives remained close to the colonial centers "as their primary concern [was] the pastoral care of the colonists and only secondarily the evangelization of indigenous peoples."[117]

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[112] Charles Pelham Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, Vol. 1 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), vii-viii.

[113] Harris W. Mobley, *The Ghanaian's Image of the Missionary: an Analysis of the Published Critiques of Christian Missionaries by Ghanaians, 1897-1965*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970). 11.

[114] Who came with masons (unknown if they were Jews: i.e. Sijilmasa and Timbuktu). On Muslim infidels the church created here upset, see Wiltgen, Ralph M. Wiltgen, *Gold Coast Mission History 1471-1880*, (Techny Ill: Divine Word Publications, 1956).

[115] Mobley, 11-17.

[116] Mobley, 17.

[117] Mobley, 19.

Among others, came the Presbyterians, Methodists, the Basel and Bremen Missions, all with an interest in proselytizing to the native population and becoming a Christian powerhouse in the colony by the latter half of the 19th century.[118] This "third" and most successful wave had a slow start as seen with the Basel Mission who reported the "failure to make even one statistical convert" by 1840, eight years after their arrival.[119] By the turn of the century, numbers were increasing but the authenticity of conversion was a concern. Amongst the Basel Mission Papers from Kumasi, a letter dated October 19, 1908 shared fears of locals "feigning Christianity" resulting in poor representation. A letter from a local chief to the reverend, tattling on an individual who was proclaiming his conversion, stated that this accused poser "is simply screening himself with Christianity and doing secret injury. I only beg to ask you if Christians are going on in such ways what will my heathen subjects do or think?"[120]

The lack of concern for determining authenticity of Christianity may have been generated by the competition between the churches, working to extend their territory and increase their numbers. This race for souls was recorded in the archive with leaders of the church reminding others of supposed spiritual territories. On December 8, 1905, a letter from the General Superintendent of the Wesleyan Methodist Society wrote to Bishop Hamlyn of the Anglican Church to remind him that while they were all working towards the same end, like colonial borders before them, church lines had been drawn and it was necessary to respect them. While seemingly salivating at the "untouched regions around" the Ashanti area, specifically beyond Tarkwa and near Kumasi, the author encouraged the bishop to proselytize in hopes to combat the

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[118] Mobley, 21-30.

[119] Mobley, 21-22.

[120] PRAAD EC 9/1.

spread of Islam from the north. However, clearer was his warning for the Anglicans to stay in their metaphorical lane. The letter explains:

> I trust that you will absolutely dismiss from your mind any thought that we regard your work as in opposition to ours, or that we do not welcome the additional force in the salvation of West Africa which you represent. There is, as I have said repeatedly, room for all in the great untouched regions around. I sincerely hope you may plant the Cross therein ere the advent of the Cresent increases the already overwhelming difficulties of the situation. … I trust that in forming your plans [to prosleytize] it will be possible to avoid overlapping, both for the sake of districts still heathen and that native Christians may not be puzzled by two sets of British Missionaries, as I fear they may be. There is also another reason which you will appreciate, the W.M. S. has spent tens of thousands of pounds, and many valuable lives have been lost in preparing for the harvest we are now reaping for our Blessed Lord, and which we hope to reap, and I feel convinced that you would not wish that in this case one should sow, and another reap.[121]

The letter also reveals the years spent in establishing relationships in "preparing for the harvest," while also indicating that a heterogenous Christian landscape, especially in more rural areas, was not encouraged. For areas such as Sefwi Wiawso, that remained isolated, there were not many churches or Christians. Stefano Boni writes in 1923, there were 2 churches and 476 Christians reported in the census.[122]

Roman Catholic Kwanim Tano II in 1935 attempted to radically shift the Sehwi haven when attempting to make all those he governed convert to Christianity.[123] Yet, opponents Nana Kwame Nkuah (1935-45) and Nana Kofi Ahenkorah (1945-52) were able to return to the "peaceful" governance that had marked Sefwi Wiawso for over 200 years. Ahenkorah was able

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[121] PRAAD EC 3/2.

[122] Boni, "History and Ideology," 2007: 48. By 2010, the census showed 81.7% of the population was Christian (113,699) across Catholic, Protestant (Anglican, Lutheran, etc.), Presbyterian/Charismatic and "other" Christian affiliates. Around 9% identified as Muslim (12,669), less than 1% as Traditionalist (960), and 1.5% "Other" (2,056) which remained undefined. Ghana, *2010 Population & Housing Census Report: District Analytical Report: Sefwi Wiawso,* (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, 2014), 32. The form says to "specify" on other but the results are not included.

[123] This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, as he was the first threat to Sehwi customs in living memory, and is often credited with the discarding of Sehwi practices.

to honor the role of the stool to preserve and respect the Sehwi customs. Surprisingly, his greatest challenge would come via fellow Christian Ghanaians like his predecessor before him. Sefwi Wiawso had successfully remained, for the most part, isolated from churches and hordes of European missionaries, having only a minority of Christians towards the beginning of Kwanim Tano II's rule. Due to the continual difficulty of access to Sefwi Wiawso, churches and missionaries came via Sefwi inhabitants. Ghanaians more familiar with the geographical, historical, and cultural terrain were able to build rapport and camaraderie quicker than *obrunis*, white foreigners. The rise of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP), alongside Christian philosophy, ultimately became the greatest challenge to Sehwi practices as they worked to create a uniform Ghanaian culture for the purpose of national solidarity. As Ghanaians representing the CPP travelled via local channels into Sefwi Wiawso, ideals of the CPP and a unified Ghana flowed swiftly into the collective spaces of the town. Yet, the method of dissemination that worked in urban areas where churches were plentiful was more challenging in rural areas that had maintained ancestral practices.[124] Darrell Reeck argued that the CPP was able to utilize religious networks and graft political ideology onto existing humanitarian philosophies espoused by the church. Reeck writes, "Since many of his followers were Christian and Muslim, Nkrumah was able to turn to the symbolic resources of those religions. He generally attempted to subsume and instrumentally manipulate their symbols for nationalistic purposes." [125] On the importance of utilizing these symbols to infiltrate an already budding network of organized unity, Rupe Simms notes "As president of the new nation, Nkrumah initiated a process of nation-building in which his use of

[124] WRG 62/1/180.

[125] Darrell Reeck, "The Castle and the Umbrella: Some Religious Dimensions of Kwame Nkrumah's Leadership Role in Ghana." *Africa Today* 23, no. 4 (1976): 7–27, 15.

Christianity was central."[126] This was also employed on groups that did not identify with these two growing Abrahamic faiths, as Simms writes:

> However, at the same time, two elements of the Gold Coast society of the mid-twentieth century compelled the C.P.P. to use Christianity as an instrument of counter-hegemony - a philosophical shift patently contrary to both Marxist socialism and Gramscian sociology. First, because the masses regarded Christianity as an essential element of their daily lives, the Party had to make it a central feature of its political philosophy in order to win and maintain their popular support - to not have done so would have been self-defeating. Second, the C.P.P. sought to create a unified nation out of a conglomeration of culturally fragmented ethnic groups artificially assembled by their colonial masters. This situation compelled the Party to utilize Christianity, which was already exerting a unifying influence, as a popular ideology that would create political solidarity and nationwide cooperation.[127]

Nkrumah and his supporters were on a mission to unify and to ensure that the various ethnic cultures did not distract from a singular identity, bolstered by Christianity. Harris Mobley writes that Nkrumah "demanded that missionaries develop a more discriminating attitude toward Ghanaian cultures."[128] While the various cultural traits may have a place, there was a responsibility to unite under the Christian banner, "working together as Christians to build a new world civilization."[129] This "new missionary" as defined by Ako Adjei, who commiserated with his friend Kwame Nkrumah and shared similar political visions, stated in 1944:

> We need missionaries but a new type of missionary. The old type of missionary, whose usefulness lies chiefly in his ability to read and interpret the Bible has no place in the new Africa that is coming into being. The new type of missionaries…are the men and women whom you may permit me to call the 'missionaries of civilization.'[130]

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[126] Rupe Simms, "'I Am a Non-Denominational Christian and a Marxist Socialist:' A Gramscian Analysis of the Convention People's Party and Kwame Nkrumah's Use of Religion." *Sociology of Religion* 64, no. 4 (2003): 463–77.

[127] Simms, 475.

[128] Mobley, 60.

[129] A quote from Dr. Ako Adei, a statesman and close friend who worked and dreamed with Nkrumah. Qtd in Mobley, 60.

[130] Ako Adjei, "Imperialism and Spiritual Freedom: An African View," *The American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (Nov 1944), 189-198; 198. Also quoted in Mobley, 62.

Civilization, like Western education had imparted, shunned antiquated practices that had the potential to divide in difference a human enlightened family. Thus, "missionaries of civilization" to urban youth also harkened to an idea of modernity that eschewed ancestral customs.

In his efforts to defend the customs of Sehwi, Nana Kofi Ahenkorah was ridiculed by CPP 'missionaries.' He and Sehwi persons were made fun of by urban CPP members and a growing number of local enthusiasts who had been persuaded to embrace the modern Ghanaian identity. The CPP, utilizing the symbology and camaraderie of Christian networks, disparaged ancestral practices, as the churches before and alongside them, that did not fit into their nationalist dogma. The harassment by CPP members to conform to this identity and practices was the subject of a petition from the Sefwi Wiawso state signed by Nana Kofi Ahenkorah, the cabinet of chiefs, and elders representing the Sehwi people. The letter, dated November 21 1951, communicates their utter frustration to the changes of customs that were observed uninterrupted up to the days of Kwanim Tano I. Having maintained their practices for so many years by internally handling any threats, the letter summons the assistance of the government to ensure that they are able to continue as they had been for so long. The aggrieved write:

> YOUR petitioners feel the presence of the Convention People's Party in the Sefwi Wiawso state is a menace to the state, Omanhene, Chief and Elders and People as a whole and that it is desirable in the interest of peace and tranquility that this organisation should be completely broken and their supporters driven from the Sefwi Wiawso State. If it had been in ancient times, your Petitioners would have taken the law into their own hands and effected a complete purge of the Convention People's Party from the State but now cannot do so without appealing to the Central Government to cause Enquiries to be made into these allegations and effective steps taken to exterminate this organisation from the Sefwi Wiawso State.[131]

[131] PRAAD, CSO 21/23/213.

The letter also discusses how Sehwi customs are being made fun of,[132] and this has become intolerable. By the next year, Kofi Ahenkorah having witnessed the amping up of CPP and continuing to represent the Sehwi and maintaining favor amongst some not wanting to join the CPP, emphatically writes to the superintendent of the Western Province in Sekondi, sending copies of his letter to the Ministry of Defense & External Affairs, the Commissioner of the Gold Coast Police in Accra and Dunkwa, as well as the Colonial Agent in Wiawso insisting someone come "investigate these cases and eliminate this gestapo method of exacting moneys from people."[133] Depending on who the CPP was supported by in the area, they could wield power away from those in positions acknowledged by the British colonial state; hence, why we see Ahenkorah writing in for support from the colonial offices.[134]

Ahenkorah, in 1952, was replaced by Nana Kwadwo Aduhene II and ruled for 44 years, witnessing the rise and fall of Nkrumah. For Sehwi, he was "unpopular" and "unpatriotic"—for allowing so many changes to occur under his governance. During Aduhene's term, Sehwi saw an increase in changes to their cultural traditions largely brought about by a racheting up of Christian conversions resulting in the dwindling of Saturday reverence with more and more funerals taking place on the sacred day and people travelling and working on their farms in light of a western work week being more and more common. Aduhene supported the CPP and a nationalist Ghana that was the path towards an independent and proud future.[135] Under Aduhene,

[132] The letter makes note of the slaughter of sheep. PRAAD, CSO 21/23/213.

[133] Letter 23 Oct 1952, PRAAD, CSO 21/23/213.

[134] On tensions between state and CPP, see Dennis L. Cohen, "The Convention People's Party of Ghana: Representational or Solidarity Party?" *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 4, no. 2 (1970): 173–94, 180-181.

[135] WRG 62/1/180.

Sehwi practices nearly vanished only taking up residence in the memory of its people. While the finger had been pointed to the impact of Christian missions, it was a nationalist-modernizing mission of the CPP that encouraged people to conform to a singular Ghanaian identity.[136] Thus, institutions that had characteristics that reminded Sehwi of their history garnered interest.

Seventh-day Adventism (SDA) became popular in the Ashanti region of Agona, just northeast of Kumasi, in the early 1900s.[137] Church records dates activity from 1915-1921.[138] According to Ashanti historian Osei Kwadwo, the Chief of Agona Nkwantabisa I fought on the side of the British in the YaaAsantewaa War of 1900 after an oracle informed him to "trust white, and fight with them." As he did not put up a fight, Osei Kwadwo informed that the British trusted him and thus entertained his two requests: honoring the boundaries of his land, and to banish all deities in the land except his own, that gave him the vision. Nkwantabisa I, who descended like many of the Agona state from the Denkyira, known for the warrior personas, and honored Saturday like other Akan groups.[139] Kwadwo informed when the Seventh Day Adventists came to Nkwantabisa I, he recognized their custom and asked all his chiefs to recognize their sect.[140]

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[136] Scholars who have been critical to the rise of Jewish communities in West Africa often associate the emergence of Judaism with a pan-African ideal, returning to ancestral ways. Yet, as demonstrated here, while an Afropositivist ideology came from pan-Africanism, it did not encourage the taking up of various ethnic practices as it was seen as a threat to unity**.** See, Parfitt, *Black Jews,* 2013; and Devir, 2017.

[137] Osei Kwadwo, interview by author, Manhyia Palace, Kumasi, Ghana, Jan. 23, 2019.

[138] Kwame Boakye Kwanin, "Ghana," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, December 04, 2020, (Accessed November 18, 2022), https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=CC1L.

[139] Robert Osei-Bonsu, "Sabbath Observance among the Akan's of Ghana and Its Impact on the Growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana," in *Africa-Asia Journal of Mission & Ministry*, Vol. 7, no. 3 (3-26).

[140] Osei Kwadwo, interview by author, Manhyia Palace, Kumasi, Ghana, Jan. 23, 2019. He stated other Christians had come to him and failed to establish a church, but upon hearing of SDA, Nkwantabisa I had an affinity to their ways.

By 1952, Charles B. Mensah, the first Ghanian ordained as a minister in 1945, and moved to Kumasi by 1952.[141] The weekly periodical of the Seventh Day Adventist Church reported on Mensah's finding when trekking to the Sefwi region:

> In one place in the Sefwi district C. B. Mensah found twenty thousand Sabbath worshipers. However, they were pagans who knew not God but kept that day only through fear and superstition. Then a layman, a trader, moved in and began to preach the gospel to his landlord and neighbors. Later a worker was called for, and today we have thirty-six Seventh-day Adventists there. Laymen and teachers had opened up the Northern Territories, where more than a million pagans and Mohammedans dwell.[142]

Mensah's mission was successful in establishing interest, baptizing 30 persons according to SDA records.[143] However, the mission did not succeed in Sefwi Wiawso with early converts training elsewhere and interest only revived upon their return in the 1970s.[144] While Mensah brought SDA to the region, the practice of Saturday rest was already common by Sehwi who maintained practices. And while other Christian churches were interested in establishing structures and communities, there was yet to be great success, largely due to the difficulty of accessing the area with a poor to no working road. In the article "Develop Sefwi District" in the *Ghanaian Times* on April 20, 1971 the area is accused of being both "backward" and "forward:" the former for not

[141] Emmanuel Dickson Poakwa, "Mensah, Charles Bennet (1918–2008)." *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*. December 04, 2020. Accessed November 19, 2022. https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=EC1B., *also* Kofi Owusu-Mensah, *Saturday God and Adventism in Ghana*, (Frankfurt: a.M.: P. Lang, 1993).

[142] D. V. Cowin, "Gold Coast Constituency Meeting, " in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 129, no. 51 (Dec. 18, 1952). [ASTR]

[143] Frank Osei-Tutu, "Western North Ghana Conference," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, January 29, 2020, (Accessed November 19, 2022), https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=BG7V.

[144] Ibid. The article mentions one individual, Isaac Aidoo, as a founding individual of the Wiawso chapter, also noting growth in Sefwi Sui (the birthplace of the founder of the House of Israel). Aidoo, now a member of the House of Israel, did not stay with SDA, as while it was reminiscent of ancestral customs of Saturday reverence, belief in Jesus was not complimentary to the belief of one God, a Supreme God, of his ancestors. Isaac Aidoo, interview by author, New Adhiembra, Sefwi Wiawso Ghana, January 4, 2019.

being developed in relation to roads and infrastructure, and the latter recognizing how much the region has contributed to the nation due to its wealth in resources. The article laments the state of the roads, giving an example of how even a "good driver" would take a minimum of 3 hours to drive the 18-mile distance between Awaso to Sefwi (Wiawso).[145] Thus, churches depended on locals to establish and maintain congregations as funneling support from dioceses and religious centers was halted by the difficulty of access.

Conclusion

Sefwi Wiawso, the capital of Sehwi townships, has since its inception been a place that provided refuge from domineering forces. Before being identified as Sehwi, the land provided space for those who were escaping Islamic persecutions that ascribed to a more strict and orthodox version of Islam that required ancestral customs to be abandoned. As trade was being conducted with those in the forested regions of Ghana, relationships were facilitated impacting linguistic characteristics as well as ritual phrases, and ultimately the moniker adopted, Sehwi from *esa hie,* "war is over," as it represented the multi-century struggle to find peace and be undisturbed in maintaining their ancestral rites. Upon settling on one of the highest hilltops in the dense forests, Sehwi were able to isolate themselves from pedestrian traffic and easy invasions, and protected their culture from refugees they sheltered. Establishing a symbiotic relationship with the sovereign appointed to govern their land, Sehwi paid tribute from the gold and resources mined in turn for the freedom to preserve their unique customs and an agreement that the Omanhene assigned to represent them would be respectful and observant of their most paramount rites. This

[145] WRG 24/2/553. Also see WRG 15/2/128 that discusses the use of "trade roads" from 1956-59, and the governments expectation for companies who use the roads to transport goods to maintain them.

relationship fractured during British colonial rule, as the Ashanti were grappling to maintain their own power and did not have the same ability to reward the Omanhene. While the long-standing relationship attempted to be honored, a greater enemy of British colonialism led Kwame Nkrumah to bring together Ghanaians and he used Christian networks to solidify interest in his Convention People's Party to build a unified national community. Sefwi Wiawso, having remained isolated and hard to reach by Europeans, had yet to succumb to a large Christian influence and thus CPP efforts to nationalize via Christian symbols and practices threatened the ancestral customs as persons gave way to a new and independent Ghanaian, and pan-African, identity. Sehwi practices had become antiquated vis-à-vis the modern Ghanaian, and while few maintained the customs of the past, it wouldn't be until the 1970s that a cadre of Sehwi, living in Sefwi Wiawso, would start honoring the ancestral rites under a new banner: Judaism.

CHAPTER FOUR

Shhhhhh: Whispered and Unspoken Transmission of Jewish Culture in 20th and 21st Century Ghana

In his memoir *Shush! Growing up Jewish under Stalin*, Emil Draitser laments a past in which he silenced his Jewish identity to protect both himself and his family in Soviet Ukraine; therein, participating in a collective muzzling among the Jewish community. Within the prologue, Draitser admits that he had embodied the "shush," only recognizing years later after someone had posed to him the curious observation, "Do you realize that each time you pronounce the word *Jewish*, you lower your voice?" This led Draitser to acknowledge that he "still spoke in half whispers about anything concerning matters Jewish."[1] In the Western region of Ghana, a small community (of approximately 150) practices Judaism, labeled collectively as the House of Israel. When discussing "anything concerning matters Jewish" in the public realm, those who identify as Jews speak in lowered voices and at times whispers. Yet, in the comfort and privacy of their own home or at the local and unmarked synagogue, members of the House of Israel speak at full volume. When words fail to describe their past as Jews, members of the community rely on and point to ritual, a medium that can communicate their ancestral culture without vocal commentary. Ritual serves not only as a mnemonic to the days of their forefathers and a banner

An abbreviated version of this chapter was awarded the New Horizon in Jewish Studies Graduate Essay Prize at UC Irvine, 2019. Much of the information regarding Sehwi was acquired through several interviews and observations by author in 2010, 2016, and 2018.

[1] Emil Draitser, *Shush! Growing Up Jewish Under Stalin: a Memoir*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1.

to assert their faith identity, but a way to transmit a perceived Jewish culture. Through these actions culture is disseminated through time (from their ancestors) and space (to their global brethren). However, as the outside world has continued to question this community about its religious heritage, members have further provided language, often citing scripture, to locate their ritual practices within a Jewish tradition.

This chapter analyzes how Jewish rhetoric, oftentimes surrounding ritual, not only transmits but also bolsters a growing Jewish culture in 20th and 21st century Ghana. The chapter examines the role of whispers and secrecy in transmitting Jewish identity while also considering why these elements of shushing have been and continue to be a part of Ghana's Judaism. Further, it looks at ritual as a silent transmitter of faith identity and culture, perhaps due to a lost narrative or a generated one as chapters one and two discuss. Ritual serves as an embodied archive, easily carried during migration and maintained when prior contexts were lost. It is a historical constant amidst a narrative that has silences and elisions. This chapter primarily focuses on the Sehwi, an ethnic group that resides in the Western region of Ghana. It is Sehwi who make up the House of Israel's congregation, and it is Sehwi ancestral rites that are understood as Jewish.

While the House of Israel, and its Sehwi members, have become the most known as the "Jews of Ghana," they are not the only Ghanaians who claim a Jewish past as some members of the Ashanti (along with a few other Akan groups), Gadangmes, and Ewe also have notions of a Jewish past in their oral history, specifically articulated as an Israelite origin.[2] This arguably is due to cultural interactions and intermixing, especially during the 14th-17th centuries after the collapse of the Ghana and Songhai empires in Northwest Africa, a period known to usher a great

[2] Kwadwo, *An Outline of Asante History*, 2004; K. Nkansa-Kyeremateng 1990; Abekar Mensah, 2013.

migration of African peoples.[3] As we have seen, the Sehwi, are not indigenous to Ghana, but were protected and fully incorporated into the Akan empire by the 19th century. Sehwi is a derivative of the Akan "Esa hie," meaning "war is over," with other translations indicating "the fighting has stopped." The name was given to them when settling in Ghana to indicate that they no longer had to flee.[4] The Sehwi oral narrative relays a past, fraught with persecution and war causing them to move southward from Timbuktu, to northern Ghana, and finally into a forested area in the Western region of Ghana, which upon their arrival was uninhabited. They became a warrior kingdom, protecting others, until eventually the Ashanti became the most powerful of the Akan groups.[5] Cultural encounters and fraternizing further intensified during the slave trade and colonial period. Due to Ashanti influences and later colonial, Sehwi practices became diluted, with parts of their oral history lost. However, not all Sehwi claim Judaism but for those who do assert a Jewish identity, they believe that it is only lack of knowledge of their ancestral heritage that other Sehwi do not identify as Jewish. Most Sehwi know of the ancestral and pre-colonial customs, but few read it through a lens of a Jewish past as most are unaware of the culture of Judaism altogether. For these Sehwi, ritual is a marker of their past, yet has no bearing on their present identities which espouse Christian and Muslim teachings.[6] In other words, without the

[3] Nkansa-Kyerematen, 8.

[4] With most referencing fleeing Islamic persecutions and forced conversions as discussed in Chapter Three.

[5] There is limited information on the Sehwi (Sehwi is the local spelling, with Sefwi being the Western spelling and used for geographical purposes). However, most interviews I've conducted relay they were protected by the strong Ashanti Empire since their migration, in the 15th and 16th centuries, were an independent state until the Ashanti alliance and eventual overtake of the Sehwi by the 19th century. Harrison. H. Ofori, interview by author, Asawinso Senior High (Kohina, Ghana), October 10, 2018. See also, H. H. Ofori, *History of the Sehwi*, (Kumasi: Beans Printing Press, 2004).

[6] Arguably, this is residual of the "colonized mind" which favors Western imports and religion to indigenous culture.

exegetical knowledge to contextualize their ancestral rites and provide value in a present sense, these rituals merely exist as a remnant of the past.

Being Jewish in Northwestern Africa was risky as discussed in chapter one. And, as historian Osei Kwadwo relayed, migration into western Ghana by the Sehwi and other groups incorporated into the Akan was also prompted by Islamic persecutions in the north.[7] Although Jewish communities in Northern Africa are better known, those on the northern fringes of the Sahara, beyond the Sahara, and into West Africa are not visible in the pages of history, perhaps due to a successful strategy of keeping their identity invisible to the persecutors they lived amongst. Chapters one and two discuss these methods of concealment for a millennium. Chapter three discusses the migration histories of the Sehwi, not indigenous to Ghana, and the geographical overlaps with known Jewish communities where parallels can be drawn from how those tethered to a Jewish identity were at risk and thus chose to practice quietly. This legacy of a quieted Judaism in Africa's northwestern landscape may point to the whispers seen within present day African communities who claim a Jewish past.

On Terminology

The terms "Hebrew," "Israelite," and "Jew" (and derivatives of these terms) are synonymous in Sehwi understanding. For Sehwi, "Hebrew" and/or "Israelite" references an ancient identity with "Jew" being the contemporary term within a present-day community. For scholars, "Hebrew" and "Israelite" are also understood as a markers of an ancient and biblical past, but differ with current manifestations of the terms soliciting mythical origins, mostly associated with a "lost

[7] Osei Kwadwo, interview by author, Kumasi, 23 January 2019. Also, Osei Kwadwo, *A Handbook on Asante Culture,* (Kumasi: Cita Press Ltd., 2002); and Kwadwo, *An Outline of Asante History,* 2004.

tribe" rhetoric. Those who claim Hebraic and Israelite origins are often accompanied with skepticism and questions of legitimacy. Further, notions of Hebrew and Israelite have increasingly been tethered to Black culture and racial classification (most notably the Black Hebrew Israelites of Dimona). For this chapter, I acknowledge, that a Jewish identity is not representative of all ancient Israelites, but I also acknowledge that the Jewish community is the oldest of the known Abrahamic faiths. A faith, that like the biblical Hebrews and Israelites, used the Torah and Mosaic laws to develop their own ethnic culture— understood as culture tethered to specific practices (in this case religious), but also with a genealogical connection (descendants of Abraham).[8] In this, the House of Israel's ethnogenetic transformation is through a partnering of their ancestral rites and oral narrative of migration (with a perceived Jewish ancestry) with normative Judaic practices introduced by visitors along with the incorporation of information (such as lost tribe mythologies) to explain a history beyond that which their oral narrative provides. For the House of Israel then, the term of Jew is applicable: as it is this community they feel ritual camaraderie and seek to be members. It is this label they employ, to express belonging in a contemporary and living religion, evolved from an ancestral religion that acknowledged the Mosaic Law.

[8] Denise Kimber Buell, *Why this New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia UP, 2008), 43.

Background

Figure 9 Aaron Ahotre Toakyirafa in 1978. Founder of the House of Israel, Ghana.

Early in the 1970s, a man in Sefwi Sui,[9] Ghana by the name of Aaron Ahotre Toakyirafa (*Figure 9*) is said to have had a divine encounter where it was revealed to him that his life and behavior were "pleasing unto the Lord."[10] Furthermore, the message disclosed that his practices and beliefs were actually called "Judaism."[11] Toakyirafa, who was seen as a "traditionalist" amongst a majority Christian demographic, was inspired by this theopneusty and began to share what he had learned with his closest friends. After a few friends and neighbors had apostatized from their Catholic faith to join him, they went from village to village to share the message. At first, the rejection of Christ was not well-received and these practitioners were thrown out of communities, beaten, and their lives were threatened. However, some were convinced the practices Toakyirafa had maintained were indeed the ways of their ancestors and remnants of a past faith, which had been taken away from them due to the encounter with the West and subsequent conversions to Christianity. This indigenous faith was preserved by their leader Toakyirafa and revitalized by the new community of practitioners now worshipping in Sefwi Wiawso, which now comprises of

[9] Sefwi Sui is in the Sefwi Wiawso district, thus it is most likely Sehwi live there.

[10] Solomon Armah, interview by author, Sefwi Wiawso, 18 August 2010. Image from "Black Jews in Ghana Reaffirm Their Faith in the Torah," *United Israel World Union*, Winter 1978 Bulletin.

[11] Devir, in his 2017 book, states the message included the phrase, "lost tribe," As discussed in the introduction, the expression "lost tribe" was unfamiliar to the HOI during my 2010 visit. In hearing the recollection of this event for over 10 years, I have never heard an account where Aaron received the message of "lost tribe" but rather that they were "Jews," or even that their ancestors practices "Judaism." One wonders if the message relayed their ancestors were Dioula, with the first syllable sounding the same as Jew.

over 30 families (*Figure 10*).[12] They call themselves the "House of Israel," and assert they have a Hebraic origin lost to them from wars and the colonial impact; yet, maintained through ritual and testimony and resurrected through the prophetic vision of their founder. [13]

Whispered Transmissions

Like the Jews living in Northwest Africa, the Sehwi Jews are quiet about their faith identity. It became apparent during my first research trip in Ghana (2010) that the explicit notion of being Jewish was not always given outright, but rather whispered. It is through the collective "shushing" of the Sehwi Jewish community and their most trusted friends that the town around them, as well as the nation, largely still remains unaware of their existence. The House of Israel's very emergence began with a private announcement — hidden from bystanders —to Toakyirafa who was sitting in a room amongst his peers in his hometown of Sefwi Sui when he first received this divine message.[14] Per interviews with some of Toakyirafa's friends, years before the creation of the House of Israel in 1975, he was struck by a vision appearing on the opposite wall, accompanied by a voice that conveyed to him that the ancestral practices that he had maintained (having not converted to Christianity or Islam like many of his fellow Sehwi, including his father), were in fact Jewish.[15] In awe, he turned to his peers to learn they had not seen or heard what he had just witnessed. Although they occupied the same space, he alone was

[12] Image from "Black Jews in Ghana Reaffirm Their Faith in the Torah," *United Israel World Union*, Winter 1978 Bulletin.

[13] Interviews by Author, Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, August 2010, October 2018.

[14] The date of this revelation has been cited as 1976 and 1977, with the latter provided most often in the interviews I conducted. Whereas, the *United Israel World Union* Bulletin published in Winter 1978 states that the House of Israel had already been established in 1975; thereby, indicating the vision may have happened years prior. UIWU, Winter 1978.

[15] Christian missions in the Sehwi area were not successful until the mid-1900s. See chapter 3.

privy to the information that was transmitted to him. Now equipped with the label of Judaism for his forefather's religion, Toakyirafa began to share his epiphany and knowledge with his most trusted friends. Some chose to join him and the ancestral belief he embraced.

In the early years, Toakyirafa and his co-religionists went from town to town explaining what he had learned of his ancestral practices, imploring people to leave their Christian faith and return to the way of their forefathers. The message was not received well, and they were often run from towns and beaten. However, they persisted, especially when coming to learn that the term Judaism had a global following and they had faith brethren in the world. By 1978, Toakyirafa had made contact with the United Israel World Union (USA).[16] By the 1990s and into the 21st century, non-profit organization *Kulanu* had been reached, and began working closely with the community to teach them normative practices, Hebrew, and the utilization of various items of Judaica.[17] Yet, despite the global exposure, the House of Israel's faith assertion was and is still relatively unknown. In fact, their synagogue, and more so the home of one of the elders of the community, Joseph Armah (who often provides a guest room to visitors), is known locally as the "Church of Israel." Where church seemingly conceals their activity by employing Christian jargon.

The first encounter with a manner of shushing was in going to the market with Joseph Armah's son, Solomon.[18] Up to this moment, he had been the most vocal and proud about his

[16] UIWU, Winter 1978.

[17] Kulanu is a non-profit organization founded in 1994 that raises awareness about less known Jewish communities around the world, providing assistance (financial and spiritual), and aims to support the diversity of Judaism.

[18] Some names have been changed for the protection of the interlocutor, while others have remained due to their appearance in previously published media, where they were proud and wanted their name printed. Since the time of those publications, some have left the Jewish faith due to the "difficulty" of being Jewish in Ghana. I have struggled with which names to keep, and which names to conceal. And hope, I have provided privacy where wanted.

Jewish identity, even recalling stories of how he opted to miss school events because they took place on the Sabbath. Or, sometimes when called to pray in school as a young student, he would offer up the *shema* (learnt through interaction with international visitors) and was mercilessly made fun of for not praying to Jesus. However, at 19, and outside the comfort of his own home, his demeanor shifted: quiet and reserved, unrecognizable to the "loud and proud" attitude he had, up to this point, relayed. In fact, in the taxi to the market, he seemed disinterested in talking about his faith altogether. When asked if I could interview his market neighbor of 15 years,[19] he informed that he did not want to be present and asked that I not share with his neighbor any information, but just to ask what she knew. I found it odd as he often accompanied me everywhere in case a Sehwi-English translation was needed. I agreed, at that time not out of a sense to protect one of my interlocutors (the community was so open in the compound it seemed as though it must be known to everyone) but as to not to influence the information I received. I learned she had no awareness of Judaism being practiced in Ghana, even to the point that she emphatically stated Jews did not exist in Ghana. After leaving the market, Solomon wanted me to talk to his best friend from his school years, David, who "knew of his Judaism" and "remained a close friend."[20] After we all had gotten acquainted laughing loudly over youth culture, Solomon left me with David, where he immediately lowered his voice when beginning to discuss his friend's faith. David, a Christian, whispered that he knew Solomon was a Jew but disagreed with it and then quietly shared his concern for his friend's eternal safety. His lowered tone protected his friend's secret from the nearby foot traffic.

[19] His father owned the market stall, which he frequented as an adolescent, and later took over.

[20] Solomon, interview by author, Sefwi Wiawso, 24 August 2010.

These differences in public and private utterings beyond the walls of the Armah family compound became more distinct when sitting just outside the gate of the property. After chatting for a bit to a member's Christian brother, the conversation turned to speak of his brother's decision to be a Jew while he remained Catholic. Sitting comfortably in the shade of a tree, while sharing a stalk of sugarcane, only inches between the compound wall and a road where a few children were playing soccer, the man lowered his voice and shifted to a serious appearance, from his previously jovial manner, to discuss what he knew of Judaism and his brother's decision to be a part of the Jewish community. The private/public barrier became even more blurred when Joseph's close and lifetime friend Constance, a Christian, came to his compound to discuss what she understood of Judaism. Everyone up to that point had felt very comfortable sharing about the topic within the compound, but Constance disrupted the pattern. Typically a very entertaining, loud spoken woman, she became very serious and quiet. She, not being a Jew, had nothing to fear, but could her silence be in fact mimicking the silence of her best friend of 35 years? Did Joseph, like Solomon, in public with friends discuss his faith identity quietly? Is that, too, why non-Jews became quiet, or was it shame they felt for their friends and family?

While some of the younger members of the House of Israel are eager to share their understood knowledge of the ancestral past with fellow Sehwi, the elders refrain from doing so and have not supported the idea. This discourages the newer members, who feel their ideas are being squashed. But, what newer members see as a power struggle between them and veteran practitioners, may be rooted in the persecution and harassment the elder community has faced, in the past and presently. As mentioned above, the earliest members were chased out of towns and beaten for their newly identified faith. Both elders and newer members have relayed that upon finding out they are Jewish, other Sehwi accuse them of killing Christ. They also stop doing

business with them, even mocking them by calling their personal cellular devices on Shabbat and on Jewish holidays to say they are at their shops and would do business with them if they were there.[21] These potential patrons have no intention of purchase, but only call to mock and convince them that they have missed a sale.[22] Children are questioned about religious history in schools, and have marks taken away if they do not answer in line with Christian thinking.[23] And, teachers will tell young children that their parents are wrong and that is their job to go home and save them from hell. This greatly upsets young parents in the House of Israel whose teachings are being challenged and children are being tormented by a fear that their parents are doomed. Newer members are exposed to this harassment but are desirous to push public outreach and education. They believe this will encourage fellow Sehwi to join the House of Israel or at least understand their faith and thus create a more harmonious and accepting environment.[24] Yet the elders consistently reject ideas that would create exposure and are seemingly uninterested in growing their congregation.[25]

Hushed transmissions of a Jewish past are not exclusive to the Sehwi. Other Akan groups also have Hebraic rituals and narratives of an Israelite origin. In 2011, after giving a public talk

[21] If a shop and/or market stall is closed, it is assumed that it is due to sickness, a family commitment, or a religious reason. By 2018 the HOI identity has largely been exposed with most knowing of the community due to Western visitors and, perhaps, the documentary.

[22] Unemployment is high in Sefwi, with most men and women's livelihood centering on agricultural production. Ghana, *2010 Population & Housing Census.*

[23] Most notably, it has been said that they are asked in school "Who is the son of God?" Teachers only accept Jesus as the correct answer.

[24] In 2018 interviews, the newer members who were parents of young children explained there was no persecution due to Ghana's 1992 constitution freedom clause. However, they later would explain being Jewish is "embarrassing" as it causes their children to be mocked and their businesses to be avoided by others. The do not perceive this as persecution or harassment, but rather a fact that being Jewish "is difficult."

[25] There was a proposal to be part of an interfaith conversation in nearby Kumasi, which the elders opposed.

of my project, a Ghanaian (Akan) academic was one of the first to ask questions challenging my findings. About an hour after the presentation, I received a phone call from a colleague who had further discussed my project with him. She relayed that in their private conversation, he wanted to know her thoughts, she being Jewish. When it came time for him to respond with his thoughts he intimated to her, by leaning across the desk and whispering, "my mother always told me we were Jewish."[26] Yet, in all the time I discussed my project with him, such a statement was never disclosed to me. In one online blog post on the Jewish community in Sefwi Wiawso, a commentator of the blog wrote: "I am a Ghanaian Jew and not from Sehwi. There are more of us here and we are Torah only not Talmudic and we like to keep our identity secret so as not to be influenced by Western/modern Judaism."[27] In these cases, identity is concealed from representatives of the West, a historic threat to indigenous culture.

As of 2018, there are still hushed voices when it comes to Judaism. Members of the House of Israel are dedicated to voicing their past, but are still silencing its transmission in various arenas and in the presence of particular audiences. Relaying Jewish culture is important to them, as they see it as having survived the colonial encounter. But there is caution exercised by most Ghanaians who claim a Jewish past as to whom to share their identity. Positionality is always considered: determining whether being Western or a part of the local Christian majority poses greater risk. So, instead of voicing their identity, the House of Israel relies on ritual to maintain their ancestral heritage and pass it on to other Sehwi who want to reconnect with the

[26] This was relayed to me in October 2010.

[27] Hannah Gaventa, "The Jews of Sehwi Wiawso — a lost African tribe?," *Wordpress* (blog), 30 July 2012, https://hannahgaventa1.wordpress.com/2012/07/30/the-jews-of-Sehwi-wiawso-a-lost-african-tribe/.

past. And, the House of Israel believes it is through ritual and physical markers that fellow Jews will recognize that they are part of a global faith community.[28]

Ritual Transmission

The House of Israel claims to have a Hebraic heritage that dates back centuries. Worshipers recount their origin narrative from present-day to a pre-colonial past with ancestors migrating from Timbuktu, with the details of their origin becoming more and more hazy as they move backwards through time.[29] They refer to the distant past as the "olden days," a catchall to refer to a time when ritual practices were performed in a Jewish context, which are believed to have been halted by the onslaught of Christianity and colonialism. Their belief that they belong to the global faith is predicated on the prophetic vision of their founder but also accompanied by a canon of rituals that has a Jewish semblance in addition to assumed Jewish markers on their landscape and vocabulary. These vestiges serve as a trigger to recollect the past but also to actively commune with their ancestors. Additionally, these ritual and linguistic artifacts construct a historical record to piece together an origin narrative to authenticate their claim to the faith. This chapter seeks to answer Paul Connerton's question of "how societies remember?" by asking how this community resurrects the seemingly forgotten or a periodical hiatus?[30] How does the House of Israel construct a social faith identity through institutional memory?

Where words were absent, ritual served as the medium of cultural transmission from the pre-colonial to present. In studying ritual, anthropologist Andrew Apter suggests ritual can serve

[28] A few members of the HOI informed they did not have to relay in words that they were Jewish to other Jews, but would be recognized by kippot, tallitot, the *magen david*, or their practices.

[29] Interviews by author, Sefwi Wiawso, August 2010.

[30] Connerton, 1989.

as a "generative locus," which thereby produces a multitude of meanings that regenerate and renew. Thus, it could be argued rituals with an affinity to a Mosaic practice could easily have a Jewish label projected on to it. Could then Sehwi ritual merely be a "generative locus" for Jewish rhetoric? Contrarily, in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, prominent Jewish historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi wrote, "historiography never served as a primary vehicle for Jewish memory in the Middle Ages...Jewish memory had other channels—largely ritual."[31] For Yerushalmi, ritual serves as a mnemonic. For the House of Israel, the rituals they have both kept and resumed performing, serve as both. Undoubtedly, from the oral narrative by Jews and non-Jews there are Sehwi practices, with a likeness to Judaism and the Mosaic Law, performed by their ancestors. Yet, to what degree these rituals are evidence of the House of Israel's narrative remains contested by some inside and outside of the Sehwi community.

Sabbath

For the House of Israel, transmission of their ancestral culture is articulated through oral narratives and ritual memory, but it is ritual that is often cited as confirmation of a Jewish identity.[32] In line with Yerushalmi's understanding, it is ritual that channels the past, not invents it. The most paramount ritual for the House of Israel, especially in asserting their

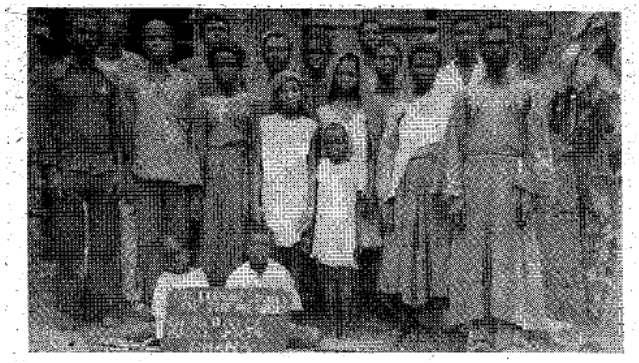

Figure 10 The House of Israel in 1978 before their synagogue was built. The community has now grown to 150+ members.

[31] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor, Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 39-40.

[32] Foreigners who witnessed Sehwi and West African indigenous ritual perhaps were (and possibly are still) the greatest imaginaries of the communities and lands they were visiting as discussed in Chapter Two.

Jewish identity, is eschewing work on Saturdays. This *mitzvah* is held in the highest regard and a practice accompanied by a local oral testimony. Sehwi who do not identify as Jewish and non-Sehwi neighbors know that Saturday is the day the Sehwi ancestors rested, a practice done away with after Christianity was adopted.[33] This knowledge, for the House of Israel congregants, validates the past observance of the holy day in the Jewish faith. Although this history does not specify a label for the former faith, they do articulate Saturday as the holy day, or God's day. And, the founder Aaron Ahotre Toakyirafa highlighted this belief in a letter sent to the United Israel World Union in Boston, MA in 1978. Toakyirafa wrote "We obey the Law and other Jewish customs…and we also cling to the Sabbath."[34] By performing this ritual, the House of Israel is not only keeping the Sabbath holy as commanded by the Mosaic Law, but they are also transmitting cultural practices of a recovered faith identity.

For the House of Israel, ritual practice serves as a remnant that tethers the present-day to the past. In her article "The Generation of Postmemory," Marianne Hirsch is interested in how memory is preserved through "transgenerational transmission."[35] Although Hirsch is primarily interested in how trauma is transferred, her discussion of how the memory of trauma is relayed is useful for understanding memory conveyance more broadly.[36] Of specific interest, is the

[33] Toakyirafa was known by his fellow peers for resting on Saturday and maintaining the practices of their ancestors. His Sehwi peers had adopted the tradition to refrain from work on Wednesday or Thursday, which is common amongst other Akan groups.

[34] UIWU, Winter 1978.

[35] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today*. 29, no. 1 (2008): 103.

[36] It could be argued that the House of Israel fits into the model that Hirsch is providing as the community believes it is due to war, the missionary impact and colonialism that created a rupture in their practice and memory. Moreover, if this community is a derivative of *converso* populations of the Iberian expulsion, then the pogroms and subsequent forced conversions along with the colonial era would be representative of a traumatic past that has a legacy of imposed invisibility and forced compliance, which would require the transmission of memory to take camouflaged or secretive forms.

distinction between Jan Assmann's "kulturelles Gedächtnis" and "communicative" memory.[37] "Kulturelles Gedächtnis," or the "institutionalized archival memory" is a preservation of memory that can be incarnated through practices or ceremonies.[38] For the House of Israel, ritual serves as a social memory that not only provides a linkage to the past but also transmits a pre-colonial history.

And so, the most paramount and most recognized ritual is the observance of Saturday as a day of rest. Toakyirafa was distinguished from his Christian counterparts for his dedicated rest on Saturday, a day with no special distinction for his neighbors who regularly rested on Wednesday or Thursday.[39] An oral narrative does accompany this ritual, as many women who converted to Judaism explained it was this practice that made them feel comfortable converting to the faith of their husbands, and brought peace to their families when their conversion was announced.[40] For many Sehwis, it is common knowledge to know that their ancestors once rested on Saturdays. Although many are resistant and unsupportive of a Jewish conversion, with little context and understanding of what Judaism is, it is when the practices are described that family members associate the conversion to a return to the ways of their ancestors, a pre-colonial practice. Joseph Armah, a close friend of Toakyirafa's and one of the first converts, syncs up the known oral history of the region with this assumed Jewish rite. He explains:

[37] Hirsch, 110.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Samuel Mintah, interview by author, New Adhiembra, Sefwi Wiawso, 24 August 2010.

[40] Interviews by author, Sefwi Wiawso, August 2010.

> And you see at first, uh, when they were going all through all this loss, one chief, the older chiefs was called *Nana* Kwame Tano in this place.[41] And, after he died there, his nephew who succeeded him as the king…was a Roman Catholic.[42] Yes, he was a Christian. So, when he became the chief, he said that this time…they are Christians. You see, it was said in their New Testament that if you are…the followers of Jesus Christ you can do whatever you like. So, at this time, you have to go to farm on Saturdays, they have to celebrate their funerals on Saturday; they have to do whatever they like on Saturdays. It's not because of that paramount chief, these laws are still there but because he was a Christian he let them stop all these.[43]

Here, Armah indicates a rupture from the ancestral practices to those initiated after conversion to Christianity, practices that came to a halt when local leaders converted and undoubtedly complied with Western expectations. This knowledge, for Armah and many of his fellow practitioners, validates the past observance of the holy day in the Jewish faith. Although this history does not specify a label for the former faith or if it is a religious observance, it serves as evidence of a Jewish rite for a community that wants to authenticate their faith assertion. Here, the continuation of this practice by "traditionalists" serves as ancestral ritual that was inscribed into memory by those who did not convert to Christianity. Institutionalized in practice, the memory of abstaining work was preserved through "traditionalist" practitioners. By performing this ritual, the House of Israel is not only remembering the observances of their ancestors but also reactivating a lost faith.

The importance of this rite for the House of Israel demonstrates Connerton's concept of "habit memory."[44] Although the very act of remembering is not stimulated, the memory of the

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[41] *Nana* (Chief, Twi). Kwame Tano I ruled for 32 years and was very popular for respecting and upholding the Sehwi practices.

[42] Kwame Tano II ruled for 3 years and was despised by many Sehwi. He ruled from 1932 until he was destooled in 1935. See Chapter 3.

[43] Joseph Armah, interview by author, New Adhiembra, Sefwi Wiawso, 25 August 2010.

[44] Connerton, 23.

habit is. Connerton explains the origin of learning the habit is not as important as the recollection of the habit being performed. This recall serves as evidence of a social memory that *was* performed, with the other details of *how, when*, and *why* becoming less significant.[45]

Dietary

A second ritual that is believed to have a Hebraic heritage are the dietary laws, including food preparation that the House of Israel observes. Toakyirafa is said to have refrained from eating particular meats, specifically pork and certain fish,[46] and these dietary restrictions observed by him are seen as linkages to the ancestors but also to the Jewish faith. These dietary restrictions are familiar to Sehwis as another rite of the forefathers, which was done away with after Christianity. These laws along with guidelines regarding proper killing and butchering of animals are in line with Mosaic teachings, and thus solidify the House of Israel's understanding of who their ancestors were.[47]

The dietary laws observed by the House of Israel are often referenced when discussing Jewish identity. The preparation of food similarly serves as a "habit memory," where the learning of the act is unknown but the continuation of the practice occurs, linking the past to the present. Toakyirafa is said to have refrained from eating particular meats, including certain fish, and these dietary restrictions observed by him are seen as linkages to the ancestors but also to the

[45] Connerton, 22-23.

[46] The go-to fish is "red fish," or red snapper which is most common in Ghana. It has fins and scales and thus considered kosher.

[47] On Sehwi butchering practices, see Michael Ramberg, "Jewish Learning Takes a Village," *Kulanu* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2007), 10.

Jewish faith.[48] These dietary restrictions are familiar to Sehwis as another rite of the forefathers, which was done away with after Christianity.[49] The observance of these dietary laws make present-day practitioners feel alive with the memory of their ancestors and deeply connected to them. Solomon Armah expounded on the community's knowledge of not only dietary restrictions but also the way in which animals are to be slaughtered. He realized how the Jews in Sehwi have a distinctive way to acquire the appropriate meat for festivities such as when the HOI prepares for Passover, which varies from the explanation provided by the many international guests who visit the community.[50] Furthermore, he states that this knowledge is biblical and has come from the olden days. He expounds:

> every Passover, for the second night you have to slaughter a goat, which will be roasted because if you can remember when, the Bible says, that when the Israelites were from Egypt going, they were not having time to boil the meat, so they roasted 'til those and, I asked the question and I was told that those in America, some Jews in America, when it is time for *Pesach*, they get the meat from the store, like they have a Jewish store which keeps *Matzot*[51] and everything. So, if you go there you can get the roasted meat, you buy it and you come to use it for your *Pesach*. But, for us here, after you do that *Pesach* will begin. We get a fresh goat, and the goat that is going to be used for the *Pesach*, it has to be kept one week without going out, so that it wouldn't get time for mating, and other things, so that we make sure that the goat is clean. So, we do the slaughtering our self, ritual slaughtering, which you have to cut the neck once to prevent any more from suffering before it dies. And, so we do it our self and we roast it our self, like we set the fire, and roast the whole body and so we put it on the plate and we put it on the altar, and we have a Kiddush cup, and honey, and pepper, and eggs, like which the eggs, like in the manner of our forefathers too which when they were in Egypt, from Egypt going. So, I think it is interest; it's interesting, like it's something traditional. Like the *Matzot* for instance, if you go to Jewess, for instance, like the Harriet,[52] Harriet's synagogue, in

[48] Locals say that it is okay to eat redfish, this is considered fish that is kosher and has scales.

[49] Solomon Armah, interview by author, Sefwi Wiawso, 18 August 2010.

[50] The community keeps a registry, in the form of an old wide-ruled school notebook, of the guests who have passed through. My name was the 115th added; thus indicating that they have received quite a bit of traffic over the years.

[51] Hebrew, plural, unleavened bread typically served during *Pesach*.

[52] Harriet is a former visitor, with whom Solomon discussed *Pesach* customs.

> Harriet's community, they use *Matzot*, which is in a box, like a biscuit. Like if you come to Ghana, our community, like we have the flour, and we mix it with water, as they were doing, as our forefathers were doing. We just mix it with water and we put it in fire. *And that's your unleavened bread?*[53] Yea, so we use that as our unleavened bread.[54]

It is apparent that not only is Solomon very aware of the dietary regulations and preparation of such foods but also his knowledge of biblical scripture that supports these laws. The preparation of animals and their method of slaughter solidifies their linkage to the faith and for Solomon, made him feel especially connected to his ancestors and proud of his knowledge.[55] The House of Israel recognizes the emblematic way in which Toakyirafa slaughtered animals along with his knowledge of the "unclean" parts of the animal that should be discarded. An international Jewish visitor was impressed by the extensive skill of the community's butcher, who knew how to properly remove the sciatic nerve; thus, preserving a large portion of the rear sections of the animal for consumption.[56] The institutionalized knowledge of removing the unclean part of an animal is compatible with the Jewish law, a rite that is acquiring context with exposure to international guests who are kosher.[57] This "habit" has been transmitted from generation to generation and Toakyirafa was able to teach it to the community. It serves as a memory of what was practiced and connects the House of Israel to the pre-Christian society of their ancestors while the biblical narrative links the practice to the faith they are asserting.

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[53] Italicized section is my own interjection.

[54] Solomon Armah, interview by author, Sefwi Wiawso, 18 August 2010.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ramberg, 10. Ramberg explained that most *schochets* (Heb. kosher slaughterer) simply discard the entire rear part of an animal to make certain that the unclean parts of the animal are not consumed.

[57] Ibid.

Purification

A third practice that provides a connection to the Jewish faith and known rites are the purification laws performed by the community. Scripture supports these purification rituals just as the slaughter practices. This particular ritual is also supported by a physical mnemonic in the nearby village of Aboduam.[58] While visiting Aboduam for another celebratory occasion, Joseph Nipah immediately changed subjects when he saw an old dilapidated building that was used by "traditionalists" as a space to seclude menstruating women. The visual sight of the building served as a memoryscape, transporting him to a time in the past when the structure was used and prompted him to recall a law his ancestors had observed. He began to explain the purification law, which restricts those who are sick, near death, or menstruating from going to synagogue as they are considered unclean. Furthermore, he began to explain women's seclusion was for the benefit of the community, keeping them away from those who could attend synagogue pure and thus capable of receiving God's blessing on the Sabbath.[59] This ruined structure served as a visual mnemonic for Nipah, not only its purpose but also its location—a place their founder had once gone to share his message. The very site prompted a mnemic response and a connection to the past, where knowledge of ancestral rites included the separation of women during their menstrual cycle.

[58] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux des Memoire," *Representations*, 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (1989): 12. Nora's use of *lieux des memoire* is applicable here as this site seemingly triggers a memory.

[59] The House of Israel is extremely observant of the purification law. Samuel Mintah, who was ill one week, refrained from going to synagogue, as he felt unclean. Additionally, I had several men enquire about my menstrual cycle and even found them going through my trash to ensure I was being honest.

Ritual Identity versus Ethnic Identity

Many in the House of Israel insist their practices are enough to legitimate their claim to Judaism, and refuse to undergo a conversion ceremony, like the Beta Israel of Ethiopia, just to be recognized by normative Judaism. Others feel this is the only way to be taken into the fold, and although not denying their believed Jewish heritage, they desire to be a part of the imagined religious community, the global Jewish nation. This debate centers around how the House of Israel underscores ritual practice as the key component that activates Jewish identity from a dormant ancestral identity.

In Victor Turner's study of liminality, and the *rites de passage*, of "becoming" a new (spiritual) identity, he concludes "the term 'ritual' to be more fittingly applied to forms of religious behavior associated with social transitions, while the term 'ceremony' has a closer bearing on religious behavior associated with social states, where politico-legal institutions also have greater importance. Ritual is transformative, ceremony confirmatory."[60] Through this lens, ritual or Durkheim's *doing*, becomes a "transformative" process, a "becoming" that allows for an identity to be possessed. For Toakyirafa, his theopneusty was the "transformative" process that allowed him to understand his new identity as a Jew, rather than a keeper of indigenous rites. For those who joined him, the *doing,* or observing of those rites creates a pattern and consistent process of being, *belonging* to the Jewish identity.

For the House of Israel, it is ritual, which links the community to the global faith of Judaism, despite which group they now associate with since the divide. Not only does the *doing* of perceived Jewish practices provide a sense of *belonging*, but it also authenticates their belief.

[60] Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981 [1967]), 95.

It is the very praxis that identifies members of the community as Jews. Through the *doing*, they assert Jewish identity. This notion of *doing* as *believing* is most evident when the community objected to any notion of DNA testing. DNA testing, was the method used by scholar Tudor Parfitt when attempting to authenticate the oral history of the Lemba of Zimbabwe and South Africa. The results indicated the Lemba to be genetically Jewish, belonging to the priestly class due to the Cohen Modal Haplotype, a genetic marker on the Y chromosome.[61]

For the House of Israel, DNA could not provide any real proof of one's *believing* and conviction to the faith community. Solomon Armah, one of the first children to be born into the Jewish community in Ghana, explains how action determines one's *belonging* to the Jewish faith, not ancestry or lineage as evidenced by blood. Solomon explained:

> To me, that testing of the blood which proves whether you are a Jew doesn't actually matter because even if you test that person's blood, and if you see that maybe that Enoch is a Jew…what's in those tests when he travels, or… [when] what he has done in his lifetime does not go complimentary with the Jewish religion? Like if he, Enoch, doesn't keep kosher, you wouldn't know through the blood, so to me, the person can be a Jew through how he behaves, or through his lifestyle.[62]

Solomon's statement clearly identifies the importance of practice over ancestry. Albert Armah, a cousin of Solomon's, voiced similar opinions of DNA testing:

> To be identified as a Jew [is] just to keep yourself with the Torah, it's all. But, if you being tapped or being have a DNA, I think it's…not necessary. Yes, because the true worship is from your heart and to see yourself as a Jew that is where you practice the law and the cultures of Judaism. That qualifies you as a Jew. But if you don't practice it, but if you are even tapped or having that DNA and you don't follow the customs, you are not Jew.[63]

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[61] Tudor Parfitt and Emanuela Trevisan Semi, *Judaising Movements: Studies in the Margins of Judaism*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

[62] Solomon Armah, interview by author, Sefwi Wiawso, 18 August 2010.

[63] Albert Armah, interview by author, Sefwi Wiawso, 26 August 2010.

For Albert, staying in compliance with the mitzvah/laws, "with the Torah," is paramount in asserting one's *belonging* to Judaism, and in showing your belief in the community. Here, the Durkheimian model of *belonging-believing-doing* all converge with the *doing* representing the *belonging* and *believing*.

As seen through these statements, the emphasis on *doing* creates *belonging*. In addition to keeping the Sabbath day holy and observing dietary restrictions are the purification laws that are maintained. Just as Williams noted the menstrual seclusion of Ashanti women, the House of Israel upholds strict rules regarding cleanliness, especially when it comes to synagogue attendance. Women who are menstruating, and anyone who is ill or has been around death are strictly forbidden to attend worship. Joseph Nipah, who converted, or "returned to Judaism" after hearing Toakyirafa's message, explained the context for the seclusion of menstruating women and the sick. He informed that the separation allowed others, not contaminated by impurities, to remain capable of receiving God's blessing on the Sabbath, which would ultimately benefit the community.[64] It should also be noted, that just as the Ashanti used the "bara hut" as described by Williams, Nipah pointed out an old structure in nearby Aboduam that once served as the seclusion home for women. Now, women remain in their homes during menses. Keeping kosher, observing purification laws (such as isolating menstruating women, those who are ill or have been around death), observing circumcision rites, and specifically keeping the Sabbath day all make this community *belong* to the global faith of Judaism, and the *doing* is a visible expression of *believing*, especially for the House of Israel.

[64] Joseph Nipah, interview by author, Aboduam, Ghana, 24 August 2010. The House of Israel is extremely observant of the purification law. Samuel Mintah, who was ill one week, refrained from going to synagogue, as he felt unclean. Additionally, I had several men enquire about my menstrual cycle and even found them going through my trash to ensure I was being honest.

Constructing History

The House of Israel worshipers have begun to construct an oral history to provide themselves, as well as the outside world, a narrative that justifies and authenticates their faith assertion. This eagerness can be described by Hirsch's understanding of how postgenerations create an account without full details. It is ritual that is being contextualized and "shaped by the reality of the *viewer's needs and desires* rather than by the subject's actual 'having been there.'"[65] The generational fuzziness of *why* the "habit" is performed allows for the House of Israel to layer on meaning predicated on a present-day "need."[66]

Many of the women I interviewed in Sefwi Wiawso understood their conversion to Judaism to be a return to the practices of the "olden days," making the departure from Christianity more acceptable.[67] Joseph Nipah informed it was the key factor saying, "My grandfathers, they are practicing, at that time they do not know it is Judaism, when I see it, then I joined" later informing it was a key component to his conversion, or return to the way of his grandfathers.[68] This return is perhaps best defined by Remy Ilona, an autodidact and Igbo Jew, who has produced many works on the Igbo Jews of Nigeria contextualizing ancestral rituals as Jewish rites. His label of a "lapsed Jew" summarizes his understanding of Igbo as Jews.[69] He

[65] Hirsch, 124. Hirsch's study analyzes photographs, whereas I argue it is ritual that is being viewed and "shaped."

[66] Hirsch, 122 and Connerton, 22-23.

[67] Mary, interviewed by author, Sefwi Wiawso, 24 August 2010***;*** Also, Miriam, interview by author, Sefwi Wiawso, August 2010.

[68] Joseph Nipah, interview by author, New Adhiembra, Sefwi Wiawso, 24 August 2010.

[69] Remy Ilona, *The Igbos: Jews in Africa: With Reflections on the Civil War and Solutions to the Most Critical Igbo Problem: Research*. (Abuja: Remy Ilona, 2007), 97-98.

analyzes the customs of the Igbo with very close similarities to Hebraic customs. He recognizes that although most Igbos are "outside Judaism" presently, they mostly associate a past with the various elements of Judaism and therefore believe they are somehow still connected to the religion. Thus, he determines that the Igbo population cannot be banished from the community of believers as they have never truly forgotten their heritage. In order to explain the fading away of the outward profession of the faith, which he feels was interrupted by colonialism would be to refer to the Igbo as "lapsed Jews," not necessarily needing a conversion to return to the faith.[70] Similarly, the House of Israel is constructing a narrative based on ritual to explain the origin of the pre-colonial rites.

Pierre Nora distinguishes between memory and history, and explains that memory can be remembered and forgotten, with history arguably more consistent, continual, and constructed. For Nora:

> Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.[71]

Applying the memory of the House of Israel through Pierre Nora's category, the memory of being Jewish was "dormant," a temporary amnesia that was "torn" away through the trauma of colonialism.[72] Present-day encounters with their global brethren, the House of Israel are now attempting to construct a history from ritual and *lieux des memoires*, seemingly resurrecting the

[70] Ibid.

[71] Nora, 8.

[72] Ibid., 7-8.

comatose memory of their forefathers. Arguably, they are "adopting" the narrative of these visitors and applying them to a past practice.[73] Hirsch explains:

> postmemorial work…strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. Thus less-directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory, which can thus persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone.[74]

The House of Israel is "reembody"ing the past narrative. But more than reinscribing the memory of past generations, they are arguably "adopting" the biblical narrative of Hebrews who were similarly removed from their homelands and enslaved.[75] Rather than assuming the same history of forced removal from the Holy Land, it is the trauma of colonialism and slavery that unites their struggle. Furthermore, the semblances in practices described in the scriptures provide a discursive narrative to the ancestral rites that were known to be performed via "habit" but whose origins were forgotten. Due to feeling of a temporary amnesia and once lost heritage, the House of Israel is desirous to recover their memory, return to a pre-colonial heritage, and "reactivate" their faith identity.

Conclusion

These rituals are mnemonics for the House of Israel who want to make linkages to a past that existed before Ashanti and Western encroachment and before many local practices were forgotten. Further, these embodied memories strengthen the House of Israel's belief of a Hebraic

[73] Hirsch, 111, 114.

[74] Ibid., 111.

[75] Ibid., 111, 114.

heritage. The collective memory of these rituals by Sehwis, even those who do not identify as Jews, has produced a historical consciousness of what the past, before colonialism and Christian missionaries, may have been.[76] The practices are seen as the last remnant of a past identity, not tarnished by the grasp of the West. With a hazy past, scripture provides context to these rituals. It is not the ritual that generates narrative alone, but a holy text that gives understanding to their migration history and their ritual practices. The textual record of the Torah gives voice to the silence, or lack of a complete narrative, of ancestral rituals. What had to be hushed due to imperialistic powers (Ashanti, colonial, and missionary activity) can now be spoken through the divine revelation received by Toakyirafa as well as given through ritual.

The visibility of Jewish communities in Africa has escalated in the last decade and is being described as a phenomenon.[77] Yet, scholarship on Judaism in Africa, especially south of the Sahara, is minimal.[78] This historical oversight in both African and Jewish history makes it difficult to understand this occurrence. More questions must be asked to understand the legacies of a Jewish past and present in Northwest Africa. Delving further in how history is transmitted, including ritual and whispered testimony, sheds light on connections to a Jewish past. Inquires must also include how Jewish culture was transmitted to these communities, and how Jewish rhetoric became inscribed into their ancestral ritual practice. For some communities across the African continent, the history is easier to trace: with communities acknowledging awareness of

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[76] Amos Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," *History and Memory.* 1, no. 1 (1989): 5-26.

[77] Brettschneider, *The Jewish Phenomenon*; Tudor Parfitt and Netanel Fisher, *Becoming Jewish: New Jews and Emerging Jewish Communities in a Globalized World*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

[78] Africa, the world's second largest continent, is home to thousands of multi-faceted religions. For the most part, scholars of religious cultures in Africa have focused on practitioners of Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religions (ATRs), and New Religious Movements (NRMs).

Judaism originated from Internet findings (Cameroon) and/or an interest in Old Testament literature (Uganda).[79] Yet for communities who relay an Israelite or Jewish past in their oral narrative, having migrated from spaces that Jewish communities lived and were persecuted, further investigation is necessary.

Ritual and whispered testimonies may just be the medium to unlock these histories. Just as historian Luise White utilizes the realm of rumors to expose, not history at face value per se, but the history in which rumors reveal, so too could whispers amplify a history where tensions exist, and where these Hebraic imaginings may be historical realities.[80] And, if Yerushalmi is to be taken seriously, and written histories were not utilized in preference of ritual and liturgy, mapping ritual and changes to ritual based on exposure to other cultures will be instrumental in expanding the rubric of determining Jewish culture.[81] Through these channels, we may begin to understand how culture and identity is transmitted under duress. Whether dialogical editing has occurred via colonial logic or recent encounters with normative Judaism, it is important to understand the method of transmission and how it speaks (or whispers) to a historical past and a present reality of being Jewish in Northwest Africa.

Meanwhile, for the House of Israel, it is these methods that they rely on to understand and communicate a Jewish culture and past. Orations of an Israelite origin along with ritual that aligns with Mosaic law encompasses their understanding of being Jewish. Yet, due to the harassment they have been exposed to since identifying as Jewish, they continue to *shush* their identity in public spaces. Therefore, quieted ways of transmitting their Jewish culture is done to

[79] Lis, et al, *In the Shadow of Moses*, 2016.

[80] White, *Speaking with Vampires,* 2009.

[81] I primarily point to the role of the Alliance Israelite Universelle on impacting ritual. See, Laskier, *Alliance Israelite Universelle,* 1984; Schroeter and Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents," 2006

keep their own identities and livelihoods safe. By explaining to others they keep the practices of their ancestors, without Jewish rhetoric, the House of Israel is able to conceal their spiritual differences from their neighbors. By whispering “anything concerning matters Jewish” with trusted friends, they keep their identities and beliefs hidden from untrusted ears, all the while conveying a need to remain relatively secret. And by shushing newer enthusiastic members, they attempt to keep their community secure and intact.

EPILOGUE

The House of Israel (HOI) is not a unique case on the continent, as Jewish communities have emerged across Africa over the past century with the visibility of these communities escalating in the last decade and being described as a significant phenomenon.[1] And yet, I argued that the HOI are unique, as they represent a historical possibility of a past obscured by boundaries of geography, time, and academic disciplines. The Sahara along with national boundaries arbitrarily designed by colonial empires have disrupted histories and spaces that have been linked and not divided. Eras categorized by global technologies and imperial missions, too, have blurred continuities of duress, survival, and refugeeship in processes of change and development or erasure and genocide. Additionally, stunting the study of Jewish Africa is a notion of boundedness that restricts a fluidity of identity, and arguably movement, of Jewish persons. This project sought to contest the boundedness of geographical, cultural, and racial or ethnic boundaries. Many works before mine have intellectualized the impermanence of these categories; yet, when it comes to the notion of a Jewish (Black) Africa, lines are drawn, obstinately adhered to, and vehemently defended — both in Jewish and African Studies. For the former, it is perhaps influenced by an already existing minority and vulnerable status, as well as a multi-century mission to move up the racial ladder, pointing the needle ever closer to whiteness.[2] Black African Jewry complicates this goal, which physically "darkens" their image, and for those clinging on to racial ideology muddies their beliefs of ethnic purity and

[1] Brettschneider, *The Jewish Phenomenon,* 2015; Lis, et al, *In the Shadow of Moses*, 2016; Parfitt and Fisher, *Becoming Jewish*, 2016.

[2] Brodkin 1998 and Shimoni 1999.

boundedness. For the latter, it is arguably rooted in a foreign (outsider) versus indigenous (insider) argument, where having achievements in history, with Jewish origins and attributes, challenging or wrestling away those of the African. This project seeks to eliminate these barriers, and explore the fluidity of geography, culture, and race in a large temporal and spatial scope, ultimately giving way to the possibility of a Jewish Africa. The story of the HOI is an entry point into those historical possibilities. From the founding of their community in the 1970s, it has been a story of resistance and camouflage, and, according to their oral histories, one that has been part and parcel of their ancestral survival since migrating from lands north of their present location in Ghana. Ultimately, their story contributes to the growing scholarship on Judaism in Africa, its influence and presence from the past and present. Particularly for Jews of Northwest Africa, scholarship has concluded the histories ended with an ultimatum: Jews either converted or died. Yet, this community narrates a resilient refugee community where terms of survival were fluid, with particular characteristics of their identity and culture being non-negotiable.

APPENDIX

CHIEFS LIST, SEFWI WIAWSO

From Sefwi Wiawso Traditional Council

Sefwi Wiawso declared a state in 1701, but founded in 1705

Rulers (title) Omanhene

1705 – 1720	Nana Kwasi Bumankamah I
1720 – 1790	Nana Nkuah Okomdom I
1790 – 1845	Nana Aduhene I Kogyeabour
1845 – 1885	Nana Kwaku Kye
1885 – 1892	Nana Kwaku Nkuah Kaa
1892 – 1900	Nana Kwasi Ata Gyebi I
1900 – 1932	Nana Kwame Tano I
1932 – 1935	Nana Kwame Tano II
1935 – 1945	Nana Kwame Nkuah
1945 – 1952	Nana Kofi Ahenkorah
1952 – 1996	Nana Kwadwo Aduhene II
1997 – 2011	Nana Nkuah Okomdom II
2014 – present	Katakyei Kwasi Bumankamah II

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