

The following is an excerpt from my recently dissertation, “For She Is A Tree of Life: Shared Roots Connecting Women To Deity.” The woman named Rudo whom I quote here is Dr. L. Rudo Mathivha, who acted as co-researcher for this project in South Africa. My heartfelt gratitude to her for her generosity of spirit, time and hospitality, for acting as interpreter and guide during much of my field research in South Africa, and always, for her invaluable friendship.

### Who Is A Jew? Shared and Contested Identities

Mann tracht und Gott lacht: man plans and God laughs  
- Yiddish expression quoted by Kaye Schuman, personal communication, January 2002

Who is a Jew? Is it a secular Jew like Kaye Schuman, who doesn't believe in God yet proudly claims her Jewish cultural identity and takes great delight in keeping alive a nearly-extinct language, Yiddish? Is it a Lemba woman who has Jewish ancestry, attends Temple services on occasion and goes to church on Sunday? Can it be a Ugandan woman who slaughters a chicken for her Sabbath dinner, an Ethiopian who claims Jewish heritage and celebrates Jewish holidays while wearing symbols of both Judaism and Christianity; the Black Israelite Jews who left the United States around thirty years ago to settle in Dimona, Israel?

The many different Judaisms practiced today comprise what are often called movements or branches, and include: reform, conservative, renewal, reconstructionist, karaite, modern orthodox, traditional orthodox, observant, mystical, ultra orthodox, pagan, goddess, humanist and secular. Through this

work, I learned about another type I knew little about: African Judaism<sup>102</sup> as embodied by the Lemba and other groups.

In exploring the range of possible answers to the question of Jewish identity, I posed the following questions to Rudo, and to myself: “In what ways do you see yourself as a religious (Jewish) representative of the community? What has that been like for you? In what ways are you a carrier of oral traditions”? I wrote:

I bring Jewish traditions and knowledge to the Women’s Spirituality community in which I have studied and taught for the last seven years. At the same time, I find myself acting as a Women’s Spirituality representative in the Jewish, Christian and other worlds. It does at times feel like a big responsibility though one I take on with both pleasure and purpose; however, there are times when I feel unqualified for the role.

I realized midway through my MA program that the only Jews in the classroom, in one class, were Anya Silverman and I, and I suddenly found myself being a rather unwilling representative, when we were asked to prepare a *Pesach*<sup>103</sup> “snack” for the class. We did enjoy sharing this bit of ourselves, I think, once we did it; we ended up bringing the apples-raisins-honey-nuts & cinnamon mixture called charoses made from both a *Sephardic* recipe (Anya’s had dates in it too, and other spices) and an *Ashkenazic* one (mine). Right after that I started realizing my position as one of few Jews in the school, and wondering why that was so in a place which sought to be “culturally diverse” in its mission statement.

As I began to realize that I was not fully identifying as a Jew with pride, and as I grew more comfortable with the role of ‘representative’, I began to use my Jewish voice. As the daughter of a German refugee who fled the Nazis, I had been raised with constant admonitions to not make waves. I had spent my teenage years in a primarily non-Jewish environment in California, except for our synagogue

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<sup>102</sup> Also embodied by indigenous Jews in many other parts of Africa including Ghana, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Mozambique, Malawi, Uganda, Rwanda, Congo, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

<sup>103</sup> Passover.

and its youth group, and had learned to be fairly quiet about my Judaism.<sup>104</sup>

As I wrote this letter to Rudo, I realized how passionate I was about my Judaism, whether or not I was as religiously observant as I—or others—thought I should be. “It is our *culture*” is also how one Lemba spokesman, Samuel Moeti described the relationship of many Lemba with Judaism in the *60 Minutes* segment (Moeti on Stahl 2000). It was his response when he was asked whether Judaism was his race or religion, an attempt by the reporter to draw him into a frequently contested area.

My advisor Constance Jones once remarked that Judaism is sociologically considered to be more than a religion: it is a way of life and a culture in its own right. In this respect, she distinguished it from Christianity. I take this so much for granted that I no longer saw these as separate elements, which was important to this inquiry. It gave me a renewed appreciation of the complexity of my research.

Another example of a person who some might identify as culturally Jewish is my friend Diane Solomon, a San Francisco native who was born Jewish. She recently said to me: “I’m a born-again non-denominational.” She created the interdenominational concept in her work through her radio program “A Meeting of the Ways,” which airs on KKUP in San Jose, California. “I would love to see a real-life meeting of the ways, where people come together and pray together, each tradition taking perhaps twenty minutes to talk, followed by a discussion among all the groups” (Solomon, personal communication, 2001). Yet,

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<sup>104</sup> This was in part due to the fact that I personally encountered anti-Semitism for the first time during these years.

Solomon's relationship with Judaism emerges through her observance of a number of Jewish holidays and her knowledge and love of ancient Hebrew melodies and instruments.

In summary, the issue of Jewish identity is one that has been ever-present since the formation of Judaism as a religion. It seems to grow more—unnecessarily—complex in each generation, or perhaps that is simply my perspective as someone born in the twentieth century. The problem of identity—who defines it, who monitors it, what the parameters are—shows no sign of disappearing. Throughout this dissertation, I bring awareness of various aspects and views of the question. In the end, the reader will decide on his or her own definition.

#### Matrilineality and The Law of Return

There continues to be much controversy regarding the issue of who is or is not a Jew, what constitute 'authenticity' and measures of 'proof', which are applied far more often to Jews of color than others. Several of the women I interviewed in the United States were in strong agreement on this point. In a recent article Susan Sorek of St. David's College, University of Wales, Lampeter writes:

The subject of why the Rabbis adopted a matrilineal principle is the subject of much debate; as yet no clear answer to this question has been put forward. Indeed there may not be one single factor involved in the Rabbis change to matrilineal descent but a variety of influences that reflected the social and economic reasons of the period in question. This article offers one possible explanation, encompassing the ideology of *hesed*, which was an attribute specific to women, and an ideology, which was of paramount importance in the salvationist aspect of post Temple Palestine (Sorek 2002).

Sorek also notes that a child can be regarded as Jewish

only if its mother is Jewish:

The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* says that in one respect the Jewish law discriminates against men and vests women with an advantage: children take their national identity from their mother, with the result that children from mixed marriages will only be regarded as Jewish if their mother is Jewish, not their father. The matrilineal principle is not attested in the Hebrew Bible or in any other literature of the Second Temple period. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE writers such as Josephus and the gospel writers are not familiar with the idea, although Maren R. Niehoff has shown in a recent article, that Philo was at least considering the matrilineal principle, that a child takes its mother's identity (Sorek 2002).

I had written to Rabbi Abrami on this question:

DGS: You said once that orthodox and conservative Jews follow the principle of matrilineal descent. In the early eighties, the reform movement adopted the principle of patrilineal descent - in addition to the matrilineal one - when the children of non-Jewish mothers are raised as Jews...

RA: If the dad is Catholic and the mother Jewish, according to the Orthodox, there is no need for a conversion...

The law of return has been a major point of contention in Israel, especially as more people of Jewish ancestry emerge around the world, some of whom want to live in Israel.

A *Jerusalem Report* story, which talks about Jews in China, India, Africa and other parts of the world, notes:

According to Shalva Weil, professor of anthropology at Hebrew University, African countries like Nigeria, Senegal, Dahomey, and Sierra Leone are filled with tribes claiming religious descent from the lost tribes of Israel. ...there is the 100,000-member<sup>105</sup> Lemba tribe of southern Africa. Lemba practice circumcision and don't eat

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<sup>105</sup> This is a much lower estimate of the Lemba population's numbers than I have read or heard anywhere else. Most put the community's size at 200,000+; Professor Mathivha's estimate was 300,000.

“impure” animals, which include pigs and creatures with split hooves. One Lemba version of their past claims the tribe left ancient Israel for Yemen and then wandered down Africa . But according to Tudor Parfitt of London University, author of a recent book on the Lemba, the tribe is probably descended from Muslim converts. They practice a religion influenced by Islam, Hinduism, the Bantu ancestor cult and, perhaps, Judaism which they may have learned from either Jewish traders or Ethiopian Jews. Only a minority of Lemba seem to believe their tribe is of Israelite origin.

...How, then, does a group claiming Israelite descent enter the Jewish mainstream? How does a lost tribe become found? The two groups that most successfully made that transition are the Ethiopian and Indian Jews. Both communities achieved mainstream status, notes Weil, because neither was entirely “lost” to the Jewish world, but rather maintained sporadic contact with other Jews for centuries; nor did they practice another religion, at least not during the centuries they were known to world Jewry (Halevi 1993).

Aside from the Israeli authorities, many European-American Jews hold strong views about who should be allowed membership within Judaism; and no doubt the same attitudes hold true within many other religious communities. Who should be considered Jewish, what the parameters are, and what is going on in various communities around the world is a subject of constant, lively discussion among members of the Kulanu<sup>106</sup> online ListServe. These conversations brought me in touch with much valuable news about the Abayudaya Jews and other groups in Africa as well as the rest of the world.

What about the Lemba nation of South Africa, I wondered on first reading this. Here is a people who migrated from Africa, as we probably all did (Cavalli-

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<sup>106</sup> Kulanu, which means “all of us” in Hebrew, is a group of people of varied backgrounds and religious practices dedicated to “finding and assisting lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people.” Its activities include research, networking, education, donation of religious books and articles, “facilitation of conversion when requested, and help with relocation to Israel if desired.” Source: <http://www.ubalt.edu/kulanu/> (Kulanu, 2002).

Sforza 2000; Birnbaum 2001), then went to Israel and then to Yemen before returning to Africa. From what I have observed it seems likely that many of the “Jewish” customs they practiced as *kohanim* were lost somewhere during migrations within the last 2,000 years; some of the remaining customs were layered over during the twentieth century with Christian theology, ritual and customs, as Lemba were converted and baptized by Swiss, Portuguese, German and Dutch missionaries. Still a number of Lemba retain their priestly functions, which appear to trace back 3,000 years.

While Christian customs were and are practiced on the surface by many Lemba, I believe most have retained their African traditional religious beliefs and practices as well. Those beliefs are also held by those referred to by missionaries—and other Lemba—as ‘heathens’, Lemba who resisted Christianization. When one additionally sees the observance of such Jewish customs as endogamy, circumcision and keeping kosher dietary laws, the result is a very complex yet fascinating spiritual practice.

What is Judaism? What is it *not*? Was Judaism a cult led by the Levites, the first ‘formal’ rabbis, or the ancient priests of Israel and perhaps Mesopotamia before that? Were its basic values, if not laws contained in the Goddess worship of those living in ancient Mesopotamia, before the time of Abraham, before one man took it upon himself to write a covenant with God which hinged on willingness to sacrifice his own child—a covenant then written not in stone but in

flesh with the promise to circumcise all future generations?<sup>107</sup> Why would men—and those women who supported the idea—even create a religion based on such extremes of blind obedience and fear?

Is a Jew only defined as someone who practices religiously in the broadest sense, who observes all the holidays, as well as the biblical dietary laws of *kashrut* laid out in Leviticus in the Hebrew Bible? Is it someone who speaks Hebrew, who regularly attends services at a temple or synagogue? Is someone not affiliated with a religious institution considered Jewish by her or his peers? What of those in the movement known as Jewish Renewal, whose spiritual practice might seem strange to some because their religious services comprise mostly singing, dancing, chanting and meditation? What about a reconstructionist service in which a member of the congregation, male or female may lead a prayer service? How about the practicing Jews who incorporate deity-as-female into Judaism or those from Jewish backgrounds who are involved in modern Goddess-centered religions such as Wicca?

Can someone who goes into the forest to talk to God, as my paternal grandfather did, be considered Jewish? Is Judaism also embodied by *Madrikha*<sup>108</sup> Lucie Brandon, who only found her Judaism after visiting her daughter in Jerusalem, when she suddenly realized that observing the holidays faithfully—even without believing in God—was enough (Brandon, personal communication, 2001)?

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<sup>107</sup> I write of Abraham as a single man, as he is referred to in the bible, though the likelihood that he is a composite of several historical figures is far more likely. I first heard this suggestion from one of my professors, David Ulansey.

<sup>108</sup> Hebrew, meaning a lay spiritual leader—in this case, in the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

## Identity and The Other

... I was dragged to the synagogue and I did sit upstairs with my religious grandmother; my father was *bar mitzvah*'d in the old great synagogue of Rome, very conservative, probably Orthodox. And I hated it, because I felt excluded, I felt segregated as a female and not allowed to go anywhere near the Torah. And I did not do the ritual.

- Anica Vesel Mander, interview, 2001

In response to an online discussion about how Jews sometimes treat other Jews, Rabbi Michael Weisser wrote to the Kulanu ListServe on July 15, 2001:

Friends,

Regarding Barbara Taverna's comment that the days of not being welcoming to the "Jew waiting to happen" I wish she was correct. In many quarters the person wishing to be Jewish is turned away by shortsighted and perhaps bigoted synagogue leaders. Of course there are many in the Jewish world who do open their arms to welcome the stranger into our midst, and this is as it should be. In our Torah we are commanded no less than thirty-six times to welcome the stranger.

...I hope the day will come in my lifetime when the doors of the synagogues will be open wide to all who would enter into them. We need not worry about labels created by people because these just tend to divide us into factions...

For my part, I will do my best to make it known, at least in Lincoln, Nebraska, that Judaism and the Jewish people are alive and well, diverse, and open to all seekers.

Rabbi Michael Weisser (Michael Weisser, e-mail to Kulanu mailing list, 2001).

Along these same lines, I learned in reading Blu Greenberg's book *On Women and Judaism* (Greenberg 1981) that she had "othered" feminists as I othered orthodox women for years. I caught myself doing this when I read a note

I had sent to a friend on returning from a conference of orthodox Jewish feminists:

*I just returned from an amazing conference held by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance...a group I had not known anything about til last year, and one which sounds like an oxymoron at first hearing. I thought you might be interested in it mostly because it represents a space of hope—to see a group of women born into or living in a very religious tradition who are actively seeking ways to make it more egalitarian, in a framework where I suspect this requires great bravery and much risk-taking ...The fact that this conference is held at all (it's in its third year)--is a minor miracle within this community. To see these women being impatient, really pushing for change especially on the issue of agunot, 'chained women' (women trapped in abusive or loveless marriages whose husband won't grant them divorce, or women who have been deserted) was very exciting.*

*What they define as change might seem slow to us, of course but represents major movement within the tradition. For instance, they're pushing synagogues to have men bring the Torah into the 'women's section' or to allow women to carry the Torah themselves—and to have the “divider” between men and women moved to a place where women have equal geographical access<sup>109</sup> to the pulpit—instead of being up in a balcony, rendered truly invisible.*

#### *Ourselves as Other*

They [the Jewish women greeting her family at the boat] did not feel like our brothers and sisters, because they actually could not relate to our experience. They felt like just all the other Americans.

- Ani Mander describing her feelings as a new immigrant, interview, 2001

Another author who talks movingly about the self is Letty Cottin Pogrebin.

In *Deborah, Golda and Me*, she writes: “... we are not likely to consciously identify with one of our “affinity groups” unless it means enough to us. ...I could

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<sup>109</sup> In terms of being able to see and hear all the proceedings and prayers.

legitimately group myself with native New Yorkers...but I choose to identify with the categories I find most meaningful, “women” and “Jews,” two groups that manage to be simultaneously significant yet intractably marginal” (Pogrebin 1991). Pogrebin defines as marginal being outside the cultural norm.

The human norm is male and the American norm is a white Christian male and as long as Americans are measured against the standards of the white Christian male, both women and Jews will be seen as the Outsider—the Other—and the Jewish woman as the Other twice over. (The same is true for women of color...and of lesbians, whose distance from the norm can be tripled) (ibid.).

I felt multi-dimensional identifications and loyalties as I moved through my dissertation preparations and field research. These included a loyalty to myself as a feminist, as a Jew, and as a woman with deep roots and a new-found sense of connection to *Sephardic* Jewry. The latter affinity is borne out of my life experience, being mother to an African-American son; it is also linked to genetic connections I am just discovering to African Jews who may have preceded any form of religion or cultural practice we today recognize as “Jewish.” As the daughter of *Ashkenazic* Jews, I had been part of a group that frequently “othered” Sephardim. This occurred to such a degree—or I myself took on such a sense of privilege—that I was actually surprised to learn in the course of this work that the Sephardim also “other” the Ashkenazim. It was at that point, perhaps, that I recognized most clearly and with both amusement and chagrin that most religious and cultural groups can be guilty of this type of behavior, othering anyone not like ourselves.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> One indication of this is the fact that not only Jews but the Maasai of Africa—and probably most religious and ethnic groups—consider themselves to be “God’s chosen people.”

“Discrimination and bigotry are intrinsic hazards of Otherness; so is invisibility,” writes Pogrebin (ibid.). I have spoken here of the discrimination I occasionally experienced as a Jew; what I never fully realized was that as a girl growing up in Queens, New York, I was also taught to be invisible at times. This teaching was an oral tradition, which had probably been transmitted for generations; for those who thought they were protected from the Nazis because they were “good Germans” and more German than Jewish. The events of the Holocaust provided a devastating reminder of the potential hazards of visibility.

We were taught as kids to be especially careful, especially quiet, overly solicitous<sup>111</sup> on Sundays, the Christian holiday, their Sabbath. We had to dress up if we went out, out of respect, even though my recollection is that we lived in a neighborhood more Jewish than Christian; perhaps that was simply the way my personal world was constructed for me. In retrospect, I realize the invisibility took several forms: I was taught to make as little commotion as possible, never to question authority, to be a ‘nice’—as in silent, cheerful, compliant girl—and to not make waves. Making oneself heard in ways that were unpopular was clearly dangerous in some way I did not consciously understand. What I did understand, if only on a subliminal level, was that we were in the minority and had to behave accordingly.

This entailed a degree of isolation. I now recognize this “cordoning off” as an attempt to survive, to preserve our Jewish identity, but all I knew at age

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<sup>111</sup> I remember this attitude was so ingrained in us that when we visited the Vatican in 1973 I was in tremendous awe, beyond that which I often feel in sacred spaces. I actually was afraid that the priests would find out we were Jewish, though I am not sure what I thought would happen if they did.

eleven was that I was not allowed to join the local Girl Scout troop because it wasn't considered a "Jewish" group. Whether this meant my parents felt we would not be welcome there, or were being separatist, I do not know. Perhaps it was a combination of the two.

### *Jewish Identity Among the Lemba*

The Lemba, as I have indicated, have been dismissed by many in the Jewish community; they too have been accused of staying aloof from their neighbors and acting superior. Unfortunately, some of the strongest objections to the Lemba naming themselves Jews have come from Jewish clergy. The following field notes were taped as I flew back to the United States after my first research trip to South Africa in August-September 2000, after I attended the annual Lemba Cultural Association conference. I was thinking about a radio interview I had heard with a white Orthodox Jewish leader from Johannesburg, Rabbi Bernard, and Professor Mathivha, the Lemba elder and spiritual leader. The attitude exhibited by Rabbi Bernard did not show real acceptance, but a lack of respect for a man I consider his peer, much cynicism and what I can only describe as an elitist or exclusionary position. He said to Professor Mathivha and the talk show host that while the Lemba might be Jewish geographically, historically, even genetically they would not be accepted by the orthodox Jewish community as being Jewish "religiously" unless they converted officially, meaning they would have to undergo an Orthodox conversion<sup>112</sup>. The more I thought

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<sup>112</sup> Many Orthodox do not recognize Conservative conversions as authentic; also, some within the Orthodox branch barely recognize Reform Jews—even those born to two Reform Jewish parents—as truly Jewish.

about this, and the types of questions that were typically asked about Lemba practices, the angrier I got, as my notes reflect:

*If the Lemba don't all keep Shabbat, so what? American Jews certainly all don't, including me! I mean, I do it occasionally, or at least I try twice a month but it isn't a fixed and fast thing. And there are many others. Kaye (a close family friend)... has said to me that I am a perfect example of somebody who embodies the values of Judaism and is culturally very Jewish [but not overly religious] like many of her friends. I go to services, which she doesn't, but "there's no question as to our identity and what side of the fence we'd be on in a crisis."*

*So I would say the same thing about the Lemba—if they don't all keep Shabbat, if they don't read Hebrew—God knows, certainly that one<sup>113</sup>—if they don't yet have a Torah or have their synagogue (fully) built<sup>114</sup>, does that mean their faith is any less strong? Certainly their educational values for their children are extremely high; their values of family, community, keeping family together and loyalty to each other, taking care of each other, are very strong. What's more important than those things? Why are they different than three-quarters of the New York Jews who don't necessarily practice even if they can claim genetic descent? The Ethiopians converted...and still haven't been accepted by many people.*

Rabbi Bernard's position is also reflected in the article,

*"Who is a Jew?" Question Becoming More Complex* by Rabbi Stephen Pearce, senior rabbi at the Reform Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco. He talks

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<sup>113</sup> Since neither I nor most of my friends speak or read much, if any, Hebrew, I do not automatically equate fluency in Hebrew with being a Jew. I have at times felt this to be an impediment to my academic research, but never to my faith.

<sup>114</sup> I believe that a lack of financial resources, not a lack of faith is what keeps many Jewish communities, including most Lemba groups from owning a *Torah*, the sacred Jewish scroll containing the Five Books of Moses, or having a complete synagogue. The structure at Sweetwaters near Elim (Northern Province), where the LCA Conference is held, is considered by the Lemba to be their synagogue. Unfortunately, at least one Jewish observer reported it was really "just a community center" and denigrated it because at present it is an informal structure and did not meet his pre-conceived idea of what a synagogue should look like. To the Lemba, it is a synagogue. The external structure was of little importance to me; it is the intention and form of the events that occur there that give it its meaning. If the Lemba had the funding to complete what is currently a framework I do not doubt they would do it.

about the struggle among religious and secular Israelis over “Who is a Jew?” and the discussions of who has the right to make such a determination.

...the question of “Who is a Jew?” has become increasingly more difficult to determine today, not because of this wearying conflict between Jews of different movements, but because of unexpected groups that claim Jewish ancestry. In various places throughout the world, people who seem least likely to be clamoring to go to Israel and claim citizenship under the Law of Return present a dilemma for Israeli government officials and religious authorities.

Israeli officials fear, now that Israel is prospering ...residents of poorer countries will claim Jewish ancestry to take advantage of Israel's higher quality of life. This is not a far-fetched concern. For example, since 1989, the Interior Ministry has granted temporary-resident status and even citizenship to limited numbers of the Shinlung communities of northeastern India, Burma, Thailand and Bangladesh.

... It is ironic that there is no shortage of groups claiming Jewish heritage or believing that they are descendants of one of the Ten Lost Tribes, especially when, for centuries, Jews were considered pariahs by most of the world. (Pearce 2000)

In fact, several Lemba I spoke with are keenly aware of the *dis*advantages of proclaiming and emphasizing their Jewish heritage, concerned that it might be a way of making themselves targets for discrimination. After more than 50 years of apartheid, they are not eager to draw this kind of attention.

While most Lemba do not express an interest in settling in Israel, Israeli authorities worry about hoards of “long-lost Jews,” mainly from Third World countries, descending on Israel. The accuracy and reliability of genetic testing raises the question of whether such biological analysis could become the basis for determining Jewish status and whether that would be acceptable to Israeli authorities (Pearce, 2000, with permission of author).

One group of African Jews, the Abayudaya, recently joined the ranks of ‘approved’ or ‘legitimate’ Jews because they underwent a formal conversion

process led by a *beit din* or rabbinic court. For me, this notion of having to undergo an orthodox-approved conversion in order to be considered 'kosher' is in itself problematic, as I know it is for Professor Mathivha and many others.

In speaking about the idea that orthodox rabbis would not accept a reform or conservative Jewish conversion as "legitimate", Dr. Rudo Mathivha said to me one day, "It's a power play. It has nothing to do with God. Men are playing little games of power; the issue of religion is totally forgotten. A human decides whether you are this or not...which is rubbish." I said that I was more culturally than religiously Jewish, and Rudo said she identified in the same way. We agreed that the attitude of the Orthodox rabbis was narrow-minded. "I don't think God approves of them being so divisive," Rudo said to me one day (personal communication, 2000).

Why do we have to rely on matrilineal descent, I sometimes wonder. If my father and my non-Jewish stepmother, for instance, had raised me the way I was raised, with religious school, confirmation, attendance at religious services on select occasions throughout the year and observance of all Jewish holidays—which is part of their life—would I really be any less of a Jew? Would I still not take the same pride in being Jewish, know the same things about my own history, be part of the same community? To the first two I can say yes without hesitation. On the latter question my only doubt is the reception I might get from some others in the community; my intention and desire to contribute to the same group functions would not, I think, be different.

The most obvious answers to the question of “Who is ‘Other?’” might be that black Jews are alien to many white Jews; that Jews are ‘othered’ by Christians. In fact, the Sephardim and Ashkenazim ‘other’ each other, and Jews within different branches of Judaism often regard those who do not share their beliefs as foreign, peculiar, strange. But there are many nuances and subtleties, and layers within layers, not just within Judaism but within every religion. One of these is the view of more religious Jews towards those who identify primarily as culturally Jewish.