Migrant Indigeneity: Transnational Health Policy Implementation Structuring The Body, Identity, & Belief

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Abstract
Globally, the rates of non-communicable chronic diseases (NCDs) like obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease (CVD) have increased dramatically. Concurrently, analyses of the disproportionate rates of these diseases in certain populations have led to an increased production of research and literature on health disparities specifically focused on race and interventions to address these disproportions. Nevertheless, few studies have focused on 1) how communities develop, adopt, and implement their own policies to prevent disease and reduce NCD risk and 2) how communities engage with racial health disparities discourse that characterizes the health profiles of their community. This study examines how Hebrew Israelites, a transnational spiritual community with members across five continents, implement a set of global health policies which respond to the need for studies on community-based responses to racial health disparities.

Drawing on over nineteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2012, 2013, and 2014-16, across three sites – Israel/Palestine, South Africa, and the United States – with Hebrews from around the world, this dissertation demonstrates how Hebrews utilize the body as a site to engage the processes of racialization and the cultural production of indigeneity that emerges through global health policy implementation. The project's primary intervention is the deployment of migrant indigeneity, an analytic and theoretical framework developed to interpret the Hebrew-specific production of an indigenous sociality that creates and supports the health policy implementation process to reduce disease risk.

I argue that the Hebrew indigenous self-making process, which community members undergo, is critical to any success in adherence to the Hebrew health policies. Given the processes of racialization that are often imposed onto the body – here disease risk and status – the Hebrews present counter narratives and arguments that re-structure their possibilities for health and wellness through their spiritual identity and beliefs as the primary mechanism for identity and behavior. Through re-imagining and re-positioning individual selves in relationship to the Hebrew community and the externally derived category of race, the Hebrews illustrate the importance of cultural identity, specifically a commitment to the indigenous practices of their ancestors, to respond to the current public health goals of population-based health promotion and disease risk reduction.
DEDICATION

For the children of migrants and those who long to be recognized for who they believe themselves to be
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The process of writing a dissertation is one that showed me how wide my circle of support is, how I can rely on others who care for me and taught me how to be grateful in the most profound and everyday ways. I first have to honor my ancestors, all the spirit guides that walk with me, and the divinities that reside within me, beneath me and above me. I know that this project in and of itself is a reflection of the journey that my soul is on this lifetime. It is also a testament to the migrations of my own ancestors whose movements led me to and through every moment of this experience. Their presence during the times when I was most unsure, when I was ready to give up, and could not see the end was as consistent as the joys I experienced when I first began this work, when I acknowledged the many gifts attached to being able to do this research, and worlds it opened up for me. I am grateful for the gift of life which I was given to do this work, the people placed on my path to do it with, and the support I had to inspire, motivate, and encourage me through it all.

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ABSTRACT

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TRANSNATIONAL HEALTH POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURING
THE BODY, IDENTITY, & BELIEF

Diana A. Burnett

John L. Jackson, Jr.

Globally, the rates of non-communicable chronic diseases (NCDs) like obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease (CVD) have increased dramatically. Concurrently, analyses of the disproportionate rates of these diseases in certain populations have led to an increased production of research and literature on health disparities specifically focused on race and interventions to address disease rates. Nevertheless, few studies have focused on 1) how communities develop, adopt, and implement their own policies to prevent disease and reduce NCD risk and 2) how communities engage with racial health disparities discourse that characterizes the health profiles of their community. This study examines how Hebrew Israelites, a transnational spiritual community with members across five continents, implement a set of global health policies which respond to the need for studies on community-based responses to racial health disparities.

Drawing on over nineteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2012, 2013, and 2014-16, across three sites – Israel/Palestine, South Africa, and the United States – with Hebrews from around the world, this dissertation demonstrates how Hebrews utilize the body as a site to engage the processes of
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I argue that the Hebrew indigenous self-making process, which community members undergo, is critical to any success in adherence to the Hebrew health policies. Given the processes of racialization that are often imposed onto the body – here disease risk and status – the Hebrews present counter narratives and arguments that re-structure their possibilities for health and wellness through their spiritual identity and beliefs as the primary mechanism for identity and behavior. Through re-imagining and re-positioning individual selves in relationship to the Hebrew community and the externally derived category of race, the Hebrews illustrate the importance of cultural identity, specifically a commitment to the indigenous practices of their ancestors, to respond to the current public health goals of population-based health promotion and disease risk reduction.
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PREFACE
Primming Physical Immortality

The African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem\(^1\) are a community drawn primarily from what they believe are the descendants of the third exile of the Ancient Hebrew Israelites, who were led out of Israel and into Egypt and then from Egypt out into the rest of the African continent, where they were exiled again into the Transatlantic Slave Trade. From here, a group that understands itself as descendants of ancient Hebrews returned to Liberia and then to the modern nation-states of Israel/Palestine, which they insist are their ancestral home. The Hebrew Israelites believe and fervently argue that they are an indigenous community who have and are actively working to recover their indigenous culture, which they have demonstrated through the community’s prototypical model, the Village of Peace, in the community’s international headquarters in Dimona, Israel. The community understands itself as descendants of ancient Hebrews, which is distinct from being Jewish (i.e., they refused the Israeli government’s encouragement to convert to Judaism), and construct Israel as Northeast Africa. The Hebrews espouse a nuanced historical narrative that understands multiple diasporas (religious diaspora, the African/Black Atlantic diaspora, indigenous diaspora) as a dimension of their past, which is tethered to their exile from Israel into other parts of Northeast Africa and further into the African continent and continued until their

\(^1\) Throughout the manuscript, I will refer to this group as Hebrews or Hebrew Israelites.
enslavement in the Americas (Jackson 2013). As a transnational, spiritual community with members who remain scattered across multiple locations (Israel, throughout the Americas, Europe, and across the African continent), the Hebrew Israelites are committed to confronting their diasporic past(s) as they work towards reclaiming their indigenous future.

This Hebrew community argues that they are a spiritual (and explicitly not religious) community, with a majority currently residing in the Southern Negev (primarily in Dimona) of Israel/Palestine (estimated between 2,500 and 3,000 members). Ben Ammi Ben Israel originally of Chicago (given name Benjamin Carter) was the leader of the community until his death in December 2014. After many successive changes in leadership, Ben Ammi is said to be responsible for leading the largest population of racialized Black people from the Western Hemisphere to the land of Israel/Palestine. The Hebrews returned to Israel/Palestine in 1969, primarily from the United States, following their initial departure from United States in 1967 to Liberia, in order to – as they see it – close the open circle produced by the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Over two and a half decades, Hebrews would continue to make aliyah or return to the land of their ancestors from the United States and various parts of the Caribbean, South America, and Western Africa.

This Hebrew community has understood themselves as exceptional for doing what no other group had previously been able to accomplish: migration in
mass to Israel/Palestine. Building on the precedent set by Black Jewish groups established in the early 20th century, the founding of the modern nation-state of Israel, in tandem with the social and political fervor of the Civil Rights Movement and Pan-Africanist Movement, catapulted this community onto the Hebrew scene in a new way. Like the congregational members of Beth B’nai Abraham, who are referenced extensively in Landes’ (1967) manuscript, the Hebrews also had “nationalistic plans in Liberia.” In 1967, they migrated in mass to Liberia only to later recognize that their true home as Israelites was in Israel. In May of 1969, “persist[ing] that they had ancient title to the claim” (Landes 1967, 177), the Hebrews utilized the Law of Return to settle in Israel/Palestine. Although the Hebrews understood Israel to be their homeland based on their construction of indigeneity, the community’s refusal to convert to a form of Judaism acknowledged by the government’s rabbinical council created challenges for their transition to life in Israel.

When they left America in the late 1960s, the Hebrew Israelites framed their project in exclusively racial terms: black versus white, Jacob versus Esau, Israelites versus Edomites, chosen people versus imposters. Racial authenticity was their quintessential organizing principle for belonging. The logic of inclusion was strictly genetic and patrilineal. Being an “Israelite” was presumptively and undeniably predicated on being “[B]lack,” and there was an unapologetically racialist underpinning to
their entire mission. After forty-five years in Israel and continuous revelations from Ben Ammi about the true nature of their leadership role on the planet, they had become clear in the early 2000s about the fact that their former focus on race was also a kind of misplaced preoccupation. It was not that they were anti-[B]lack. Indeed, their entire project placed the Garden of Eden squarely in Africa and defined a large swath of Africa as peopled by descendants of Jacob. Race was not completely irrelevant. It was just that race had formerly been such an obsession, they claimed, that it did not allow them to accept their more universalist goal, which they began to make more explicit almost half a century after arriving in Israel (Rouse, Jackson & Frederick, 2016: 189).

Here, I draw on Jackson’s (2016) account of the changing significance of race to contextualize the process of spiritual synchronism. This concept reflects the community’s understanding of the impact of the processes of racialization on the structure of their identity and the transition from state-endorsed notions of racial categorization identity to what they believe to be their indigenous identity as Hebrews. The dissertation will work to illustrate these generational transformations and reifies the claims that I make about the reflective shifts in identity formation. The layered complexity of diaspora and the textured and robust, palimpsestic construction of the transnational can be illustrated through Hebrew practices, migrations, and theology. The communally held belief in their
heritage as descendants of ancient Hebrews has led the community to what can be understood as the re-indigenization of their practices. For the Hebrews, indigeneity coalesces in response to the state’s enforcement of a particular religious identity connected to the acquisition of citizenship as well as in attempts to address what they believe are the historical disjunctures in the narratives of racialized Blacks in the Americas commonly known circulated in the region.

As the saints, how community members refer to each other, worked to build the Kingdom of Yah (a term often used to describe the community), there were many challenges to their presence in what they refer as ‘the Land.’ The Hebrews’ refusal to convert to Judaism resulted in a number of consequences that are reflected in the structure of Hebrew families and health policies. The revival and development of their Hebraic system of health promotion and disease prevention reflects the community’s diasporic experiences. As the Hebrew Israelites were building community and the model for all Hebrew life, their return to Israel/Palestine (and their refusal to convert to Judaism) meant that they were denied citizenship and the accompanying benefits. As non-citizens without the assistance provided by the government to new migrants, the community struggled to provide for the basic needs of community members: food, housing, and healthcare in addition to respond to the lack created by the social and economic benefits provided to other newly arriving parties. While community members began experimenting with dietary change and preventive
methods to address their health prior to their arrival in Israel, in the Americas and in Liberia, in response to the initial unwillingness of the Israeli government to provide health care for the community, they experienced an increased commitment to maintaining the lifestyle ascribed to their ancestors, and the community created their own more defined system of preventive health care. The Ministry of Divine Health (a community institution that directly focuses on the health of the community on the macro and micro levels) has led the revival and development of their Hebraic system of health promotion and disease prevention, a system which is the basis for the community’s ‘global’ health policy in all jurisdictions.

A system of preventive health measures based on their interpretation of sacred text was developed, a system that also responded to their relative lack of access to conventional and institutionalized biomedical health care and their knowledge of the impact of their ‘diasporic past’ in the Americas relative to disease risk. First, given that the community believes that they are the descendants of Ancient Hebrews, the Hebrews have aimed to model every aspect of their lifestyle after their understandings of the practices of ancestors. The community operates under a system of “spirituality-in-practice,” comprised of a set of lifestyle practices that reflect their interpretation of Old Testament principles and which can be most acutely observed through the set of health promoting practices, which they believe can prevent nutrition-related chronic
diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. This system of lifestyle practices is structured and organized around the community’s ‘Hebraic’ (separate and distinct from Jewish) theological principles and mandates. This process of spiritual and cultural recovery is guided by their adherence to a set of community-based interpretations of Hebrew scripture, including the belief that the ancient Hebrews survived on a plant-based diet (their interpretation of Genesis 1:29) and lived according to a particular set of practices and values that they believe could under ideal conditions lead to the ultimate goal of this Hebrew Israelite group: everlasting life.

Communally-held beliefs in their heritage as descendants of ancient Hebrews has led the community to what can be understood as the “re-indigenization” of their practices. Their commitment is connected to larger global movements of indigeneity, which focus on the decolonization of their diets (returning to the diets of their ancestors prior to colonial contact). For the Hebrews, this move towards indigeneity and decolonialism, known as the High Holy and Sacred Diet, includes a strict form of veganism, decreased sodium and sugar intake, increased fiber and water intake, avoidance of processed foods, weekly raw food days, avoidance of certain oils and fats, in addition to regimented and prescribed amounts of physical activity, fasting, internal cleansing, avoidance of smoking, and proper rest (Lounds, 1981; Hare, 1998; Singer, 2000; Michaeli, 2000), often referred to as the “Dimona model.”
Moreover, this collection of practices, which I refer to as Hebrew health policies throughout the manuscript, directly incorporate a challenge to normative conflations of race and biology in the rates of non-communicable chronic diseases (NCDs) and a sustained engagement with the reconstructing, refashioning, and transforming of the Black body and health, which particularly piques my interest in their work of spiritual-cultural recovery. Their ancestral and spiritual commitment to an indigenous model of health promotion is believed to circumvent the population-based (or here, race-based) notions about the genetic foundations of nutrition-related chronic diseases, with a documented high prevalence among racialized Black populations in the Americas. “Hebrew Israelites also characterize their diet as an antidote to the unhealthy lifestyle they associate with African American inner city communities” (Michaeli, 2000).

**Hebrew Health Policies**

Plant-based (vegan) diet

Water upon rising; at least 64oz of water is encouraged daily

One bean day per week

Two raw food days per week

Pursuit of foods in their most natural form (raw and organic foods encouraged)

Avoidance of processed and canned foods

Use of only cold-pressed oils
Avoidance of certain food combinations (e.g., fruits and vegetables at the same time)

No eating and drinking at the same time (Water is to be consumed at least 30 minutes prior to eating and no sooner than one hour after a meal)

Daily consumption of supplements (molasses, fenugreek, Brewer’s yeast, sesame seeds, kelp, spirulina)

Seasonal cleansings (quarterly regimen of garlic, olive oil, and herbs to promote increased elimination for 3-5 days)

Raw food weeks (4 times/year)—coincides with seasonal cleansing process

Sugarless weeks (4 times/year)

Salt-less days (every other day of the week; Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday)

Avoidance of the utilization of microwave ovens and efforts to reduce any harmful radiation

Regular exercise (at least three times per week to the point of exhaustion for 30 minutes or more for all adults)

Fasting (Weekly on the Sabbath)

Proper Elimination (colon hydrotherapy encouraged although dietary measures should naturally aid in this process)

Avoidance of alcohol, drugs, any stimulants, additives (including caffeine and food additives)

Massage (at least once per month)
One of the community’s most radical principles is their belief in physical immortality. In addition to endeavors to return their diet as indigenous as possible, abstention from salt, sugar, certain fats, meats, alcohol, and other substances, the Hebrew Israelites believe that they can work to live forever. Everlasting life, which is core to their efforts to improve the planet, is one aspect of their ability to ensure life for not only members of their community but also others who follow this plan. It was a practice and belief that traveled the globe with their health policies.

Also, as the community developed and in response to Israeli government’s practices of targeted deportation and rejection of the community’s claims of indigeneity. The community continued to evolve and recover practices lost through their exile. As they continue to develop the practice of polygamy emerged, which has generated many children in families that are organized by what they term as ‘Divine Marriage.’ Through ethnographic research, community members shared with me that many men (especially leaders) were strongly encouraged to take more than one wife even if they were not inclined to do so given their own inclinations in support of the goal to increase the ranks of the community, particularly when aggressive deportation measures were being taken by the Israeli government.
From Humble Beginnings to International Business and Community

The global Hebrew community maintains what they call jurisdictions, or local chapters or groups of the community. For example, while the community formed in Chicago, members in other cities expanded the community. The community began in the heart of the Black Belt, or the place I theorize as one of the racialized islands in Chicago. “The Hebrew Israelites were headquartered at what they called the Abeta Hebrew Culture Center on the second floor of an office building at Forty-Seventh and Cottage Grove. The cultural center was where they taught history classes and Hebrew classes, threw parties, sold Sunday dinners, and organized bake sales to raise money for the community” (Rouse, Jackson, & Frederick, 2016: 105). From here, it would be the work of members like Prince Asiel Ben Israel to catapult the community to international acclaim. Prince Asiel was the community’s international ambassador and was responsible for developing relationships with an international constellation of communities and individuals that would support and if necessary defend the community and community life for years to come. He forged relationships with other spiritual communities like the Nation of Islam, who would support the community and even with white American Jews and the United States government, who would eventually provide resources to build the community’s schools. Prince Asiel was also responsible for one of the community’s proudest moments in relatively recent history: having Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown join in 2003 them as
friends of the community. A relationship was built through Pat Houston, Whitney Houston’s manager and sister-in-law (wife to her brother) whose spiritual advisor was a member of the community. These events which occurred decades apart re-popularized and promoted the Hebrew life in Dimona to different generations and segments of the community.

Similarly, the work of community leaders has been attributed to their entrepreneurial success with the development of a global constellation of vegan soul food restaurants. For example, in the southern United States, one member whose military service led her from Baltimore, Maryland to Ft. McPherson, Georgia, has been responsible for the institutionalization of the community’s diet and the expansion of the community’s national collective of vegan soul food restaurants. Yafah Israel, who is responsible for the community’s internationally circulated cookbook, worked to perfect the community’s staple recipes, which are featured in the global constellation of community restaurants and Hebrew homes.

Under the auspices of the Hebrew Israelite Community of Jerusalem, she developed a deep interest in the vegan diet that the spiritual practice prescribes and opened the first Soul Veg in 1978 to show people that going meat-free didn’t have to mean ‘eating rabbit food.’ Initially located on Peachtree Street across from the Fox Theatre [in Atlanta], the restaurant moved to West End in the early ‘90s. ‘We wanted to offer the
community an alternative to what they were used to, like fast food, which didn’t serve them well,’ Israel says. ‘We wanted to be that light, with food that maintains that down-home soul food taste but is prepared in a healthy manner.’ Today, the space has an old-school cafeteria vibe, its half-wood-paneled walls festooned with framed newspaper clippings and photos of spiritual leaders. Locals line up for the daily lunch buffet, kalebone and meatless Garvey burger. An on-site juice bar called Return to Royalty serves up seriously addictive smoothies. Soul Vegetarian became a catalyst, inspiring healthful converts from all walks of life to open their own plant-based eateries and helping support a growing network of urban farms and community gardens (Cardigan 2017).

The restaurant in the West End of Atlanta now has a sister location in the Virginia-Highland (Va-Hi) neighborhood. The Va-Hi location, situated in a more affluent neighborhood, appeals to a different demographic of those wanting to consume vegan and vegetarian fare and provides standard restaurant full-service and works to publicize the efforts of the community. These restaurants join with the Original Soul Vegetarian Restaurant, the first restaurant in Chicago, several in the Washington, D.C/Maryland/Virginia area, locations in Tallahassee, Florida, Tel Aviv and Dimona, Israel/Palestine and others, which were previously in operation in California, Kingston, Jamaica, and Liberia. Similar to what was described in an article about Atlanta location of the restaurants, many of the
restaurants have developed adjacent businesses geared towards the promotion of
the tenets and policies of the community: bookstores, where the community’s
literature is sold, natural hair salons (the only acceptable form in which
community members can wear their hair, with the exception of any type of
dreadlocks) and barber shops, juice bars, fruit and vegetable co-op businesses,
colon hydrotherapy businesses, and clothing stores (community members are
only allowed to wear all-natural fibers).

The businesses have been driven by the development and growth of
jurisdictions, or local Hebrew groups in spaces around the world. While in the early years, the Hebrews focused their energy on ‘returning’ to Israel, an
agreement with the Israeli government and the backlash after many attacks of violence directed at the community (detailed in the community’s production, A
Day of the Show of Strength, in 1986) led to the community to discourage new
mass forms of migration in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, the community continues to maintain and establish new ‘jurisdictions’ throughout the world. In the past twenty years, the Hebrews have expanded to South Africa, which is one of their largest international jurisdictions outside the United States. At the present moment, the Hebrews have less faith in people working with their Hebrew brothers and sisters in Babylon (the Western world) and are now focused on different locations in the Global South. After the official end to apartheid, South Africa was primed for the Hebrew arrival; here the Lemba, a Black
Southern African ethnic group found in South Africa and Zimbabwe, laid the foundation for African Jewry and documented its Jewish heritage through genetic testing (Parfitt, 2013). While there are differences in the stories of Black Americans (North and South) and Black South Africans, the shared experience of marginalization (through enslavement, apartheid, and a shared history of colonialism) has served as to bridge the historical disjuncture. All jurisdictions, including those in South Africa, are united under the umbrella of their shared belief in their Hebraic identity, which informs their quest to implement the Hebrew system of ‘spirituality-in-practice.’

**Community Organization**

The community runs on the hierarchy of leadership. At the head of the community prior to his death was Ben Ammi Ben Israel, who the community refers to as the Messiah. The leaders appointed to execute his plan are the community’s international rank of princes, who are bestowed the title of “Nasik,” prince in Hebrew. Then is the Sarim, the group of ministers responsible for different aspects of community life ranging from agriculture, health, information, etc. There is also the Kohaním, the priesthood, which is responsible for the spiritual life of the community as well as the rules, regulations, and adherence to Hebrew laws. Following the priests are the Crowned Brothers and Sisters (Ahtureem), which is the highest level of leadership that women can occupy. Next are the Men and Women of Valor, who report to the Crowned Brothers and
Sisters and are responsible for serving as more accessible models of upstanding Hebrew citizens. They are followed by the Sisters and Brothers on the Move, who are the up and coming emergent leaders who have developed themselves into evolved Hebrew adults and are poised for further leadership within the community. The Chosen First Fruits (CFF) are the group of young people ranging from graduates of their ‘coming in’ or initiation into adulthood ceremony to the age of forty. This group of young people is the heart and soul of the community, as they represent its vibrancy, the age of reproduction, and reflect the rapid changes occurring within the community. Lastly, is the Youth on the Move (YOM), which is the group of adolescents ranging from those who have completed the Hebrew rite of passage around age thirteen to those awaiting their official ‘coming in’ ceremony, which can occur at any age between eighteen and twenty-five. The Hebrew community hierarchy is as follows: there is God, man, woman, then child. It is the structure that governs every part of Hebrew life.

The community has a number of different institutions. Most important for this research are the trio of the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, and Information. The Ministry of Health is comprised of community members who also serve as part of the Rofim (a cadre of healers) who respond to the healthcare needs of the community. Through consultation, the Ministry of Health led Hebrew community members in preventative health care measures. For example, members of the ministry would provide colonics, massages, or herbal remedies.
The Ministry of Health works to inform the global community about the latest Hebrew health policies and practices for best health. The Ministry of Health, when necessary, would also direct community members to and through engagement with the Western biomedical health care system when natural, herbal, or non-allopathic forms of treatment are not possible. Leaders of the Ministry of Health are responsible for the development of materials for example, the High Holy and Sacred Diet or materials on best practices for maintaining a vegan diet during pregnancy and childbirth.

The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for maintaining the community’s farm and research related to the theo-agricultural aspects of community life, including “plants of renown.” Plants of renown are plants recognized for their medicinal or healing properties, which the ministry would focus on for development, cultivation, and (in consultation with the Ministry of Health) for consumption for improved health. Through the connections between agriculture and health, the Ministries of Agriculture and Health work together to research and disseminate information about plants, herbs, and supplements to use to access health and everlasting life. Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the delivery of produce to the community for regular consumption.

The Ministry of Information is responsible for public relations, official communication, and correspondence between the community and outside
institutions. Ministers are charged with being the historians and providing official community narratives that can be shared with parties outside of the community. Furthermore, the Ministry of Information is responsible for documenting community affairs and important events in the community.

The Context

Within anthropology, most of the work prior to Merrill Singer’s dissertation and a few articles and John Jackson’s more recent book-length project drew on work with Hebrew Israelites on the East Coast. Specifically, anthropologist Ruth Landes’ ethnographic portrait of the “Negro Jews of Harlem” provides great historical context for how anthropologists were framing research on Black Jewish and Hebrew groups today. Her broad engagement with and analysis of the factors that gave rise to the communities she observed in the 1920s and 1930s (such as Marcus Garvey’s race-based nationalism and even Father Divine’s more multi-racial operationalization of “supernatural faith”) serve as the foundation for my current study with the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, a transnational group of Black Americans, Black Caribbeans, and Black continental Africans that builds a trajectory in anthropological research that Landes and Brotz studied in the early 20th century. In the late 20th century and the early 21st century, a group of anthropologists, mostly European and white Jewish scholars who are creating a body of scholarship about this specific
Hebrew community. This is conversation with scholars working with other ‘African Jewish’ populations globally and the research in Americas on Hebrew groups. My work continues in this critical line of inquiry by focusing its attention on how 21st century Hebrews construct their own distinctive set of Hebrew cultural practices, cosmological systems and ontologies within a larger socio-political context.

Although scholars have destabilized the biological constructions of race and popularized social construction as a framework for understanding race, the areas of health research, clinical practice, and scientific discourse on genetic explanations for patterns of disease continue to deploy unscientific conceptualizations of race to reproduce narratives of racial difference (Hunt et al. 2013). Amidst, and perhaps against, the backdrop of the voracity of the obesity crisis and the global epidemic of nutrition-related chronic diseases, continued inequities in chronic disease prevalence rates persist and are subsequently utilized to reinforce narratives of population-based differences in health outcomes. The renaissance of genetics and the construction of racial categories in medical genetics discourse utilizes the contemporary moment of the dominance of genetics and genomic research to promote scholarship that revitalizes notions of racially-based biological inferiority. Although anthropologists have destabilized the biological constructions of race and popularized the social constructivist approach to understanding race; health research, clinical practice,
and scientific discourse on genetic explanation for patterns of disease continue to deploy unscientific conceptualizations of race to reproduce narratives of racial difference (Hunt, et.al, 2013; Roberts, 2011). This discursive trend demonstrates the urgency and relevance of this research to explore under-researched phenomena that is mostly absent from the literature as well potential sources of praxis-based models for promoting health equity and eliminating racial disparities in the rates of nutrition related chronic diseases such as obesity, hypertension and diabetes. As the global epidemic of obesity and correlating rates of chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes increase drastically, understanding how prevention can be structured to attend to the migrations and multi-national residence of populations will be essential to disease prevention as well as health equity writ large.

There has not been much attention on how communities have developed and implemented their own strategies to address this global health epidemic and/or how they understand the relationships that emerge from the data on race (or more broadly, identity) and health. The Hebrews have developed a holistic model of non-communicable disease prevention, which they believe can prevent, reduce, and eliminate nutrition-related diseases like obesity, hypertension, and diabetes. My research sought examine how the Hebrew Israelite implementation of their global health policies address nutrition-related chronic disease prevention (of obesity, hypertension, and diabetes) within this community.
In their forty-plus years of sustaining a community base outside of the Americas, the community has adapted and implemented their health policies among the members in what they call ‘jurisdictions’ around the world. Specifically, I examined the three contexts of Hebrew health policy implementation in Georgia in the United States, in Dimona in Israel/Palestine, and in various locations in South Africa.

The impetus for Hebrew health policy implementation efforts is bolstered by the commonalities in prevalence of racial health inequities especially in NCDs among Black populations in the United States and South Africa. Those who are racialized as Black in the United States are 40% more likely to have hypertension, and are twice as likely to be diagnosed with diabetes compared to whites (CDC, 2012). Those defined as Black in the United States also have the highest rates of obesity at 47.8% (CDC, 2012). The disproportionate rates of obesity are gendered, unevenly affecting Black women. Among Blacks age 20 and older, 63 percent of men and 77 percent of women are overweight or obese. There is other research that shows that the prevalence of high blood pressure in Black Americans is the highest in the world (American Heart Association, 2016).

In the United States, the research was conducted in inner-city of the nation’s Southeastern region, Atlanta. Atlanta is home to the Centers for Disease Control and a number of world-class institutions of higher education, which Hebrews are in conversation with through their own version of public health education and
interdisciplinary research. Professors and public health professionals from these institutions are often engaged with and participated in community learning throughout the data collection phase of this research. Moreover, Atlanta’s geographic position as an urban crossroads known to be the Black Mecca of South, it attracts people from all over the South, the nation, and even internationally. This was also true of within the Hebrew community in Atlanta, the membership was a collection of regional, nation, and international community members who found themselves in the Mecca.

Figure 1: A map of Georgia which shows where Atlanta is in reference to the rest of the state and the Southern United States region

South Africa is an ideal space for a theoretical and practical interrogation of the meanings and practices of transnationalism, and the study of Hebrews in this context allows for a deeply considered exploration of the embedded nature of social,
political-economic, and corporeal consequences and impact of identity on health. As the global epidemic of obesity and correlating rates of chronic diseases increase drastically, understanding how prevention can be structured to attend to the migrations and multi-national residence of populations will be essential to disease prevention as well as health equity writ large. South Africa is in the center of these intersecting debates particularly in the post-apartheid moment where continued social inequities in the country (Ataguba, Akazili, & McIntyre, 2011; Benatar, 2013) manifest in racial inequities in health. In South Africa, 57.7% of Black women and 25.4% of Black men are overweight and/or obese, with a combined prevalence rate of 24% for hypertension, and have steadily increasing high prevalence rates of diabetes compared to lower rates among whites (Bourne, Lambert, & Steyn, 2002; Steyn, 2006; Peer et.al, 2012). The International Diabetes Foundation (2015) estimated 7.5% prevalence of diabetes in South Africa, making it a leader on the African continent with its partner Egypt. The Hebrew local health policy adaptation and implementation process also benefits from South Africa’s Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, which has prioritized non-communicable disease prevention and enumerated multiple levels and sectors of governance for collaboration to implement policies addressing the issue.

Although this research has the potential to transform health research globally, I conducted this research in South Africa for three reasons. One, it is the location in the world where the largest numbers of Hebrews are residing in
community outside of Israel and the Western Hemisphere. The South African jurisdictions provide an ample selection of community members to participate in research. Two, it is the ideal place to analyze the model of policy adoption and implementation because South African community members are among the newest members of the transnational AHIJ community and have the least amount of experience with adopting and implementing the AHIJ global policies locally. Examining adoption and implementation in action, provides the opportunity to document the entire process which includes the successes and the challenges to the process. And three, it is one of the most analytically rich spaces for exploring the diasporic and transnational components of this research given that the South African community members are predominantly native South Africans, unlike the North and South Americans of African descent in the other jurisdictions, which adds multiple dimensions to the implementation process locally and globally. Therefore, I conducted research in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth, and one rural location, Ngcobo.
Figure 2: A map of South Africa which shows the different cities where the research is conducted and in reference to Southern Africa

Israel/Palestine is a critical space for a theoretical interrogation of the meanings and practices of diaspora with its own national investment in the transnational iteration of diaspora. Also, study with Hebrews allows for a deeply considered exploration of the embedded nature of social and political economic corporeal consequences and impact of diaspora and transnationalism on health. Diaspora is an essential theoretical framework for analyzing the political economy of the transnational migrations and the structure of governmentality (Thomas, 2009) and additionally serves as a prime epistemological starting place for grounding an inquiry into the revival of the discourses on genetic determinism on health outcomes, which are framed around racial categories. Although the Hebrews have cultivated significant communities in Arad and
Mitzpe Ramon, Dimona is the official international community headquarters. The research conducted in Israel/Palestine occurred in the city of Dimona, in the Southern Negev region of the country. Unfortunately, official Israeli health statistics are collected are not collected by race. The data for those living in Israel/Palestine is collected from Jews and Muslims. This leaves a gap for official reports on Hebrews living in Israel/Palestine and other spiritually or religiously marginalized groups. There is data however to suggest that there are wide inequalities in NCDs in the country based on socioeconomic status. Furthermore, among immigrant groups and other subpopulations like the Hebrews’ neighbors in the southern region of the country, the Bedouins, disparities in NCD risk, incidence, and prevalence exists (Muhsen et.al., 2017). Beginning in 2010, the Israeli Ministry of Health started to think about social inequalities in a more strategic fashion. They named health inequalities as one of the strategic objectives for 2011-2014 and have implemented programs to try to reduce health inequalities and to address the cultural barriers that exist in addition to ethnic and geographic marginalization.
Figure 3: A map of Israel/Palestine and which illustrates where Dimona is in relationship to the capital, the West Bank, Jerusalem, and neighboring countries.

**Research Design & Methods**

In this section of the chapter, I work to detail my methodological design, plan, and data analysis process. I drew on a range of sources and data sites to structure the analysis that are produced in the chapters of the dissertation. Here, I will outline the data collection methods, the timeline of my fieldwork and how they intersect with the material produced in the chapter.

I formally began fieldwork in the summer of 2012, after my first year of course work as a doctoral student. However, prior to my work as a graduate student in Philadelphia, I was engaged with the Hebrew community in Chicago as an adolescent and in the months prior to the move. Moreover, through engagement with Hebrews in Chicago, I was aware of community structure, its public
community engagement work, restaurant set-up, and public health work. And it was here where I was able to do initial interviews. In 2011, as John Jackson was finalizing his book, he encouraged me to meet the Hebrews in North Philadelphia who would bridge the group of Hebrews from his dissertation fieldwork to his most recent single-authored ethnographic manuscript, *Thin Description: Ethnography and the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem*. During the first summer, I spent two months in Dimona. Given my interests and previous research in Latin American & Caribbean, I spent the remaining time in Jamaica, exploring the small Hebrew community in Kingston, which then prompted an engagement with the Rastafari communities there given their aligning pursuits around health and food consumption. I would return the following summer to Dimona for further research, focused on the relationship between chronic disease prevention (focused on hypertension) and identity. I had a rare pleasure of experiencing this summer research trip with committee members Lisa Lewis and John Jackson whose research and disciplinary training helped me to understand the community in a rich way. I continued to maintain relationships with the community after summer fieldwork trips as I completed my coursework. During this time, I also earned a Master of Public Health degree which informed my work on non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention. I defended my dissertation proposal in May of 2014 to conduct a standard twelve-month period of ethnographic field research with the community in Dimona. After a summer internship at the National Institutes of
Health, I was scheduled to depart to Israel/Palestine. Nevertheless, the most recent violent eruption in the region - what is now referred to as Operation Protective Edge - changed my research location. During this time, it was unclear how long the firing of rockets, airstrikes, and other violence would last. And while I was prepared to go and committed to sticking with the plan I proposed, I received professional and personal advice to the contrary. Therefore, I had to re-route my fieldwork and design a new plan for research. Given these changes, I spent the most intensive period between October 2014 and May 2016 conducting fieldwork with Hebrews; officially beginning in the United States, moving to Israel Palestine, and then concluding in South Africa.

The research was structured around the following research question: how does a transnational community, like the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, organize, manage, and implement a ‘global’ set of health policies locally to address non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and what is its significance for the overarching national and global health policy implementation environments that exist today? Therefore, the specific aims of the study were to: (1) understand the processes, mechanisms, and practices related to the adoption and implementation of Hebrew global health policies to address nutrition-related chronic disease inequities; (2) examine community perceptions about the relationship between Hebrew ‘global’ health policies and chronic disease
prevention among the Hebrew community members; and (3) understand the context of the “effects” of policy adoption and implementation system on NCDs.

Initially, to address these aims, I thought that I would engage approximately 100 community members in Dimona. While there is great intentionality in the size and structure of these purposive samples based on Guest and colleagues (2006) findings about theme saturation in interviews, the methods account for a modest dropout rate throughout the course of the study. The aim was to interview each study participant at least once with the prospect of a follow-up interview. I imagined that I would ask questions which have been confirmed to be significant based on review of previous interviews conducted with community members in the start-up phase of research. To ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives, I had community members from across age groups (18+), with diverse representation with respect to place of birth, gender, and position within the community to participate. Additionally, I also interviewed NCD international policy implementation leaders to understand the context and conditions under which this transnational community implements community-based ‘global health policies’ locally.

Although this changed in the field, I did adapt my original methodological plan and engage each research site to think about global health policy implementation locally. In Atlanta, I worked in the city with the community membership there, although there were often members from other jurisdictions
in the U.S. South or internationally who drifted in and out. Similarly, in
Israel/Palestine, I worked primarily in Dimona but paid close attention and
conducted interviews from jurisdictions in the U.K., Bermuda, the Virgin Islands,
Antigua, and other locations in the United States. In South Africa, I initially
designed the research to only collect data in three sites: Cape Town,
Johannesburg, and Durban, but at the encouragement of the community, I was
invited to also spend time in East London, Ngcobo, and Port Elizabeth.

Within the body of the dissertation, I work to integrate triangulated data
from the following sources: 1) multi-sited participation observation with Hebrew
community members in Israel/Palestine, South Africa, and the United States; 2)
semi-structured interviews with one hundred and twenty one Hebrews who
represent the community membership across the Americas, Europe,
Israel/Palestine, and Africa; 3) focus groups with different collectives of
stakeholders within the community on specific themes and; 4) analysis of printed
Hebrew institutional policy as well as national policy relevant to NCD prevention
and theological literature.

As an ethnographic researcher, this research was not undertaken without a
number of challenges, as access to the community became central to the work. For
example, political violence translated into limited access to the data I proposed to
collect. Moreover, as is common with other communities with extended histories of
state surveillance and being the target of political violence, the Hebrews in different
locations were deeply suspicious of my motivations, reasons for conducting research, and my actual ‘agenda’ and funding sources. Their heightened suspicious or ‘racial paranoia’ are not unmerited, as the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) released a report on domestic terrorism which named Black identity extremists are one of the effective enemies of the state. And as Hebrews report, at one point the community was on the FBI’s Most Wanted list. Nevertheless, I was surprised by the reception that I received from certain community members who suggested that I was an agent. Again, there are stories of FBI agents who have joined the community only to have their trust betrayed, but it made the research process incredibly intense, difficult, and rich.

Another component of the research that provides an interesting dialectic for the research was that I identified as a woman, the fact that community members read me as Black, and I often revealed when I was asked that I grew up in Chicago. While often this facilitated the research in allowing me to be perceived as ‘native’ to certain extent, it also provided an opportunity for members of the community to confront, rehearse, and perform the narratives (which are often individually and communally held) about Black people from Chicago. Although I was a mostly willing participant in the conversations that were generated through these exchanges, it was the conversations around gender which made it more difficult to remain in ethnographic character. I benefited from ways in which food, nutrition, and diet were women’s work and I often had mostly unrestricted access to this
information, but it was often the ways in which my status as a woman precluded me from other areas like community ideology, theology, and communally held beliefs that were a challenge. Nevertheless, as I sought to navigate these community structures, I was able to build very strong bonds with women in the community and learned how to work around the barriers that were placed around the research. Often my naivety as an outsider about these limitations was a source of extensive data production. Collectively, I benefited from my positionality in the field in ways that often were traumatic, but also were great sources of learning. Through my experience with the community, I was able to establish credibility among its membership and to eventual flourish as a ‘friendly visitor.’

Furthermore, to ensure that the effects of my experiences in the community did not completely distort the data represented in this dissertation, I sought to employ a number of methodological tools to support the collection of the most objective knowledge as possible. For example, in addition to relying on participant observation as a central method, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with community members, conducted surveys and focus groups, and analyzed community documents to support the findings that are here in this dissertation. While in certain sections of the dissertation, the difference of worldview, opinion, and perspective arises, it is critical to the scholarship on the community as there has yet to be a young, woman, of color, who is not a member of the community to write
about the Hebrew Israelites. The analyses here represent those marginalized experiences and reflect the production of data from this specific positionality.

**Multi-Sited Participant Observation**

As an ethnographic researcher, I rely on participant observation as an integral methodological tool. Similarly, as someone who understand herself as a mixed-methods researcher, I draw from feminist and community-based participatory methods (Wang & Burrus, 1997) to inform and undergird my methods in the field. Through the course of this research, I focus on four major spaces with the Hebrew world: homes, kitchens and adjacent spaces of food preparation and consumption, Hebrew classes and other spaces of theological dissemination, and Hebrew community events. I have fieldnotes that are a collection of notes that I took while observing as well as after encounters, events, and interviews. The research that is presented here received IRB approval or was considered exempt from formal approval. Furthermore, verbal and written consent was sought by all participants and research protocols were shared with leaders of the Hebrew community and local leaders in each research site.

I have been working with the Hebrew community formally since 2012. Similar to my research interests in the relationship between the global and local, it was both global and local political situations that transformed this research project from a single site project to a multi-sited project. I employed the multi-sited
ethnographic approach of “following the thing” (Marcus, 1995), in this case, the Hebrews’ health policy adoption and implementation processes, mechanisms, and practices to address NCDs. Although I sought to begin the intensive year of fieldwork in Dimona, the most recent outbreak of violence in the region meant that my research was initially re-routed to the U.S. South, then back to Dimona, and concluded in South Africa. The nineteen continuous months combined with preliminary fieldwork break my research time in each location into relatively equal proportions in each site. Although the Dimona model was the model for health practice in the community, the circulation of knowledge and the implementation and dissemination of global health policy local reflects the deterritorialized theoretical framework of dissertation. This ideological construction of identity is challenged by the conflicting narratives about indigeneity locally. Therefore, in the dissertation the presentation of migrant indigeneity that attends to this particular history.

Homes: For a majority of the fieldwork, I was hosted by members of the Hebrew community in the field sites. I lived in the homes of many Hebrews over the course of my time in the field. Living with and among Hebrews gave me access to the intimacies of everyday rituals and the health practices in which I was interested. Living in the homes of Hebrew members allowed me to blend in and provided me access to more Hebrews as I was incorporated into the daily life of my host(s). Through these invaluable opportunities, I spent time with the social group of the
hosts and developed relationships which expand my network within the community. Often, I was placed with a host who was very active in the community and through whom I had great access to a wide variety of community members, events, and stories. Participation observation through lived experience was critical to an understanding of indigenous identity, Hebrew spirituality, and processes of racialization that were being circulated across the transnational Hebrew membership.

*Kitchens (and adjacent places food preparation and consumption)*: As a woman doing research with the Hebrews, access to the food was seen as a ‘natural’ space for me to occupy. I often volunteered to help in the daily food preparation tasks of the women I lived with as well as others to learn as much as I could about the how and why of diet and its connections to identity and health. The casualness of work meant that the participants were somewhat at ease to talk freely about something that they partook in multiple times a day. I observed women as they prepared food for ailing children, husbands with special diets, and the family of friends in the community who traveling, away, infirmed, or on their menses. Moreover, I had the opportunity to learn from the women in the community who were pioneers of solar cooking in the heat of the desert’s summer sun. Additionally, I frequently volunteered to spend some time in the community’s factories to learn about vegan food production, processing, and distribution. These spaces provided me an opportunity to consider
how Hebrew identity is foundational to most work in the community – both work that is compensated and work that is not.

*Hebrew classes*: In addition to the time spent with Hebrews in more intimate spaces, I spent a considerable amount of time in Hebrew classes. The Hebrew class was typically held on the Sabbath (in locations outside of Dimona) and generally lasted three to six hours. The classes were structured around a model that is replicated globally with Current Events, Health Watch, and Main Class. Given the theoretical thrust of my research, the Health Watch portion of the class was fascinating for me as most often it was presented by women and it engaged the health beliefs and practices of the community on a relevant national or international health issue. Furthermore, the Hebrew classes were incredibly important for my development as a student in the logics of Hebrewism, the local histories in each jurisdiction, and the local leadership’s practice of the faith. Moreover, Hebrew classes presented me with copious notes about Hebrew cosmology, theology, and history.

*Hebrew community events*: Although the Hebrews are a spiritual community, they absolutely love to have events and celebrate. These festive occasions were times when women could show off their ability to sew all-natural (loose-fitting) attire. Furthermore, these events allowed Hebrews to let their ‘natural’ hair down to honor
the holy days in their spiritual calendar or different rituals in the community like weddings, bridal showers, baby showers, New World Passover, Youth Day, The Day of Appreciation, the Writer’s Retreat, National Gathering, and a year-long string of events. These events provided insight into community relations that illustrated theology, community values, and how Hebrews live through the stringency of re-indigenization. Events were practically organized around food as a signifier, with different kinds, amounts, and quality of food served to certain individuals at certain times.

*Interviews*

To support the data that I collected from participant observations, I conducted both semi-structured and unstructured interviews with community members. While community leadership often provided access to a select subsection of the community membership, I engaged in activities with an assorted selection of the community. Although the majority of interviews were with rank and file membership, they also include interviews with community leaders like the leading nutritionists, innovators of solar cooking, developers of the community’s cookbooks, the developer of the community’s diet, leaders of community’s exercise and physical activity development, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister of Information. Conversely, unstructured interviews were built around the silences and the inattention to certain members of the community. Often, these
interviews occurred during casual conversations when I was hanging out during the evenings in Hebrew spaces (often in the restaurants in the U.S., on the ‘King’s Court,’ the open communal space that leads into the Village of Peace after morning exercise classes, in the homes of members of the community in Dimona, during group gatherings, and in the homes of Hebrews in South Africa). I made myself available to these opportunities by volunteering to help with events, in the factories, or in the kitchens of overworked women, to be a listening ‘outside’ ear, taking rides with members of the community to and from places they needed to go. At a certain point, the relationships I developed prompted people to tell me their stories and to alert my attention to “things I needed to see” or “people I should really talk to, in order to get a different perspective” than the official narrative that the community tried to promote. After these encounters, I would take notes on the details and occasionally I would follow-up with taped and more structured interviews. With semi-structured interviews, I used an open-ended questionnaire.

**Focus Groups**

Throughout the course of the research, I worked collaboratively to organize four different focus groups to engage with Hebrews around specific themes. The first two emerged as a sampling strategy and rapport building exercise as I sought to engage with the community in Dimona around health promotion and disease prevention. These two focus groups were sometimes divided by gender (a
recommendation of community leaders, not mine) to discuss intergenerational perspectives on the relationship between Hebrew identity and health. Among the women, there were twelve participants representing six decades of age, ranging from their 20s to the 70s. The women discussed how they practiced health, primarily focusing on the wellness and welfare of their children and families, the importance of diet, childbirth, and the continued to work to innovate and further develop their lifestyle. The group of male participants had eight members, who ranged from age 19 into their 60s. They focused on a discussion of the belief in the official Hebrew policies as a guide for their individual and communal practices, the transformation of their lifestyle as Hebrews (for the older generation), and their pursuit of everlasting life.

In South Africa, I conducted two mixed gender focus groups in two different locations in the country. The first group of participants was with the local leaders of each of different jurisdiction in the country. The six leaders discussed their perspectives on the relationship between Hebrew health and identity in urban, rural, and the peri-urban communities under their leadership. The final focus group was held in one of the coastal cities in South Africa and included eleven participants. This group convened at the request of the community to discuss the themes that were emerging from the semi-structured interviews. Our discussion was structured around Hebrewism in South Africa; the history, legacy, and impact of apartheid on identity; and the mechanics of global health implementation locally.
**Community Document Review**

In order to contextualize the accounts that I was documenting through interviews and fieldnotes from interactions, I conducted a review of relevant institutional and national-level policies. The Hebrews have developed a system of disease prevention that is grounded in standard public health advice. Therefore, I studied the public health national policies around NCD prevention as well as locally circulated Hebrew literature on disease prevention in each country. Similarly, I analyzed the publication of High Holy and Sacred Diet, Hebrew cookbooks, official Hebrew absorption manuals for those who are transitioning to the lifestyle, the Regenerative Health report, and their international work around global NCD prevention. Similarly, I analyzed multimedia content provided by informants relative to Hebrew ideology, theology, and health practices.

**Data Analysis**

After collecting the data across the three sites, I compiled field notes which are a collection of observations and experiences and combined them with transcripts from interviews and focus groups which provide the rich data that I sought to synthesize and analyze in the body of this dissertation. Analysis of this amount of data is complex and required a dynamic, multi-layered process of
synthesizing. In conversation with the dissertation advisor and members of the committee, I began the initial stages of data analysis utilized in the model of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), which is methodologically significant for participant observation studies. Through this systematic process, I uncovered the underlying social and cultural processes occurring behind, within, alongside, and between the specific phenomenon that is the aim of the study.

From here, I began the process of analyzing the data in sections through cycles of coding. The data collected through field notes, interview and focus group transcripts, and other media sources were all reviewed, sorted, and organized into themes. The major themes were organized by site, date, and then into subthemes. The codes were then examined in comparison and contrast to other codes. Through a triangulation of data, analyses were verified through various sources of data. In conversation with the literature, outlines for chapters were developed, and data was harvested to support the argument made in each chapter.
Introduction

*Migrant Indigeneity: Transnational Health Policy Implementation*

*Structuring the Body, Identity, & Belief* attends to the tensions among the anthropology of race (specifically Blackness) and indigeneity, and its relationship to culture, identity, and health. Through a sustained engagement of the Hebrew Israelites in this multi-sited ethnography that follows the thing—here the implementation of what can be read by communities as a non-communicable disease (NCD) risk prevention/health promotion strategy. Known by Hebrews as their “spirituality-in-practice”— I focus on how the cultural production of an indigenous identity practiced by racialized Black subjects challenges previously held assumptions about the relationship between culture, identity, and health. This study interrogates three interrelated queries: (1) the tension between the processes of racialization and the formation of Black identity in the United States that grounds the community’s practices, and the embodiment, performance, and the advancement of indigenous cultural production of identity; (2) the related impact of these processes on the construction of health and well-being; and (3) the relationship between identity and health as produced by the Hebrew Israelites. This broad interdisciplinary project incorporates divergent bodies of literature ranging from the anthropology of race and indigeneity to biomedicine, public health, and medical anthropology’s engagement of health inequities and NCD prevention. It also considers the intersections of the anthropology of
religion and spirituality, theology, and diaspora/migration. Squarely, the dissertation works to bolster research in the subfield of medical anthropology that focuses on the intersection of health disparities with the processes of racialization, indigeneity and identity.

**Embodied: Health, Identity, & Racialization**

The dissertation focuses on the process by which Hebrews construct, produce, and structure the terms of health and well-being in their community. It focuses specifically on what Hebrews believe to be their indigenous system of health practices, which mirrors the public health recommendations for non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention for diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and obesity. Through an ethnographic engagement in the everyday rituals of Hebrew cultural practices, such as pedestrian morning ceremonies of water consumption to begin the day, seasonal fasts, and specialized diets to treat, cure, or prevent disease, the dissertation emphasizes the relationship between identity and health. Within health research and practice, health disparities and the social determinants of health represent popular ways to frame discourses regarding the relationship between identity and health. For the Hebrew community, it is a touchpoint for establishing, promoting, and documenting the strength of their cultural practices, in order to refute existing claims and challenge prevailing statistics about disease risk for certain populations that are based primarily on external (read: raced) constructions of identity. Given the significance of this
literature for investigating a system of NCD prevention and Hebrew counterclaims, this work is structured around a targeted engagement of the extra-communal processes of racialization (which racialize Hebrews as Black) and its interaction with the cultural production of Hebrew indigeneity. Within a sustained focus on disproportionate rates of NCDs among racialized Black populations, I examine how the body is a medium for engaging the impacts of racialization and the cultural production of identity. I draw on the symbolic violence of the process of racialization (Bourdieu, 2000; Fassin, 2011), which historically has precluded racialized Blacks from identifying as indigenous in the Americas (Forte, 2013). I also build on the anthropological focus on “the body [as] the site of the racial experience” (Fassin, 2011;420) and scholarship focused on how race is embodied (Gravlee, 2009), and how bodies are racialized (McCallum, 2005). Throughout the dissertation, I study how the Hebrews who are racialized as Black yet argue for an indigenous identity work to demonstrate their particular form of indigeneity, which I term, migrant indigeneity through the body.

As I navigate the terrain of studies of racialized embodiment of Blackness and cultural practices of indigeneity, within the body of this manuscript I challenge and offer amendments to a number of accepted approaches towards identity formation and cultural productions of indigeneity. Although Blackness and indigeneity were constructed as mutually exclusive categories (where the term indigeneity often is synonymous for “Indianness”), works within the
previous two decades have sought to identify, document, and analyze forms of indigeneity produced by racialized Black communities in the Americas. For example, work like Shona Jackson’s *Creole Indigeneity* (2015) is powerful, as it demonstrates the processes by which ‘Creoles’ (racialized Blacks) indigenize themselves in Guyana and are allowed to be seen as indigenous in the nation-state through their historical relationship to labor and the land. Similarly, Anderson’s seminal work, *Black and Indigenous* (2009), focuses on the Garifuna in Honduras and analyzes when a racialized Black subjectivity engages rights and claims to a cultural indigeneity. Even Deborah Thomas’ (2011) and Jovan Scott Lewis’ (2017) engagement of Rastafari indigeneity vis-à-vis cultural citizenship and market practices respectively are grounded the community’s claims to being and belonging to Jamaica as an example of how communities understood to be Black in the Americas can also be indigenous. Similarly, Shane Greene’s special edition (2007) on Afro-indigenous multiculturalisms presents us with a host of literature that pushes us to engage and take seriously the claims to indigeneity being produced by communities who are raced as Black. Building on Sylvia Wynter’s (2003) work helps us to think about what it means to be “indigenous in the New World,” previous studies and to review this literature collectively to see that claims to indigeneity by racialized Black subjects have been made through appeals to the multiculturalist frame of Latin America and the Caribbean and/or grounded in claims to land. This scholarship is fundamentally groundbreaking
and together these scholars have sought to indigenize Blacks through connections to land (or land vis-a-vis labor).

However, I argue that doing so retains the imposition of the normative and external racializing processes. Not only that, it preserves European colonialism and white supremacist understandings of time, space, and identification of people and continues to prioritize enslavement and labor as the currency through which to incorporate racialized Black subjectivity and cultural identity into the fabric of the nation-state. While my research relies heavily on and is indebted to these works, my scholarship also is forging a new path through an acknowledgement of the territorial dispossession of many Black communities in the Americas, which has made claims to land and belonging difficult, especially in places of demographic underrepresentation. My work therefore acknowledges the significance of place without tethering indigeneity to a specific place. Subsequently, my argument for indigeneity departs from previous work by attempting this theoretical intervention with a community who is perceived as Black with histories derived primarily from the United States. Therefore, I propose migrant indigeneity, which attends to these histories of migration, experiences of racialization, domination of European/white supremacist framing of indigeneity, yet I support the particular articulation of Hebrew indigeneity that is informed by place and argue that cultural practices inform the structure of cultural identity.
Given the project’s grounding within the discipline of anthropology, I historicize the challenges of exploring indigeneity among racialized Black communities. I reference the longstanding “Indio v. Negro” debate, which reflects broader Americanist discussions that created clear trajectories of inquiry in anthropology. Similarly, anthropologists’ efforts to document and preserve culture in the late 1800s through the early and mid-1900s among Native communities resulted in the study of communities framed as Black mainly to other disciplines subsequently were perceived as having an uncertain existence of a culture, with the exception of a few anthropologists. Moreover, racialized Black communities were largely unattended by anthropology because of the perception that continues to haunt them, that they are without a historic past, culture, or an identity. Integrally, Truillot’s (2003) seminal article, “Anthropology and the Savage Slot,” is instructive for understanding the ways in which anthropology as a field has built its empire in contradistinction to the savage, which has created a safe space for the emergence of a Western and modern white identity. Trouillot sought to have anthropologists understand the “savage slot” as critical to the “modern colonial project,” built into anthropological discourse, but he also endeavored to have anthropologists understand “the broader terrain that makes the savage slot possible, and that preserves the structural position of the slot even as its inner contents change” (Pierre, 2013). Trouillot demonstrates two critical features that are central to this dissertation: 1) Anthropology continues to be in desperate need of decolonialization (Harrison, 1992); 2) Anthropologists need to
come to terms with the impact of the savage slot on scholarly inquiry. As
historical work within anthropology (Baker, 2010) has documented, there has
been a great need for anthropology to re-negotiate its relationship to race —
principally to reconcile and advance the study of Blackness. This is especially
necessary, given the fact most scholarship has not placed the United States in
conversations about decolonialism, beyond conversation with communities
perceived as indigenous/Native American, and research that clearly identifies the
construction of the savage slot in relationship to processes of racialization of
Blackness in anthropological discourse remains limited. For these reasons,
anthropologists must clarify just who are the anthropological “noble savages” of
the United States. It is clear that anthropological discourse in the United States
was primarily focused on certain group of Natives (i.e., savages) to fill the slot of
inquiry within the discipline. The disciplinary focus has reflected deeper
imperialistic, structural, and hegemonic forces that have defined indigenous
communities in contradistinction to Negroes or Blacks in the construction of the
society. The evolution of the category of Indio, Indian, Native to the modern
framing of indigeneity has maintained strict boundaries which reflect a continued
commitment to a belief in the mutual exclusiveness of indigeneity and Blackness,
which also reinforces the overarching racial and cultural hierarchies (Pierre,
2013); a major lacuna in the field has emerged from the intersection of these
processes. I argue that because of the structure of the savage slot, anthropology
has overlooked the opportunity to analyze and theorize the cultural productions of indigeneity among communities who are identified as Black.

Therefore, the dissertation seeks to interrogate rigorously the claims of the Hebrew Israelite community as indigenous. Previous anthropological inquiry has ignored these claims, registering them as fraudulent, imitative, and responsible for re-inscribing the violence of ascribing racial identity (Landes, 1965; Brotz, 1963). Therefore, the dissertation is invested in an exploration of the cultural production of identity in a way that is perceived to deviate from the processes of racialization given the presumption of mutual exclusivity of Blackness and indigeneity. More clearly, it explores what happens when those who are racialized as Black choose to cultivate an identity formation that appears to be inconsistent with the narrative scripts of that racialization. Further, given that Hebrews draw from an indigeneity grounded in theology and spiritual practice, it asks: How does one produce theory about the community and spirituality from this epistemic starting point (Alexander, 2005)? Given the processes of racialization that have been articulated by anthropologists (Lee 2016; Pierre 2013; Clarke & Thomas 2006; Jackson 2005), there is a clearly formed relationship between racialization and the dominance of white supremacist foundations in producing spaces for inquiry into Blackness globally, including academic inquiry. Jemima Pierre discusses the phenomenon in this way: “Racialization processes in various locations are interlinked and occur in relation to one another within the global context of white supremacy” (Pierre, 2013; 112). These processes of racialization
are instructive, not only for understanding the boundaries for theoretical inquiry, but for the imagined possibilities for existential and ontological communities in a practical way and that illuminate through a scientific investigation of health and well-being with the Hebrews.

Subsequently, the dissertation’s thrust involves a commitment to understanding the Hebrew’s community-based approach to the prevention of inequitable rates of NCDs; it illustrates how the processes of racialization and cultural identity formation are a core aspect of understanding disease risk as well as prevention in the community. A survey of the literature in medical anthropology reveals most scholarship has been focused on macro-level discussions of the relationships between race, the body, and health. In medical anthropology, this impetus is driven by theories of structural violence (Farmer et al., 2004), affliction (Nguyen & Peschard, 2003), and the embodiment of race (Gravlee, 2009; Nguyen & Peschard, 2003) as a mechanism to understand racial inequality in the bodies and biologies of marginalized and oppressed peoples. Scholarship focusing on ground-level ethnographic depictions of how communities understand and engage with inequalities in health is quite limited. Similarly, limited research exists regarding and the impact of race and racism on the social construction of disease vis-à-vis their own understandings of the self, community, and the world; preliminarily, the results produced in this dissertation demonstrate that these conceptions likely differ from normative constructions. In their article *Radical Contextualization: Contributions to an*
Anthropology of Racial/Ethnic Disparities, Chapman & Breggren (2005) argued for how anthropological theory and methods could yield novel ways of understanding the undergirding processes that support racial health disparities. Nevertheless, there has yet to develop a critical mass of anthropologists who are examining community approaches to racial/ethnic health disparities by interrogating the external processes of racialization to understand how racialized communities understand race, their relationship to the racial category that frames them, and their understandings of the relationship of race and disease in the larger context of racial health disparities. Through an engagement of the Hebrew community, their practices, and ways of being, I listened to narratives that frame how Hebrews understand the disease etiology and their ability to produce health. This dissertation makes its intervention by theorizing and interpreting a particular form of indigeneity, ‘migrant indigeneity’, as central to understanding how Hebrews produce health, and how migrant indigeneity structures not only the body, but also identity and the community’s entire system of belief. Similarly, the dissertation works to challenge the epistemological grounding of health disparities and medical anthropology’s engagement of it by seeking to theorize the embodied reproduction of racial hierarchy and racial inequality.
Race, Place, & Space: Theory from ‘the Island’

To better understand migrant indigeneity and how an indigeneity is deterritorialized yet connected to place, I highlight the specific yet undertheorized construction of Blackness arising from Chicago. More specifically, through the dissertation, I examine the cultural production of a transnational spiritual community to better understand indigeneity in the United States. In the dissertation, the racialization of Blackness in Chicago is central to the theoretical production of a migrant indigeneity for three critical reasons: 1) the Hebrews begin their journey in Chicago, have continued connections to leadership in the city, and the impact of Chicago is reflected in their framing of counterclaims about identity; 2) the relegation of studies of Black culture and Black life to sociology, foundationally sociology at the University of Chicago, which has literally build a canon out of and on the backs of fieldwork on Black subjects and subjectivity that has informed the global circulation of Blackness in Chicago with which Hebrews are closely engaged; and 3) the specific formation of Blackness in Chicago created by the enduring legacies of racial segregation that have created a de facto islands of Blackness in a city built on the prominence of white supremacist divisions in place and space (Khabeer 2016) that have been demonstrated to have direct impact on a number of outcomes, especially health (Shabazz 2015). What Shabazz refers to as spatialized Blackness, in Chicago, “which produce[s] racialized and gendered consequences for Black people on the city’s South Side...underscores how mechanisms of constraint built into
architecture, urban planning, and systems of control that functioned through policing and the establishment of borders literally and figuratively created a prison-like environment,” (Shabazz 2015, 1-2), I refer to as ‘the island.’ The black geographies (McKittrick & Woods 2007) of Chicago helps one to see how the geographical isolation created an island of Blackness in the center of a vast urban metropolis. Its distinctiveness is often overlooked and undertheorized for its production of a specific racialized subjectivity, a particular formation of Blackness that while pathologized is often widely circulated and disseminated to make claims about Black people in the U.S. broadly, even though there are lacunae of anthropological texts that represent, theorize, and interpret Blackness in the United States outside of the coasts (Jackson 2005; Costa Vargas 2006; Gregory 1999; Gwaltney, 1993; Barnes, 2015; Abrams, 2014).

This island of racialized Blackness in Chicago that I am theorizing appears in the historic literature as the Black Belt, a region of the city that contained seventy-five percent of the Black population at one time in the city’s history. Given the documentation of the fact that “Chicago had the largest influx of southern Blacks of all Northern cities—277,000 from 1900 to 1940. They lived on a small strip of land seven miles long and one-half mile wide on the South Side of the city, which came to be known as the Black Belt.” (Shabazz 2015, 2). This island of geographically racialized Blackness entered social scientific discourse in the mid-1940s with Horace Cayton & St. Clair Drake’s (1945) *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in A Northern City*. Their research depicted the diversity of
perspectives and people that continues to demand ethnographic attention to Chicago outside of formative framework and perspectives of Chicago School graduate students and faculty like William Julius Wilson, Ulf Hannerz, Sudhir Venkatesh, and Mitchell Duneier who have focused on the urban poor and working class. This is not to distract from the analyses of work like Elijah Anderson (1999), which sought to look at structural factors as an explanation for high rates of crime. My research engages with one of the most prominent forms of the island’s diversity: religious diversity. Chicago is and was home base to a number of religious and spiritual traditions that have argued for an indigenous identity that lies beyond racialized Blackness and/or advocates for justice for racialized Black communities. The Hebrews created and maintained a community base in Chicago and are a foundational part of the cultural milieu of communities like the Moorish Scientists, who relocated their headquarters to Chicago and who also argued for indigenous spiritually grounded identity beyond Blackness. Moreover, most iconic is the Nation of Islam through the work, charisma, and personality of Louis Farrakhan and Mosque Maryam which are ingrained in fabric of Chicago alongside the Christian Black liberation theology of Jeremiah Wright and Trinity United Church of Christ, which are both on the Southside island of Chicago.

Furthermore, after the geographical residential ban was formally lifted, what I am referring to as the island spread out to a nation of small connected islands which allowed for the incorporation of the next wave of the Great
Migration’s residents. Until today, Blackness in Chicago remains a peculiar racialized identity formation specially because of how sociological works have been drawn on the widely circulated claims about racialized Blacks and specifically the Black poor. Of those whose work has promoted and advanced an approach to Blackness which has been ripe for denigrating interpretations is William Julius Wilson (1987). Although his work is often easily manipulated into another narrative on Black pathology, what he does get right in his work on Chicago is the social isolation of those racialized as Blacks from what he deems as ‘mainstream America.’ While the gravity of the effects of this social isolation are reflected in the social, economic, and the political consequences for the community, there is less focus on how this Northern city benefits from geographical placement of racialized Blacks on these islands.

Given the overarching theories that have deemed the inner-city of the United States as without culture vis-à-vis foundational anthropological theory, which have drawn from the model of African retentions and Africanisms that sought to recuperate racialized Blacks into anthropological analysis, there has been scant anthropological attention (with some exceptions; Ralph, 2014) to the development of identity formation beyond or outside of the ‘culture of poverty’ trope in Chicago Black communities and with Black families that are created through work of the Chicago School. Moreover, these analyses overlook the fact that for multiple generations, the racial geographic isolation was not class-based; therefore socio-economic, educational, cultural, and prominently religious and
spiritual diversity (Best 2005) emerged on the island. The making of this racial island laid the groundwork for the surveillance and social scientific study which continues to make the spatialization of racialized Chicago Blackness famous for all the wrong reasons. It is the theories on inner-city environments riddled by crime, plagued by drugs and unemployment, fueled by teenage pregnancy and poor education, and dependence on government program that has given a face to pathology of the poor (Wilson 1987) which has predominated the literature on urban Blackness to the dismay of scholars who seek to interrupt this with research on the Black middle class and more objective approaches to urban Blackness (Gregory 1999; Patillo 1999; Barnes 2015; Cox 2016). Moreover, this work borrows from the scholarship of other critics who named the omission of the Great Migration in the United States as a major lacuna in the regional categorization of cultural communities within diaspora and migration studies. By emphasizing the Great Migration as central to a majority of the members of the Hebrew Israelites, I think about migration and indigeneity as an unlikely yet fitting model to think about the practices of the community.

In the discussions of the tensions between native Black and migrant Blacks in Chicago, it would be food and restaurant spaces where class-based and nativity divisions are argued. Poe (1999) details how the dietary practices of the South were cautioned against in periodicals and other forms of mediatized circulation. The consumption of what was assumed to be healthy (fruits, vegetables, bean, and legumes) and the forms of preparation (frying, barbecuing, with spices and
condiments) as well as the modes of consumption were critiqued by elite Black Chicagoans. It was the migrants’ connection to food that forged a relationship between migration and food for the millions of Black Chicagoans. “Migration strengthened their desire to preserve their traditions. Migrants' symbolic identification with Southern foodways was reinforced as communal meals continued at family dinners, holidays, and community gatherings. A market was created for the grocery stores, butcher shops, and restaurants that catered to these food preferences and the community that sustained them. Food became a symbolic battleground for the public image of the race, with middle-class native Chicagoans advocating the abolition of Southern food practices while migrants publicly perpetuated them” (Poe, 1999:10). Building on ethnographic work with a community of migrants who argue for this form of indigeneity demonstrate the importance of food and foodways in the strengthening and maintenance of identity.

Pollak (2017) writes about Native identity in Chicago, citing it as the eighth largest urban Native population in the United States as a result of the Urban Indian Relocation Program from 1953-1973. Through migration to the city which aimed to assimilate this population, “Natives reasserted, and continue to reassert, their indigenous identity through a range of avenues in city spaces, including participation in American Indian cultural and religious centers, involvement in intertribal acts of resistance, and active maintenance of ties with reservation communities” (Pollak, 2017:3). While a migrant indigeneity seeks to destabilize
notions of coloniality undergirding indigeneity, it does however rely on the impact of colonialism in framing indigeneity. Moreover, this situates Chicago in the conversation on urban indigeneity. This data about Native communities in Chicago reinforces the geographically racial isolation and gives further credence to the idea of Chicago as a string of racial islands. Similarly, this work on Native identity in Chicago demonstrates the exclusion of racialized Black subjects from being perceived as Native and the similar processes of assimilation which were focused on these communities in the same environment.

Given the development of the study of Blackness in anthropology that overlooked formations of Blackness outside of spaces within the Americas seen as having particular connections to African cultural retentions, studies of Blackness in Chicago were taken up by the legacy of Frazier through a hegemonically comparative normativity arising from the aspirations for Blacks to adhere to white cultural frameworks, patterns of behavior, and modes of being. What resulted was the social scientific data that allows policy makers among several others to utilize racialized constructions of Blackness arising from Chicago as a ground-zero for pathologizing and racializing Black behavior, cultural patterns, and deviance based on comparative studies of white communities. Most clearly this is crystallized in the Moynihan Report, which cited heavily from E. Franklin Frazier’s work on Black communities in Chicago. The media continues to highlight historic notions of Black pathology and racialize Chicago Blackness vis-à-vis the rates of violence in Chicago to demonstrate this point in the
contemporary moment. What I do here is think about production of racialized Black identity in Chicago as a framework for the dissertation to emphasize the importance of place and space, as well as examine how the processes of racialization and identity formation occurs amidst great isolation, detachment, marginalization, and exclusion while living in close proximity to communities who externally define identity and/or serve as the reference group. I trace that concept across these three spaces of ethnographic inquiry while seeking to think about the racialized geographies of Blackness in conversation with globalization.

It is the work of Chatelain (2015) in *Southside Girls* about Blackness, the Great Migration, and identity formation in Chicago that helps us to see how the broader New Negro movement is an overarching structure for the reconfiguration of identity and its development in a city like Chicago. Writing about a community with a similar history to the Hebrews, the Moorish Scientists, she describes the process by which Negro identity is understood as an inauthentic identity and is replaced by a more authentic Moorish (Asiatic) identity. For many racialized Blacks who were migrants living through the challenges of life in the city, a new identity was critical to a host of needs to feel and be included. These spiritual and religious traditions responded to the need for a sense of identity and what Scott (1991) outlines to be the larger anthropological concerns for the Negro community. Scott writes: “Therefore, on the conceptual terrain established by the categories of Boasian culture, the task presented to the new anthropology was to show in as scientifically conclusive a way as possible that the New World Negro
did in fact have both a determinate past and a distinctive culture” (Scott, 1991, 277). Hebrews and communities like them provided not only an identity for the Negro but an accessible, defined historical past and a distinct sense of culture which remains one of the most contentious points of identity formation for racialized Blacks in the Americas — all of which will be explored through ethnographic accounts with Hebrews.

**Anthropology, Blackness, & Indigeneity**

Working with communities of Hebrews challenges classic anthropological methods and theories as demonstrated in Jackson’s (2013) *Thin Description: Ethnography and the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem*, a treatise on the discipline’s hallmark of thick description to interpret culture as constructed by Clifford Geertz (1973) and the only full-length published anthropological manuscript about this specific group of Hebrews. My research is in conversation with and challenges African diaspora scholarship within anthropology. Although there has been is a more recently formed set of approaches to diaspora that do not lean entirely on Africanisms and invoke hybridity, syncretism, and creolization frameworks (Pierre, 2013b), these approaches only arose after multiple decades of scholarship that build on the legacy of the Herskovits-Frazier debate. Notable exceptions include works like Matory (2009), which disrupted the traditionally held view in the field by establishing the centuries-long relationship between African and ‘diasporic communities,’ and ground breaking
work like Pierre (2012), which has resituated the African diaspora as constructing and circulating discourses on race that inform global structures of race including in Africa. Through these works, we have opportunity to think more critically about the processes of the racialization of Blackness that are not drawn from Africa which emerge through ethnographic study. Nevertheless, I argue that the long history of Africanisms as a dominant frame has stunted the development of works in the field that seek to produce theoretical frameworks on communities who have been racialized as Black yet who claim an indigenous identity, particularly in places which have historically been said to be without culture: the inner-city of the United States. The few works that have ethnographically interrogated the indigenous claims of racialized Black communities have focused on places in the Americas outside of the United States (Anderson 2007, 2009; Ng’weno 2007, Greene 2007; Lewis 2017). Nevertheless, anthropology has been in violation of its own ethics by not viewing and seeking to understand communities as they do by not engaging communities like the Hebrew as indigenous. In this dissertation, I place this research in the gap of work on race and ethnicity that seeks to fit communities into the very rigid paradigms that have been outlined by the overarching national structure as inappropriate and inaccurate social scientific constructions. Therefore, migrant indigeneity focuses on relationship between anthropological theory and the construction of self and community that falls outside of those parameters. I do this in one of my primary themes, diasporic past/indigenous future, which I discuss below.
Moreover, the dissertation is based on ethnographic research that was conducted in three settler colonial locations where notions of indigeneity are greatly contested. In the United States, which is the grounding place for indigeneity by racialized Black communities that arises from the community and is the central location for the theoretical framing of the dissertation, claims to indigeneity by racialized Black communities have been virtually non-existent in the ethnographic literature (outside of communities of “Black Indians”). Discourses of indigeneity here have been reserved for communities that have been seen as Native in a way that understands racialized Black communities as non-Native. Nevertheless, similar processes and markers of indigeneity have been the guiding frames for understanding indigeneity. Colonialism, forced removal from lands, warfare, repeal of culture, and policy-based discrimination demonstrate a similarity between these two communities. Specifically, anthropology has excised racialized Black communities as an Other who have a categorically different savage slot than the other natives. In Israel/Palestine, the question of indigeneity is a hotly contested debate that has led to violence in the region for decades. Principally, these two nations sharing land has suffered from constant conflict over theocratic claims to indigeneity that leave very little, if any, room for alternative constructions of indigeneity, particularly of those with racialized constructions of identity that do not neatly fit into the ongoing dialogue. While this discourse is a recent debate in grand scheme of history, its dominance makes the Hebrews claims of indigeneity seems fantastical at best.
and prosperous at worst. The community’s efforts to establish indigeneity have been at the center of their work and are central to the material in the dissertation as they continue to pursue citizenship, identity, and belonging in a country that has demonstrated its anti-Black prowess directed to the community and among other communities raced as Black as evidenced through the Israeli state’s targeted sterilization of Falasha Jewish women without their consent or knowledge (Knutsen 2013). In South Africa, the discourses of indigeneity are also a part of the broader discursive engagement with the breadth and dimensionality of white supremacy in defining identity. Here, similarly, the migrations of Black South Africans are mired in the post-colonial attempts to sort out power, privilege, and identity after one of the most brutal legacies of imperialist occupations of land, which has resulted in a sophisticated form of injustice, oppression, and marginalization in recent history. Therefore, the claims to indigeneity that the Hebrews living in South Africa produce fall flat in the larger dialogues of one of the only regions in the world where Blackness and indigeneity occur in the same conversation, Southern Africa. Without an epistemological starting point of pre-settler in a definitive way to ground their claims that is believable and verifiable on scientific grounds, their claims go unheard. Even with attempts to co-articulate with the ‘genetic’ verification of tribes like the Lemba in Southern Africa (Parfitt, 2013; Tamarkin, 2014), the Hebrews are without a genetic, territorial, or locally produced form of indigeneity. Even in a region that values oral tradition and the inheritance of culture verbally, the
Hebrews have not been recognized in South Africa despite a twenty-five year “revived” presence in the country. Nevertheless, the Hebrews work amidst, between, and with these difficult conditions to support migrant indigeneity as a banner of self-determination that is the hallmark of many indigenous communities worldwide.

**Medical Anthropology, Race, & the Body**

The dissertation research began by focusing on the Hebrew transnational health policy implementation and analysis of the material resulted in themes which are spread across three major and interrelated queries: the body, identity, and belief. As a manuscript that engages the work of medical anthropologists, the relationship between embodiment of migrant indigeneity and the body is central to the discourses of local biologies. The ways in which the creation of a social world that reflects the understandings of the Hebrew community are plentiful. As an undergirding and aligning construction, the construction of this social world is critical to the formation of identity that is in conversation with the processes of racialization, creation and assertion of ethnic identity, and the promotion of indigenous knowledge. Within anthropology broadly and medical anthropology specifically, discussions of race have been relegated to two categories that rarely overlap: cultural anthropologists who conduct in-depth studies of the meanings, symbolism, and substance of race and the processes of racialization, and the renewed interest of biological anthropologists who utilize social constructionist
categories of race to engage with genetic, epigenetic, and genomic research to make claims about populations. The dissertation seeks to examine how the global health epidemic of the drastic increase in rates of non-communicable chronic diseases like obesity, hypertension, and diabetes, which are discursively naturalized through the embodiment of race in biology, are being addressed at the ‘community health’ (local) and ‘transnational health’ (global) level with this community. Through this research study, I sought to understand how this community implements a multi-national strategy of prevention of these priority issues on the health inequities list. The data demonstrates that through the interweaving of a strong network of inextricably linked constructions of the body, belief, and identity the community is able to promote a system of disease prevention/health promotion that is grounded in their holistic health system and cultural practices of indigeneity.

Within the field of American anthropology, scholars have generally eschewed the biological deterministic approaches to race and instead more liberal understandings of race as a social construction dominate. Nevertheless, since Franz Boas was considered to be the father of American anthropology who heralded the relationship between race, culture, and language, we have yet to disentangle the relationship between the anthropological history of race, culture, and biology that is being reproduced in medical practice, health research, and in general in the scientific literature. Therefore, anthropologists observing the relationships among this trifecta focus on structural inequalities (Farmer et.al.,
but often leave out the nuanced ways that communities connect race, culture, and biology. The dissertation is an intervention in medical anthropology that examines inequities in health/health disparities by taking a step back to understand how communities understand and negotiate their relationships to race, culture, biology, and health disparities. Through my research, I illustrate how one community is extremely proficient in outside understandings and defining paradigms and fervently asserts their beliefs in an identity that is contrary to normative and dominant framing as a mechanism to transform, reconfigure, and revive their bodies and biology. With significant attention to embodiment, I work through these debates in the dissertation and offer recommendations based on the findings here to move towards more nuanced understandings, strategies, and approaches to global health epidemics.

What is clear in the dissertation is an engagement with raciology, the collective discourse of differences between races that are built from and on images, identities, stereotypes, and prejudices (Gilroy, 1993), and racecraft, the mechanism by which racism produces or effectively constructs race (Fields & Fields, 2014) as a way of understanding how the body is foundational to examinations of inequality and identity in United States society. These core concepts are central to how the Hebrews utilize the body to deploy counter discourses in response to the amalgamation schemes (Sexton, 2008) of the processes that racialize the community as Black. Through an interpretation of these processes as symbolically violent (Fassin, 2011), I argue for the longer
history of anti-Black violence which produce Blackness (Smith, 2016) through racecraft technologies. It is through the negotiation of the processes of racialization and the cultural production of indigeneity that I theorize as an extension or modification of DuBois’ (1903) infamous conceptualization of double consciousness. As a dually conscious community, the Hebrews are forced to contend with their racialization as Black that governs the world they encounter and determines their corporeal possibilities while arguing for, performing, and seeking to bear witness to an indigeneity that is derived from theological belief and spiritual practice, placing them in alignment with the articulation of spirituality as central to defining their indigeneity.

These processes of racialization are directly connected to the popularized Foucauldian concept of biopolitics (1977), which examines the management strategies and apparatus of human life. While scholars have critiqued Foucault for his inattention to race in his theoretical proposal, others have utilized biopolitics to think about its relationship to race. Smith and Vasudevan argue that “we must attend to how race is (re-)produced globally through biopolitical practices...[as] race is fundamental to the rule of life and death spatialized through the severing of territorial ties as well as the enclosure of racial others in place (Smith and Vasudevan 2017, 211-212). This engages Mbembe’s (2003) necropolitical arguments that biopower and sovereignty dictate life and death. These key concepts structure what the Hebrews do in making a self through the culturally produced forms of indigeneity seeking to reposition their relationship
to life and death relative to how racialized Blackness has framed their bodies, disease risk, and often death.

**Indigenous Hebrew Self-Making: Constructing Health & Well-Being**

The primary theme that structures the dissertation is the process by which Hebrews culturally produce indigeneity and the relationship between this form of self-making to health. As the Hebrews work to cultivate an identity beyond the imposition of their racialization as Black arising from the United States, I detail their quest to create, embody, and rhetorically fortify an indigenous identity. Through the creation of a Hebrew indigeneity identified by a sustained examination of the health practices of community, the multiple of dimensions of how Hebrews engage with the processes of racialization emerge as a guiding framework of how not to be and reminders of a past and inauthentic identity. Drawing from works in medical anthropology (Gravlee 2009; Montoya 2011; Fulwiley 2011), which demonstrate the ways in which research works to naturalize inequalities in health through biology, I focus on how this community articulates their identity as a co-constitutive process of reconstituting the body and biology. I build on one of the key critical insights of medical anthropology, local biology (Lock, 1993; 2001), as a foundational construct for understanding the ways in which embodiment is produced by an interaction of the social and the biological. Primarily, in medical anthropology theories of the embodiment of race have dominated the literature on inequitable rates of NCDs, specifically works
that document the co-constitutive ways in which the social and biological are produced through the body. Although many in medical anthropology have even re-engaged this process as it relates to local biology in the age of global health (Brotherton & Nguyen, 2013), we have not had critical scholarly or ethnographic evidence to understand the embodiment of race for a community that attempts to address the processes of racialization through the assertion of an indigenous identity. Through a consideration of the works in medical anthropology that have examined race, ethnicity, and health disparities, I think through how the Hebrew Israelites’ reorientation to the self and community vis-à-vis indigeneity is an under-investigated strategy for disease prevention/reduction. Although there has been significant literature produced on the projection of racial and ethnic categories on/into the bodies of marginalized communities, this dissertation considers how members of these communities embody and reposition themselves in relationship to these categories. Through an examination of indigeneity, I interrogate the work of the Hebrew community to make the self on terms that are often contradictory to normative constructions.

**Diasporic Past/Indigenous Future**

The second theme of the dissertation is diasporic past/indigenous future, which illustrates the process by which Hebrews are able to navigate the Hebrew self-making process and narrate themselves in language and themes that are intelligible to the structures, people, and practices of how they engage with race.
In order to fully demarcate migrant indigeneity as a framework for conceptualizing the Hebrew community, diasporic past/indigenous future is the bounded analytic frame that attends to the historic trajectory of academic study of Blackness and indigeneity as separate categories. Through study with the Hebrew community focused on their conceptualizations of identity and their spiritual practices, I signal how scholarship in the social sciences has informed and framed how this community constructs, imagines, and re-invents itself. The diasporic past of the Hebrew Israelites is also an intellectual guidepost for tracing the lineages that have historically framed the community. Through a triangulation of race, religion, and health, I examine the ways in which the Hebrews have been framed by the African diaspora, religious diaspora, and even construction of indigenous diasporas that structure approaches to health inequities and rates of disease. Through a staked claim in the intellectual genealogy of anthropologists of the African Diaspora who have created a home for the study of Blackness, race, and culture in communities throughout the Americas, I utilize how the Hebrew old ways of being created a framework for engaging the community. For example, I argue that it is their diasporic past that takes them initially to Liberia on the movement of the Back to Africa/Pan-Africanist approaches combined with the energy of the Civil Rights Era momentum. This diasporic past is the path by which they eventually access their indigenous future in Dimona (Israel/Palestine). This gives context for the Hebrew beginnings of employing their understandings of race as a strategy for
community organizing and the substance of community ideology to where they now believe that “race is a distraction” (Jackson, 2013a). Engaging their diasporic past in order to access and obtain their indigenous future is a direct connection of the Hebrews that demonstrates the relationship between the production of identities from within the very rigid constrictions and possibilities for how identity. The acceptable and plausible construction of identity was shaped through an African survivals/African retentions model. By building on work like Baker’s (2010) which “explores how anthropologists and the texts they produce contribute to the various dynamics involved in the formation of the racial category used for African Americans” I think about how anthropology has been critical to the construction of the rigid boundaries of race framing for Blackness in the United States. Through an engagement of the development of the discipline, I trace how anthropology influences the construction of Blackness. Nevertheless, with a commitment to understand their claims to indigeneity, I discuss the work involved in creating this indigenous future for Hebrews and other communities who understand themselves as indigenous. Through a recovering of the past, it is clear exactly how the Hebrew past informs the future. Specifically, diasporic pasts and indigenous futures allows us to further interrogate the boundaries of racialized Blackness. It also questions how we place indigeneity in conversation with racialized Blackness in the Americas. This dissertation is in direct conversation with the question: can diasporic citizens claim indigeneity with any believed authenticity?
(Alter)Native Indigeneity/Spiritual Synchronism

This third theme engages the distinctiveness of the Hebrews claims to indigeneity and the challenges to those claims based on traditional notions of indigeneity. More distinctively, this theme seeks to capture the work within American anthropology that troubles the relationship between Blackness and indigeneity. I examine how the Hebrew Israelites embody their constructions of the world that directly engages the previous theme of diasporic past/indigenous future. This past challenges them to think with how Africa has been positioned relative to the processes of racialization that inform how Black identity arising from the United States is constructed in order to successfully transition the community into a position to claim indigeneity as a futuristic quest through their re-mapping of the world to center an identity that seems incompatible with normative constructions of place and space. I explore how the Hebrew Israelites recalibrate the social in order to influence to the biological. Their (alter)native indigeneity gives them the ability to determine who they are and through embodied cartography, they are able to reproduce this ideology in their everyday being. I look at Lai & Smith’s volume on Alternative Contact: Indigeneity, Globalism and American Studies (2011) which points our attention to the indigeneity across geographic borders and that is based on foundational dichotomies of Indigenous and European. This work allows for an (alter)native indigeneity that I argue for here, specifically one that reclaims forms of
indigeneity from the margins as well as creates a space for a transnational formation of indigeneity. I utilize these alternative forms of indigeneity to scaffold migrant indigeneity, the core of the dissertation and the primary mechanism for understanding the relationship between how the embodiment of the social is reflected in the body and biological.

Similarly, this alter(native) indigeneity is derived from cultural identity drawn from their spirituality as opposed to overarching racial categories. I detail through the dissertation the ways in which the process of shifting from race as a primary source of identity to spiritual culture is critical to the Hebrew self-making process. The process of spiritual synchronism is a one that I name to describe the specific work to understand one’s identity primarily through one’s spirituality instead of through one’s racial/ethnic position in the overarching racial, structural, and political hierarchies (Pierre, 2013). Although Hebrews and communities like them have attempted to produce, perform, and advance an identity beyond race, Blackness has not allowed an immediate identification of Hebrew as an acceptable spiritual identity that can be (and is) used as a racial/ethnic identification. I work through the race, religion, and nation conflict of producing this kind of identity as a racialized Black subject with a history in the United States.
Chapter Descriptions

In the first chapter, “Racial Reconciliation, Indigenous Healing: A Theoretical Framework for Identity,” I propose a theoretical framework for the Hebrew Israelites to analyze and interpret their specific form of indigeneity. Moreover, I begin by framing the violence of the external processes of racialization that seek to understand this community as Black (Fassin, 2011; Bourdieu, 2000) and ignores their claims to indigeneity and other “multiple forms of belonging.” Through the proposal of migrant indigeneity, I introduce the dissertation’s primary intervention, which is to demonstrate how a community creates distance from the imposition of the processes of racialization that seek to restrict them with Blackness in order to fully embrace and circulate the articulation of the cultural production of indigenous identity. In order to demonstrate this, I focus on health, specifically the community’s system of NCD prevention, treatment, and reversal which is grounded in the ways that the Hebrews narrate their relationship to and between identity and health.

In order to ground the theoretical framework of migrant indigeneity, I utilize historical works (Weisenfeld, 2017) to demonstrate the history of Hebrews and ideologically aligned spiritual and religious communities who have been advocating for the recognition of their indigenous spiritual identities for almost a century. In doing so, I illustrate how the history of American anthropology and the broader context of the project of the Americas created mutually exclusive categories of Black and Indian (as synonymous for indigenous), make it difficult
to analyze indigeneity among racialized Black communities. While anthropology vehemently pursued the documentation and preservation of Native cultures in the Americas, specifically the United States, the discipline did not include the natives who were racialized as Black. Within these savage slot politics, the paradigmatic concern that Blacks were without culture and a past left communities who were identified as Black without ethnographic attention to their cultural production, with few exceptions (e.g., Hurston).

Nevertheless, there have been more recent works in anthropology and other fields which have argued for indigeneity among communities who are racialized and perceived as Black, mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean. Through this scholarship, I build a case for a flexible, dynamic, and deterritorialized form of indigeneity that is produced from the friction of racialized Blackness grounded in the United States. By arguing for the possibility of indigenous identity that is not denied by external processes of racialization into Blackness, I position the Hebrew Israelites’ argument for indigenous identity as critical to new modalities of analysis and interpretation of racialized Blackness in the Americas but also central to this dissertation and understandings of the relationships between identity, culture, and health.

In the second chapter, “Spiritual Synchronism: Embodiment, Race, and Transformation in Identity,” I focus on how Hebrew ideologies, which are drawn from their theology, ground the community’s understanding of identity, culture, and health. Given that Hebrew indigeneity is built on their spiritual identity as
Hebrews, I work to demonstrate how Hebrews make their racialization into Blackness as peripheral to authentic claims to Hebrew indigeneity. Therefore, while anthropologists who have studied Hebrew communities have mostly dismissed their claims as fraudulent, imitative, and inauthentic, I utilize this theoretical intervention to epistemically resuscitate their claims. Nevertheless, through a presentation of evidence of the spiritual and religious milieu of Chicago that birthed the co-articulating claims of indigeneity from this particular group of Hebrews and other communities like the Moorish Scientists, I draw connections between how Hebrew communities have historically utilized theology and spiritual practice to define identity, to respond to claims about culture, and often to derive health practices. Through ethnographic work, I examine how individual members of the Hebrew community embody their indigenous theological beliefs. I argue that through this embodiment they seek to structure the self and community and redefine their relationship to health. Therefore, I analyze belief as critical strategy for the cultivation of self, community, and the definition of health and well-being. While other communities have explored the relationship between theological beliefs, identity, and health, there has been less attention to those communities whose claims are questioned. Seeking to recuperate the claims of the Hebrew Israelites, I present migrant indigeneity as a framework for the process of spiritual synchronism, the process I detail by which Hebrews transition from race to define indigenous identity that is grounded spiritual practice.
In the third chapter, “Once You Go B(l)ack: Palimpsestic Processes of Diaspora, Blackness & Indigeneity,” I employ the concept of overlapping diasporas to demonstrate how Hebrews culturally produce indigeneity. Through an examination of religious diasporas, cultural diasporas, and indigenous diasporas, I work through the theme of diasporic past/indigenous future to engage how the concept of diaspora is related to the particular formation of indigeneity. I use the Hebrews’ understanding of history, diaspora, and identity to demonstrate the connections between their cultural frameworks and lifestyle. I propose that diaspora is a theological episteme that situates the community’s system of belief and details their cartographic understandings of world which informs their approach to identity. As I draw the connections between race, culture, and biology that have racialized the Hebrew community, I examine the sophisticated mechanisms that the community has established to embody, reproduce, and structure indigeneity. In this chapter, I look at three ethnographic examples which allows me to consider the relationship between diaspora and transnationalism as it relates to indigeneity among the Hebrew Israelites.

Through this framework, I think about the history and legacies that reify the relationship between race, culture, and biology. This framing engages the diasporic past/indigenous future construction as it utilizes a collectively held pathway to becoming indigenous and re-narrativizing the relationship between ethnic identity, culture, and biology as mediated through the social. Although
drawn from and engaged with ethnographic material, these first three chapters are predominantly theoretical.

In the fourth chapter, “Cooking Up Indigeneity: Food, Performance, and Hebrew Self-Making,” I offer up three ethnographic vignettes among the Hebrews across the different research sites to examine the production of indigeneity. Drawing on food metaphors, I discuss the blending, mixing, chopping, and processing required to get Hebrews from a diasporic past of narratives and practices of racialized Black dietary consumption to the indigenous future of diets that reflect a commitment to consuming the way their ancestors did. Through an interrogation of the data that emerged from participating in the food preparation and consumption spaces, I witnessed how the performance of Hebrew food signaled a commitment to the Hebrew indigenous self-making process, the aligned participation in the ‘global’ practice of adherence to the community-based health policies/dietary mandates, and participation in the broader indigenous movements to re-indigenize diets. Grounded in ethnographic evidence, I interrogate how these models for food consumption, food preparation, the regulation of dietary rules overlap with identity formation to demonstrate how the cultural production of Hebrew indigeneity is nourished. Engaging one of the dissertation’s primary themes of spiritual synchronism, I narrate encounters with Hebrews who work to perform their identity as Hebrew as their primary way of representing themselves to the world. Privileging being a Hebrew as their spiritual and cultural identity, the
ritual acquisition, preparation, and consumption of food is an illustration of the ritualized nature of how Hebrew members perform what it means to be indigenous, particularly when positioned against racialized Black identities. Through an ethnographic portrayal and engagement with Hebrew food, as informants produce food they are able to tangibly represent and reproduce identity not only for themselves but for others to consume, engage, and devour. The chapter illustrates the work involved in producing indigeneity through every bite, every meal consumed, bought and sold. Given the ways that food in the Hebrew community is public, through the operation of restaurants, food tourism, and vending of goods in markets, it is a primary way for the community to serve indigeneity among themselves, others in the community, and to the general public.

In the fifth chapter, “How Policy Is Racial Exorcism: Examining the Relationship between Culture & Policy,” I focus the chapter on the relationship between policy, race, and culture. In this chapter, I focus my examinations and analyses on the relationships between policy and culture, to illuminate the symbiotic relationship between policy implementation and the reification of Hebrew cultural values through Hebrew health policies. Drawing on the formations and processes of racialization in the United States that are central to the development of Hebrew indigeneity, I build an argument on the evidence that pathological constructions of Blackness have been constructed through a collision of politics, policy, social science, and conjecture of image. These constructions of
Blackness are employed to substantiate the introduction and implementation of U.S. policy that serves as a model for Hebrew policy which functions to exorcise racialized formations of Black identity in order to produce indigenous subjectivities and bodies. Relying on the translation of the culture of poverty trope into the emergent ‘culture of disease’ trope, I examine efforts to de-racialize dietary practices and aligning chronic diseases are a policy aim of the Hebrew community. Ethnographically, I build on data that demonstrates how, through the careful cultivation of indigenous cultural practices, Hebrews can reverse the processes that racialize the Black body into being overweight/obese and/or having diabetes (or hypertension) as a standard feature of the larger subjectivification of identity among Hebrews.

In the sixth chapter, “The (Self) Determinants of Health: Exploring How Identity Shapes Health” I draw on ethnographic data from three interlocutors to examine the relationship between identity and health within the Hebrew Israelite community. I explore the creation of a Hebrew biological citizenship; the process of bioethnic (re)conscription; and the assertion of local biology in the context of global health. Employing ethnographic detail with Prince Azriel, I listen to his stories and community narrative about how he has reversed and prevented disease and aims to defy death as a core aspect of Hebrew identity. His efforts and the global circulation of his example of health and well-being work to instantiate a Hebrew biological citizenship. This form of biological citizenship is in direct opposition to processes of racialization that construct a biological
citizenship based on Blackness in the United States. Here, I illustrate how
citizenships are re-made through the re-indigenization of the body through
Hebrew cultural practices. Moreover, through time spent with the Williams
Family during a Hebrew summer celebration, I detail how the family works to
create indigenous Hebrew children through the process of bioethnic re-
conscription. Utilizing Montoya’s concept of bioethnic conscription, I
characterize the process by which Hebrews work to try to produce claims and an
identity different than the one conscripted into the scientific literature, research,
and data about the relationship between race and health through efforts to
transform the body that reflects Hebrew narratives about the relationship
between indigeneity, identity, and health. I end the chapter by discussing Prince
Caleb’s journey with multiple chronic illnesses at the end of his life that
represents the process of becoming in the quest to transition from a local biology
of race in the United States to a Hebrew local biology. Through these three
examples, I illustrate how Hebrews engage with racial health disparities
discourses and literature to produce narratives which align with their cultural
identity vis-à-vis Hebrew indigeneity as a counter to the rigid and impinging
racialization processes of Blackness to foster new understandings about the
relationship between indigenous identity and health.
CHAPTER ONE
Racial Reconciliation, Indigenous Healing:
Migrant Indigeneity as a Theoretical Framework for Identity & Health

It was the Sabbath, the day of the week where things were simultaneously the quietest and extremely busy. Since, it was the one day of the week when most of the community did not work in Dimona, some of the community leaders thought it would be a great time to talk to a wide variety of community members. This focus group like setting would gather Hebrews across generations, locations of birth, length of time in the community, and knowledge about the topic of interest: race, diet, and chronic disease prevention. While I was interested in thinking about race and health as a primary mode for health inequities in NCDs, the series of conversations produced something far different than I had anticipated. It was not as if race was a construct which was foreign to Hebrew communities. It was in fact critical to how they had often presented themselves and their lifestyle to outsiders and of course how outsiders perceived them. Therefore, I honed in on it, invested in wanting to learn more about race and health. Instead, the Hebrews challenged me to see who they were from their perspective. Over the course of the research with the community, seeking to understand their approach to the disparities in health specifically focused on NCDs, I would continue to come back to the impact, depth, and richness of the comments from this focus group which give insight into how the Hebrews understand the relationship between identity and health.
The day we met was a dusty, hot, and hazy day when the sun was sliding into its peak position for the day. We gathered in the shelter of one of the cooler meeting rooms which was shaded by the room darkening yet festive curtains that women in the community made. There was water but nothing else for most of the adults as they were observing the weekly ritual of fasting from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday evening. That did not mean that the Hebrews did not come to the meeting dressed like royalty in their uniquely designed and crafted garments which were often a reflection of the love, devotion, and commitment of those in the community who made them. As we all sweated through the sun’s magnificent abundance, somehow the Hebrews seemed cooler and better able to endure the heat. I imagined that it might be a result of their years of practice with the desert heat. Whatever the technique for endurance was, we all managed to find the strength to make it through and we began our discussion. There was a formal introduction which began by giving honor to the Hebrew God, then the Hebrew leadership, and finally the Hebrew people for their presence. After prayer, veneration, and the brief introduction, one of the community leaders who served as a facilitator of sorts for both the research and my credibility as a researcher, was also actively working to reassure the community about purpose and goals of the research while encouraging freedom to answer the questions that would come up in discussion as they felt comfortable.
Of course, I had prepared an interview guide which would lead me through some basic questions about race, health, and disease prevention. While many of the saints were working to carefully construct their answers, the first few questions felt like a first slow dance between myself and the community members. Nevertheless, it was the response of Rofeh Mickael which really struck me with his insight. Rofeh Mickael was the community’s Ministry of Health leader which made him responsible for the administration and communication of health information, the global standardization of community practices, and even for some of the actual care of those locally in Dimona. Born in the mid-seventies in Gary, Indiana, his life led him to South America because of his mother’s travels for work and study as a Spanish teacher. He was open to the world and eventually the community when he met them during his early 20s in the 1990s. He would subsequently relocate to Dimona and his passion would result in his further study with the community elders who were working to recover the health practices of the Hebrews. While his title, position, and status in the community made members of the community certainly defer to his knowledge in the area, it was his voice supported by the collective and resounding affirmations of his statements and added contributions of others from the group that made his comments significant.

Of his many statements, what stood out to me was an answer to a question that I was not sure would work but I asked anyway, how are your diets related to your ancestors? While I thought the topic of discussion would be about the diets
of their parents and grandparents before they had come to Israel/Palestine instead it was Rofeh Mickael who made clear the importance of the relationship between spirituality and culture. What was extremely poignant was when discussing the relationship between health and identity that he demonstrated how for Hebrews “spirituality being an intricate part of culture, you know it really goes hand-in-hand, the manifestation of proper spirituality in culture [which]made it simple to not just follow the Hebrew community guidelines but to really live the spiritual principles.”

He as well as others discussed these spiritual principles staying, “if your culture is geared towards living the principles, it’s easy to do them because it’s just part of the rhythm.” The rhythm that he discussed would also be connected to the larger cycles that he explored through the discussion. For him and others who chimed in, these cycles were connected to the practices of Hebrewism for generations and the current ones that they as Hebrews were currently in that led them to back to their indigenous way. He says, “It was like almost at the same time we realized the spirituality of eating veganism and also the physical need to eat vegan at the same time; it all came to us really and it connected at the same time. And we pursued the spiritual aspect of veganism for our spiritual understanding, then we pursued the physical aspect for those who may not desire to really see it from our eyes spiritually, but we can connect with them on a health side.”
The cycles pointed to the practices of the ancestors that the Mickael discussed at length. He noted in monologue form stating,

“Our immediate ancestors, they were just eating to survive, they weren’t eating to live. Our ancestors that predated slavery or predated being excommunicated from Israel... if you go back to that time period of 2,000 years ago or 2,500 years ago, way before the Industrial Revolution, it was more similar because even though they were eating flesh, you had a segment of the Israelite community... they were vegans. It wasn’t really until we got to the west coast of Africa and started to get under the dominion of the European slave holders when our diet took a serious dive, so from that time or diet is like a 180 degree turn. Everything that we decided to put in our mouth, we really make that decision based upon, is it going to give us health, great health or at least sustain our health? And that’s why we always try to even wean out certain things as we grow and add other things. So from our immediate ancestors, it’s definitely a difference.”

Rofeh Mickael went on to discuss where the community is now in terms of diet, transitioning, and health, “I think there are concepts that I feel that we have brought over that even though we made the transition from meat-based to plant-based, but conceptually some of the things that were... the diet over there we brought over as a carry-over that we’re now looking at... re-conceptualizing it, reordering ourselves in relationship to it. We’re looking at that now. But the
major difference is that when these things part of your cultural expression, that’s what makes it easier. It’s part of your rhythm.”

Then one of the women elders spoke up, stating that she wanted to contribute to the conversation. Naomi, who was born in Bermuda but then relocated to the United States where she was introduced to the community, was in her early seventies. A petite woman with bright brown eyes who was wearing all white that day including a head wrap that showed an every so slight amount of her softly twisted silver and white hair. Her soft yet strong voice cut through the cacophony of voices when I asked if the Hebrew approach to dietary prevention was different. She responded, “We have the addition of the spiritual aspect that makes it come across differently.” She went on to detail with support for others in the room that having been raised in Bermuda, she believed “[her] grandparents and parents had innate knowledge about things. My ancestors were more natural people. People who live close to earth, have innate knowledge that when you come to the cities you lose that, as a pattern globally.” Their connection to the earth is different and one she explained was one that the community was working to recover as they moved away from their ancestors’ traditions.

By the end of session as the sun was preparing to set and community members were anxious to head back to their homes to officially end the Sabbath in prayer with their families and begin the new week I had only last question that I wanted to ask the group that was not on my interview guide of carefully worded questions. Eventually I blurted out, “So then are you all African American?” It
somehow fumbled out of my mouth before I could retract or rephrase it. It was one of my ill-formed spur-of-the-moment research questions that I had not intended to ask but one that sort of slipped. This question would be answered by a 20-something member of the community. When Ben Aaron answered the question, he stated concisely and simply, “No, I am a Hebrew,” I found myself oddly taken aback, even disoriented. Not because it was during that strange liminal period right before the end of Sabbath when Hebrews would pray, find time to commence eating and partake in post-Sabbath activities. Rather my disorientation came from having my own conceptions of his identity as a younger member of the Hebrew community so casually undermined. It had been twenty years since a book-length manuscript about this community had been produced, and scholars were not examining how the newest generation of Hebrews—especially those who had grown up in Dimona—were identifying. I was perplexed by how someone who is racialized as Black, possesses a U.S. passport, and claims American citizenship could be anything but African American. And yet, he easily offered a discordant identity from what I expected. But this discrepancy between my own preconceptions about her identity and her own self-definition became the starting point of a much longer journey for me, in which I came to embrace how Hebrew understandings of identity are connected to their broader project of renegotiating Americanist racializing paradigms and how that renegotiation informs their indigenous health practices. The answer to this and subsequent questions in that focus-group like setting as well as my observations the years of
research would set me on a path of exploration and understanding about how a community of people could claim and enact an indigenous identity that was neither African American nor Black Hebrew but also connected to both—an identity that would be greatly contested by a number of parties, including powerful institutions. Over the course of two years of transnational ethnographic research with the Hebrew Israelites across different countries and sites, I was able to analyze how Hebrew (as an indigenous identity marker) structures their collective identity formation process.

The African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem are a community drawn primarily from what they believe are the descendants of the third exile of the Ancient Hebrew Israelites. The Hebrew Israelites believe that they are an indigenous community with their own culture that they are actively working to recover, asserted through their prototypical Village of Peace in the community’s international headquarters in Dimona, Israel/Palestine. This process of spiritual and cultural recovery is guided by their adherence to a set of community-based interpretations of Hebrew scripture. My interest was piqued because of the ways in which this community’s work of cultural recovery through spiritual practice directly challenges normative conflations of race and biology in the embodiment of diet-related non-communicable chronic diseases (NCDs) and reconstructs and transforms health and the racialized Black body. This process is buttressed by the belief that the ancient Hebrews survived on a plant-based diet, a belief grounded in their interpretation of Genesis 1:29, which states, “And God said, Behold, I
have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.” Also foundational to this process of cultural recovery is their belief that the ancient Hebrews lived according to a particular set of practices and values, which they believe could, under ideal conditions, lead to their ultimate goal: everlasting life. Therefore, the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem are vegan. They mandate frequent vigorous physical activity, fasting, decreased salt and sugar intake (through no-salt and no-sugar days), and increased water and fiber intake. They also encourage proper rest and regular elimination, in addition to the promotion of a life free of stimulants and illicit substances.

The quest to understand the relationship between race, NCDs, and disease prevention transformed into a broader conversation about identity and health after this focus group experience. I was able to recognize the “Hebrew self-making process,” an idea drawn from the Hebrews’ own understanding of their journey as one of reconciliation with God over their past disobedience. Through their spiritual practice and “finding their way back to God,” the Hebrews (re)discover their purpose, their culture, and their identity. I claim that this process of Hebrew self-making is a way of engaging their diasporic past while claiming their indigenous future as discussed by the community members in the opening vignette when speaking about ancestry and their past. This indigenous future relies on adherence to indigenous spiritual practices as the epistemological
ground on which they level their claims for an indigenous identity, which is the foundation of all the community’s efforts.

In this first chapter, I introduce the concept of “migrant indigeneity,” a phrase I have coined to understand, analyze, and interpret the particular Hebrew production of indigeneity. It also serves as a central analytic and theoretical framework for the dissertation, which seeks to contextualize and theorize the identity formation process that is particular to a group like the Hebrew Israelites, while facilitating a nuanced understanding of the broader relationship between race, identity, culture, and health in the United States. In particular, I mobilize this concept of migrant indigeneity to respond to the larger theoretical questions and challenges that the Hebrews present to certain anthropological commitments. Thus, how do you theoretically engage indigeneity produced by racialized Black subjects in and arising from the United States? Moreover, what is the relationship between the racialized construction of Black and indigenous identities in the United States that is not an ethnography of “Black Indians”? And specifically given the thrust of this research, what relationship does this question have to the development of strategies and policies to prevent NCDs and promote health? My theoretical intervention here is to demonstrate how the processes of racialization of Blackness are often ideological distanced from the cultural and social production of indigenous identity which might facilitate a better understanding of health promotion. To do so requires an extensive decolonization of anthropology that is grounded in a commitment to addressing
the legacies of anti-Blackness that promoted the analyses of Black people in the United States as racially, biologically, intellectually, and culturally inferior. This context gives significant attention to the community-based origin stories that are grounded in narratives of migration and structured by a sense of diaspora—transnationalist approaches through which an indigenous tradition that was preserved, recovered, and reconfigured emerges in new contexts where the group continues to experience colonialism, racial discrimination, and social and economic disenfranchisement. This frames what Johnson says is “the birth of a new form of imagined community arising out of the dislocation of migration to address new social needs is surely to the good” (Johnson 2002, 326).

I want to assert that settler-colonial populations do not qualify for this form of migrant indigeneity but rather form what I am contrasting as “immigrant nativity.” This is the hegemonic practice of inserting one’s cultural identity as the dominant form in an occupied new place by employing power to transmit and validate its imported identity as native and authentic. In the Introduction to Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society, Sherene Razack details the examination of spatial and legal practices that make and maintain white settler society. Razack demonstrates how a

“white settler society continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy... [a belief in the idea that] white people came first and that it is they who principally developed the land; Aboriginal peoples are presumed to be mostly dead or assimilated. European settlers thus become the original inhabitants and the
group most entitled to the fruits of citizenship. A quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is, therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour. In North America, it is still the case that European conquest and colonization are often denied, largely through the fantasy that North America was peacefully settled and not colonized.” (Razack 2010, 1-2)

This builds on my theory of immigrant nativity, which explains the process by which white settlers work to become native through colonialism. Although settler colonialists can be easily perceived as immigrant nativists, with this term I try to give language to the process by which nativity is acquired through colonality and other iterations of power and force.

‘Put Some Respek on My Name’: Historicizing the Claims for Analyzing Hebrew Indigeneity

In order to theoretically ground this intervention, I frame the Hebrew argument for indigeneity within other Hebrew communities (and other allied indigenous spiritual and religious communities) who have made this argument for almost a century and which will be central to the following chapter. I draw heavily on Judith Weisenfeld’s (2017) work in which she proposes “religio-racial” identities as a frame to examine specifically the Ethiopian Hebrews, in addition to the Moorish Scientists, Nation of Islam, and Father Divine’s Peace Mission Movement. Weisenfeld marshals evidence from military draft cards during the
Vietnam War in which Hebrews were rejecting United States racial categories that only offered them “Negro” to collectively articulate identity. Weisenfeld demonstrates the agency of this group who identify Hebrews instead of Negros providing evidence of the historicity of Hebrew groups rejecting racial categories and advocating for Hebrew as a primary identification. Similarly, Chatelain’s (2015) historical work with Moorish Scientists contextualizes spiritual communities in the first quarter of the 1900s, who were making claims to non-Negro (Black) racialized identities and arguing for indigenous identities. Moreover, these works are in conversation with the larger New Negro Movement, which was popularized by Alain Locke and promoted new methods and approaches to understanding identity while redefining the agency of self and community (Gates 1988). As a support to the foundation of this theoretical framework, it is critical to understand the role of the Great Migration, and the subsequent migrations into the United States from the Caribbean and Latin America, which would further shape both the New Negro Movement with its emphasis on writing and arts and the development of different spiritual and religious communities. This would give demographic shape to a number of communities but specifically this Hebrew community which are built from the different migratory waves much like paths of Rofeh Mickael, Naomi, and Ben Aaron. Following World War I and during the Great Migration\(^2\), religious leaders

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\(^2\) The Great Migration is a series of migrations through which six million racialized Black people in the United States moved from places in the rural Southern parts of the country to predominantly urban centers and other places in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, West, and Midwest which spanned over six decades and ended in the 1970s.
and community members of spiritual communities like the Hebrews spread awareness of and promoted collective resistance towards dominant racial logics and asserted their spiritual values as the primary source for both “racial” (as a proxy for or bypassing of race) and religious or spiritual identity. Therefore, these historical works ground my argument for interrogating the claims of indigenous Hebrew identity as a challenge to dominant approaches to studying and discussing the spiritualties of racialized Black communities in the Americas.

Similarly, given the social scientific nature of this work, I will outline and problematize anthropological traditions of examining race and culture as they relate specifically to Blackness and indigeneity in the United States. I then leverage the concept of migrant indigeneity to attend to the cultural formations and the processes required to produce Hebrew indigenes.

**Natives, Blacks, and Anthropology in the Americas**

In the United States, Franz Boas (1940, 2017) is considered the father of anthropology. Boas is credited for embracing a four-field approach, opposing scientific racism, and offering cultural relativism as his gift to the field. One of his more traditionally successful students was Melville Herskovits (1930, 1933, 1941, 1948), who is celebrated for the promotion of the study of Black (or Afro-American) culture and its connections to African culture and subsequently the constructionist approach to race vis-à-vis Boas’ cultural relativist theories. Less well-known and cited are the anthropological works of Boas’ student Zora Neale
Hurston, who espoused controversial epistemological, methodological, and even revolutionary approaches to the field. While I argue that Hurston’s work (1935, 1938) implicitly argues for the careful readings of what we understand as Blackness and shape my proposal for thinking about migrant indigeneity, it is Herskovits’s work which came to dominate the anthropological study of Blackness in the Americas in the early 20th century.

The development of cultural anthropology in the United States was largely in the context of studying “Natives” and the “others” as a framework for understanding and engaging with non-white subjects. This trajectory of anthropology as a discipline missed the opportunity to study the native or indigenous identity formations of those read as Blacks (or then Negro) in the Americas in a politically significant way. Historically, making space for groups like Native Americans in the United States and First Nations people in Canada left no room for the indigeneity of those racialized as Black, specifically in North American anthropology. Moreover, given the alliances between physical anthropology, ethnology, and government efforts to preserve the cultures of Native American communities in the United States, many Black communities were seen as unworthy of study for multiple decades while simultaneously being forced to endure cultural assimilative measures similar to those in communities traditionally understood as Native. By drawing on and bridging the literature on critical race, indigeneity, Blackness, and the history of the development of anthropology, I maintain that communities racialized as Black in the Americas,
and specifically in the United States, have not received full analytical and theoretical treatment. This lacuna is due to the political and epistemological projects of disciplinary boundaries within anthropology that have sought to protect the study of Native American communities.

Specifically, I point to the Frazier-Herskovits debate, which engenders two distinct but interrelated bodies of sociological and anthropological literature on Black communities in the Americas. I maintain that Frazier’s argument that Blacks were stripped of culture through the process of slavery fostered an institutionalized form of sociology that had been the primary training ground for the study of Blackness in the United States. Similarly, Herskovits fostered a brand of anthropology that sought to promote a notion of culture that relied on African retention as the source of Afro-American culture in the Americas. Taken together, these arguments in different ways impeded and even precluded a rich analysis of the indigenous cultural formations of subjects racialized as Black in the United States. These disciplinary trends combined with the structure of anti-Blackness that denigrated Blackness and Black culture; white supremacist valences that seek to maintain power through construction of social categories dictate that Blackness and indigeneity or nativity must be separate identities in the United States. The legacy of the Frazier-Herskovits debate has resulted in a hegemonic construction that furthers the belief that Blacks are without culture or if they do have culture must be connected to African traditions—a view that reinscribes and even further corroborates the view that Blacks are “without
culture” by binding them to develop a culture from what they could retain from African culture.

Although Herskovits’s legacy is often understood as a defense of Blacks “having culture,” such a view fails to address the complex ways that the social isolation produced by enslavement and colonialism, the marginalization that resulted from racist regimes, and their association with land in the Americas. Such processes could have been producing an indigenous culture that could subsequently be protected by international law or produce political rights or notions of sovereignty as they do with Native Americans. I argue that the ethnographic exploration of the Hebrew Israelites and their often unsuccessful claims to indigeneity in the modern nation-states of Israel/Palestine allows for an expansion and modification of this anthropological categorization of the indigenous that accounts for the significant migrations of the world’s populations. Moreover, as Johnson argues, “given the impact of globalization—both the concept and the flows it describes—the category of indigenous presents special problems...multisite ethnography is often necessary to locate ‘a religion’ no longer of a particular territory, but rather forged across migrations and returns of bodies and signs” (Johnson 2002, 308). Furthermore, I argue for a restructuring of the category of the indigenous from the unstable perch of the powerful and dominant, considering how indigeneity might look for communities for which migration is critical to their identity, who live and connect through and across diaspora yet wholeheartedly believe in their maintenance of a set of
indigenous customs, beliefs, and practices that comply with some of the prototypical markers of indigeneity. Through this hierarchy of “savage slot politics” (Trouillot 1991), communities racialized as Black have been relegated to sociology and often are bereft of the kinds of ethnographic analysis and theoretical insights that could have emerged had scholars looked at Black communities through this lens of indigeneity. This ideological blind spot combined with both the social scientific commitment to the idea of non-existent Black culture in the United States and efforts to “reform” Blacks from their inaccurate performance of whiteness has hindered decades of study of Black culture (Baker 2010).

My broader argument here is that given the internal organizing politics of academic anthropology, the political agenda of the United States within the larger transnational project of white supremacy, and the predominant relegation of the study of domestic U.S. Black culture to sociology, anthropology’s construction as a field was birthed through racist science and a commitment to viewing Black communities through a lens of cultural bankruptcy and African authenticity. It is these epistemological traditions and commitments that have prevented the argument that I am advancing, migrant indigeneity, from emerging until now. Although emphasis on the study of the natives was the hallmark of American anthropology, when the study of Black culture increased in the discipline as the number of Black scholars in the United States also increased, scholars continued to uphold models separating race and indigeneity. I marshal this evidence to
demonstrate the difficulties of the proposal of migrant indigeneity in anthropology.

**The Door of No Return: Race, African Diaspora, and Studies of Blackness in the United States**

One day in Dimona, when the desert heat was at a temperature so high that the only plausible explanation could be that some divinity had placed a magnifying glass at an angle that would amplify the sunlight and the heat, we loaded up in a van to make a trip out of “Israel” into the West Bank on the Palestinian side. As was quite typical of a Hebrew adventure, we started late. There were several parties that had to be located and organized, and there was undoubtedly some form of vehicular dysfunction. Nevertheless, we drove in the heat of the day. When we came to the border, the members of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), who donned their desert sand browns and were carrying their AK-47s across their bodies, questioned our movements across borders. From what I could see and hear from my seat in the back of the van, there was a brief exchange, a waving of American passports, and an explanation of tourism before we were across the lines. Once we were over, we drove through countless marketplaces and encountered the sprawling life that is common to the region of the Palestinian Bedouins (stands vending dates, figs, nuts, fruits, and other foods). About fifteen minutes past the border patrol stop, we found a house
nestled in a wing of a neighborhood where relief could be found from the desert heat and brilliant sun. When we arrived, we were introduced to the men and women whose pigmentation to which Hebrews would lay claim and capitalize on its presumption of affiliation. Their skins were the color of brown sugar, chocolate, walnuts, dates, and other assorted hues of the earth. Our visit (as a motley collection of guests, interested parties, visitors, and me, the lone researcher on a local Sacred Visitation) was one of the community’s forms of public relations and diplomacy to connect with people who were recognized as indigenous to the region and subsequently recognizable to the Hebrews. For them, finding communities of people who had been living in the desert for centuries with skin colors that appeared similar to theirs—recognized as shades of skin readable by those born and socialized by the pigmentocratic empire of the United States as connected to Blackness—was important to proving not only Hebrew claims to indigeneity but to the claims of their political allies as well. For the Hebrews living in Dimona, their claims to what I term migrant indigeneity were also launched in South Africa, against the grain of the tracks of settler colonialist imprints on regional constructions of identity, and against the narratives produced by the Israeli state about those who had a “birthright” to the land based on construction of the nation-state. The Hebrews sought to strengthen their claims of indigeneity with the lives of those who were believed to have remained, and not necessarily those who left and then returned. Their mini Pan-richly hued skin congress in the Southern Negev of “Black” Palestinians, “Blacks”
living in Jerusalem, and “Black” Sudanese intimates who were imprisoned for attempts to migrate out of their conflict zones, was part of a larger effort to be seen as indigenous to the region. The Hebrews worked to highlight what had been racialized as Black as a native or indigenous category in the region, which they hoped would help others to acknowledge and confirm their claims to their history and ancestry in the region. This ethnographic vignette which comes alive more fully in chapter three demonstrates the case that I am trying to make about the work of the Hebrews to signify to their overlapping diasporas as an acceptable and plausible route to their indigenous future. In this section, I illustrate how the African Diaspora, the problematic construction of race, and studies of Blackness in the United States are all impinging structures that the Hebrews have to address in their work to advance their claim of indigeneity to a broad range of audiences.

The project of African Diaspora has been incredibly successful in providing a transnational framework that sought to consolidate group identification across similar experiences of racism and colonialism. Nevertheless, the problems of race and culture have loomed large as the prevailing structures of African Diaspora as intellectual frames that privileged Herskovitsian notions of African cultural retention. Inherently, in the African Diaspora, certain locations and populations have been recognized, lauded, and celebrated for their documented “closeness” to African culture and subsequently authentic modes of identity. While eventually replaced by encounter models (Mintz and Price, 1976[1992]), hybridity,
creolization, and syncretism, the search for a distinctive culture remained ever present in the diaspora (Scott 1991). Within the African Diaspora, there have been other places that have been understood as having weaker connections and therefore have been most vulnerable to the critiques levied against the African Diaspora: a people without culture, marginalized, inferior, territorially and nationally dispossessed, and of no value culturally or intellectually to modernity (Gordon and Anderson, 1999). I argue that Black culture in the United States has remained one of these locations of “weaker” African connection, popularizing the argument for the absence of “real” culture models, with the notable exceptional studies of the Gullah/Geechee and occasionally Creole communities in the Southern United States, as evidenced by Herskovits’s seminal works on these communities (Yelvington 2001). Frazier counters Herkovits’s African retention model by grounding his work on the study of Black Chicago. By tracing these trajectories in anthropology and sociology, respectively, we can see that while espousing seemingly different views, both Frazier and Herskovits were trained to study and analyze Black culture from two ends of a wider spectrum of what I understand as an African obsession. Herskovits was invested in scientifically documenting that Blacks had culture vis-à-vis their retentions of, connections to, and proximity with African culture, whereas Frazier worked to demonstrate that Blacks had lost their connections with African culture which has connections to the political debates of that time. Their collective fixation on African identity as foundational to the processes of racialization in the United States and to
production of Blackness and black culture in this context—and the wider reproduction of these epistemic frameworks in subsequent scholarship—has blinded us from experiencing, understanding, and interpreting the local instantiations of Blackness given the specter of Africa. While imperfect, I offer migrant indigeneity as a counter to these intellectual trajectories, as situated within overarching regimes of white supremacy and coloniality, and which seek to maintain the status quo in the study of this community of Hebrews who have been racialized as Black.

Although the contributions of other sociologists of race and racism have centered their research on the experiences of Black Americans and have been essential for understanding race, racism, and racial formations in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 1999, 2015; Omi and Winant, 1993, 2004), the sociological focus has often omitted this discussion of culture and theorizing on the relationship between race and Black culture in the United States. What I am doing here is attempting to assess, evaluate, and analyze the constructions of Black culture outside of the Frazier-Herskovits debate and assume that Black-identified persons in the Americas certainly have culture. But to continue to analyze and theorize this cultural production as a derivation of African culture is no less heinous than the cultural theories that attempt to pathologize Black culture. Decentering whiteness, European colonialism, and imperial rule as a dominant structure and mechanism by which to determine who is indigenous and not is imperative to reorganize the analysis of racialized Black communities,
with their claims to indigeneity. However, models of indigeneity—or perhaps moving more closely to a model of cultural analysis demonstrated by Zora Neale Hurston—might have been more useful for understanding religious subjectivities and primary markers of identity for racialized Black folks (Burnett 2016).

Notwithstanding these critiques, theories and constructions of Blackness found a comfortable home in Africanness and the African Diaspora as an acceptable scaffold for the study of Black culture. Subsequently, theories of the African Diaspora have developed to attend to the formation of communities produced by the dispossessed, or Blacks of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. Moreover, synergies emerged from scholars working on the continent and the theorized diaspora. These theories have been significant for understanding the interconnections of shared histories, overlapping colonial projects, and the construction of cultural identity. Given this theoretical momentum, many Black communities have attempted to recover their African heritage as a mechanism for demonstrating culture, often as a way of reclaiming their own national legitimacy in the face of European and white domination. Nevertheless, I argue that the theories of African Diaspora—while they have been infinitely generative in illuminating the relationship between Blackness, migration, transnationalism, and diaspora—have not been able to successfully address the widespread notion that Blacks in the United States are believed to have culture. In the United States, I argue that these theoretical conceptions also reinforce the narrative of Blackness and its relationship to enslavement, property, and its status vis-à-vis
non-humanity as a dominant trope in the Black cultural landscape. What is less acknowledged, however, is the degree to which there is cultural continuity, exchange, and borrowing that happens between all groups, particularly in those who have considerable histories of migration. Through a focus on the Hebrew Israelites, I look at the ways in which their name, the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, signals the ways the community utilizes limited possibilities of Blackness that enable walking through the door of no return, through the inhumanity and the rigidity of Blackness, which allows them to reconfigure the self to be registered as indigenous and to enter the Israeli nation-state through the Law of Return.

Even still, diasporic theory has been incredibly useful and I respond to Gordon and Anderson’s call for “ethnographic attention to the process of diasporic identification” which “argue[s] for a shift in focus that concentrates not so much on essential features common to various peoples of African descent as on the various processes through which communities and individuals identify with one another, highlighting the central importance of race—racial constructions, racial oppressions, racial identification—and culture in the making and remaking of diaspora” (1999, 284). It does so by looking at the transnational efforts of the Hebrew Israelites to place race, specifically Blackness, in conversation with indigeneity through processes of racialization and cultural production. Similarly, I turn to Paul Gilroy (1993), who has been central to the study of Blackness with the groundbreaking work *Black Atlantic: Modernity and*
Double Consciousness, which was critical in disrupting the nation-state as the de-facto level of analysis. Similarly, Gilroy illuminates the processes of identity formation, which emerge from debate on roots (the construction of a culture that is situated in a particular place) and routes (emphasizing the results of transnational circulation of people and practices). Gilroy’s work can be interpreted as a demonstration about the universality of cultural intermixing and cross-cultural permutation. However, notions of cultural purity, Euro-dominant ideas about the significance of these populations’ contribution to modernity, and a long-standing commitment to racial, ethnic, and national absolutism has left racialized Black subjects in the same position of racial and cultural inferiority, without substantive territorial or national connections, and with ostensibly nothing intellectual to offer modernity (Gordon and Anderson, 1999). Similarly, Matory’s (2005) work sought to attend to a more objective view of the Black Atlantic as a space where parties from all sides of the ocean were contributing to the formation of religious culture that is not part of this “myth of the Negro past” but actively engaged participants in the creation of the historically transnational universes of these religious adherents. Hebrew Israelites turn traditional Black Atlantic circuitry on itself and utilize these narratives to foreground and center an argument about the self that is disruptive to the shortsighted historical framing (with enslavement as the primary and the furthest time point) of racialized Black subjects.

The field has evolved relative to the primary critiques of Scott (1991) in
challenging the Africanism as a source of necessary validation and Matory’s (1999) dialogic approach to centuries-old dialogue of African diasporic communities across the Atlantic. Moreover, models of diaspora as practice (Edwards 2003), process (Clarke and Thomas 2006), and cultural citizenship (Clarke 2013) have sought to expand our understanding of diaspora. Scott’s intervention can be understood as a challenge to scholars writing in the field to re-examine the implicit principles that ground theory in this field and to look beyond slavery by reconceptualizing notions of authenticity and subjectivity as central tenets of scholarship in the African Diaspora literature. The circuitry of the African Diaspora and the Black Atlantic is complex and engages notions of memory, which Holsey (2008) conjures in her exploration of diaspora from an African or a geographically African site surveying the diaspora and diasporic subjectivity. Discourses of authenticity are ameliorated and/or approached differently through both Scott’s intervention and Holsey’s conception of memory. Racial authenticity and subjectivity are central concepts within the critical race literature as it relates to work on creolization, hybridity, and mestizaje. Within the debate on authenticity, Matory (1999, 2000, 2005, 2008) has contributed a notion of diasporic co-production, which is often veiled by attention to “retention” as a disciplinary constraint. Subsequently, authenticity is deactivated as a litmus test for determining what is constituted as true and verifiable. Jackson (2005) troubles and expands the conversations on racial authenticity by proposing that these constructs are insufficient to encompass or do the full
theoretical work required to engage Blackness and in turn proposes “sincerity” as an analytic to address the remaining spillage of incomplete understandings of the inner workings of race. Similarly, literature in the field has sought to depict and analyze the “transnational migrant circuits” (Rouse 1991) and related cultural processes that result from these circuits.

I argue that there are forms of indigeneity that, through the construction of the Americas, we have been deprogrammed from seeing and understanding. These models of people-making that sought to create “indigenous” as a modality structured by settler colonists were predicated on spatial and temporal markers for identity. The importation of these dominant tropes to construct identity and studies of this construction through the development of social scientific methods that inherited these models has purposely obscured the complex ways indigenous identities have been formulated through the process of decolonialism (both in the social sciences and as a community-based process). “Therefore, indigenousness is never ‘natural’ and unmediated; it must be imagined and standardized (not necessarily in that order) sufficiently to generate lasting and relatively stable sociopolitical affinities and allegiances of what are typically now called ‘identities’” (Johnson 2002, 306). I argue that in order for anthropology to take decolonialism efforts further, scholarship must pay attention to the ways Black identity as a construct of projected identity formation may not be the best or most accurate way to capture the subjectivities of Black people. In order to decolonize American anthropology, we have challenged the racial hierarchies and
epistemic frameworks that emerged and persisted from the initial formation of the field in the study of Blackness. Moreover, while anthropology and the broader discipline of social science have provided a home for the study of Blackness, there needs to be revolutionary shift in how we approach such a study (which Black anthropologists have been arguing for decades—Harrison 1991).

While Hebrew identity is a subversion of these normative and hierarchically-structured racial categories and logics employed by the American nation-state, the Hebrews I worked with demonstrate the impossibilities of escaping racializations of being Black that are rooted in Africanness as imposed by external formations of identity. This is demonstrated through the argument I flesh out more in subsequent chapters about their diasporic past leading them to their indigenous future. It is through their moment in Liberia and their connection to the Pan-Africanist and Civil Rights Era momentum of radicalism that they participate in the projects of identity formation that would lead them “B(l)ack to Africa.” From there, they attempt the most difficult of what I term “geo-corporeal acrobatic moves” from Afro-Diasporic to indigenous community in their move to Israel/Palestine. This move led them to the overlapping diasporas that I describe in more detail in chapter three. The Hebrews continue to revise their vision and purpose from this diasporic past to indigenous future. And yet even with this radical renegotiation of their project from diasporic to indigenous, the Hebrews have been forced to contend with a continued state of dispossession and lack of formal state recognition living without citizenship in
Israel/Palestine. Similarly, the nature of their migration and their specific relationship to land focuses our attention on the models of indigenous identity formation, which mirrors the histories of others marked by territorial dispossession. As illustrated by Rofeh Mickael in the opening vignette, the Hebrew specific iteration of indigeneity is often difficult to understand because of the numerous waves of migration, many of which are involuntary, and the inconsistency of its articulation with the traditional ways in which indigeneity is understood. For example, the primary principles that define indigeneity in the United Nations’ “The Concept of Indigenous People” involve land; the document states that historical continuity can be demonstrated in the present by “occupation of ancestral lands or at least part of them” and “common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands” (United Nations 2004). Although the Hebrews have worked to make a case that is in alignment with the basic tenets that the United Nations has used to define and conceptualize indigeneity, in a space like Israel/Palestine (as well as in the other settler colonial sites) common ancestry with the original occupants is a continued source of tension that animates a number of debates not limited to the rights to land, sovereignty, and identity which often generate the need for clarity on definitions of indigeneity. Nevertheless, the specific challenge that the Hebrews confront that further complicates their ability to be understood and accepted as indigenous beyond their multiple migrations is its overlap with their racialization as Black combined their leverage of the criteria and evidence for their claims to indigeneity (their
commitment to a spirituality different than the state), and with their more recent histories in specific nation-states.

Hybridity, Syncretism, and Creolization: Building on the Legacies of Caribbean and Latin American Scholarship

In 1976, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price introduced *The Birth of African American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*, which seeks to disrupt the discipline’s accepted notion of African cultural continuity as the primary analytical frame for interpreting Black culture in the Americas (specifically in Latin America and the Caribbean). This work, by contrast, advocates for a more dynamic framework for interpreting cultural production and transformed the field through their intervention as “creation theorists” (Price 2001). From this work, and other literature generated during this time, concepts like creolization (drawn heavily from the field of linguistics), syncretism, and hybridity rose to dominance. Each of these terms has been critiqued by anthropologists (Palmié 2006) but has yet to be replaced by a field-defining analytic to examine Black culture in the Americas. While a number of scholars have discussed indigenous cosmopolitanism (Forte 2010) and the experiences of recognized indigenous communities today (de la Cadena and Starn 2010), the few arguments relative to indigenizing Blackness in the Americas have been made primarily in the Caribbean and Latin America. These works, like Jackson’s *Creole Indigeneity*
(2012) and Newton’s (2013) article in *Small Axe*, discuss the creation of a Creole or Black nativity, which is dominant in the Anglophone Caribbean as a displacement of the indigenous populations. However, while this work leads us towards a proposal of Black indigeneity in the Americas, it continues to respect the categorical divisions between “Negro” and “Indio.” Other works on the Garifuna (Johnson 2002, Anderson 2007) have longer histories of proposing indigeneity among racialized Black communities and accompany more recent work on the claims to Black indigeneity in the Americas with the Rastafari in Jamaica (Thomas 2011, Lewis 2017). At the University of Texas-Austin, Edmund T. Gordon and Charles Hale have been instrumental in conducting research on the relationship between Blackness and indigeneity in Central America. Hooker has conducted similar research in Nicaragua (Hooker 2012). Nevertheless, a corresponding body of research on the United States has yet to emerge.

Anderson’s (2007) scholarship provides some context for the difficulties of considering a relationship between indigeneity and Blackness. He states, “The earliest reference to the word ‘indigenous’ recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary juxtaposes indigeneity with Blackness” (Anderson 2007, 1). Referencing Sir Thomas Browne in “Of the Blackness of Negroes,” Anderson quotes him as saying, “Although in many parts thereof there be at present swarms of Negroes serving under the Spaniard, yet were they all transported from Africa, since the discovery of Columbus; and are not indigenous or proper natives of America” (Anderson 2007, 1). Like Anderson, I question the
juxtaposition of the categories of Negro and Indio or Blackness and Indigeneity but go further in challenging the discrepancy in Browne’s argument, which assumes Europeans predated Negroes in the Americas (Bennett 1962), and more importantly, privileges the white supremacist positioning of non-European identities based entirely on their temporal and spatial relationships to European arrival in the Americas. Given the historical divisions of the categories of Negro and Indio since the seventeenth century, it makes sense that the field of anthropology ensured that Blacks in the Americas would never be seen as indigenous. While several communities have received honorary status as Black Indians, the literature predominantly constructs these groups as separate but with alliances (Lewis 2000, Katz 2012).

The Process of Racialization & Construction of Indigeneity

In this section I think with DuBois (1906) in his oft-cited quote, “How does it feel to be a problem?” and his construction of double consciousness. Here, I think about how double consciousness for the Hebrews is a function of the processes of racialization that are pitted against the articulations of a culturally produced indigeneity. As demonstrated in the opening vignette, Hebrews health practices are a central mechanism by which the community demonstrates how they culturally produce indigeneity. For Rofeh Mickael, Naomi, and Ben Aaron, spirituality is the source of cultural production for Hebrews that not only a pathway to health, wellness, and care of the body but a site for dictating identity
that supersedes race. The opening vignette’s description of how the health
practices which are just “part of the culture” reinforce the notion that spirituality
determines how to live and be but who to be and the context by which identity is
determined. Through this double consciousness of racialization and indigeneity, I
work through the literature to discuss the effect of racialization on the
construction of a migrant indigeneity. Specifically, this effect involves “the
transnational negative associations” with the category of Black that are often
reified in health.

These include attributions of biological inferiority crystallized in the
scientific racisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; attributions of
collective personality characteristics such as hypersexuality; associations between
blackness and cultural deficiencies (e.g., lack of civilization, witchcraft,
backwardness); associations with menial work and the stigmas of inferior social
position, themselves produced by racial hierarchies; and exclusion from
consideration as true nationals (Anderson 2009, 16). Therefore, this dissertation
depends on the notion that “the body was [...] the obvious signifier of race as well
as its ultimate evidence—attested by science and the state...ma[king] racialization
rely on bodily attributes” (Fassin 2011, 420).

The core foundation of the dissertation is the repeal of the processes of
racialization from the cultural production of indigeneity through ethnographic
study with the Hebrews that engages “the body [as] the site of the racial
experience” (Fassin 2011) focused on racial disparities in rates of NCDs. I
examine how community members produce indigenous identity which often parallel external processes of racialization. The ethnographic data demonstrates that while I and often others perceives and construct the Hebrews as Black and build analyses from this perception, they lead with their spirituality and subsequently their theology as the basis for constructing the self, community, and defining their cultural practices. Therefore, in this section I offer a review of scholarship in the social sciences that considers the processes of racialization and puts it in conversation with the production of indigenous identity. Whereas Anderson provides “a conceptual orientation toward [B]lackness and indigeneity not as mutually exclusive categories but as modalities of identity formation that can overlap with each” (Anderson 2009, 21), I theorize an orientation that accepts Blackness and indigeneity not as mutually exclusive categories yet seek to tease apart the processes of racialization of Blackness from the processes that culturally produce indigeneity. I build on Anderson’s argument: “indigenous people represents a particular type of subject position, we can analyze indigeneity as a form of political practice, as a bundle of concepts, associations, assertions, and/or rights mobilized in acts of self-representation by marginalized social subjects. Indigeneity, in this sense, involves discursive frames or models through which subjects voice their claims in the world” (Anderson 2009, 20-21).

The process of racialization makes proposals for indigeneity difficult and continues to produce Blackness through violent means. “The process of racial assignation always exerts a form of symbolic violence upon those who are
ascribed” (Fassin 2011, 423, cf Bourdieu 2000). Throughout the dissertation, I highlight the “symbolic violence” embedded within processes of racialization, which forces a particular identity onto those racialized Black communities who seek instead to claim indigeneity through spirituality. “Ascribing someone racially is therefore not only imposing an identity upon him: it is also depriving him of possible alternative identifications, including the mere possibility of multiple belongings” (Fassin 2011, 423). In this work, I propose a reconciliation between this conception of migrant indigeneity and the notion of multiple sets of belongings. It is these multiple sets of belonging that relieve the tension between indigeneity and Blackness as contested structures of identity. Like Anderson’s (2009, 8) presentation of the Garifuna, I build on “a configuration of indigeneity as a marking a particular cultural status or condition, a mode of being more than a matter of blood... [which allow us to see an] emerging, contested meanings of [B]lackness and indigeneity as overlapping rather than exclusive categories of identification even as it demonstrates the differences and tensions between them.

Given the processes of racialization that demarcates the Hebrews as a particular subject that privileges racialization over their own assertions of indigeneity, anthropologists Mark Anderson and Christen Smith allow us to consider alternative modes of self-making through structural and discursive antagonisms and hierarchy. Anderson writes,
We do not simply choose our selves. One is not [B]lack simply by choice; one’s identity is always in part constituted—sometimes against one’s will—within a structure of recognition, identification, and subjectification. On my view, the [B]lack diasporic subject is a subject whose “historical fate” has been produced as [B]lack in and through raced social relations, ideological apparatuses, and political regimes (Anderson 2009, 16).

The structure through which racialized Blackness is produced is evident in this work, and therefore the difficulties of producing collective and individual identification and subjectivities that reflect indigeneity are challenging. Smith shows how structural and physical violence is critical to understanding this relationship. Smith writes,

Not only do police officers and death-squad agents identify [B]lack people when they enact violence on the [B]lack body, but they also produce [B]lackness through these acts. This is an important political distinction because the dialogic nature of racial formation requires us to move away from an analysis that over determines race as an elective identity marker toward a discussion of structural antagonisms—historical, social blocs that define what position people hold in society based on racial hierarchies. (Smith 2016, 14)

For Hebrews, these perpetual structural antagonisms govern, contest, and structure their identity formation and highlight how the production of Blackness through violence seeks to destroy their own cultural project of claiming indigeneity.
The history of the social construction of Indio (indigenous) and Negro (Black) as ideologically, analytically, and interpretatively mutually exclusive are at the core of this dissertation, specifically situated in the broader political and medical projects of global health and NCD prevention as the substance and thrust of this work. Therefore, with this concept of migrant indigeneity built on and out of ethnographic research on global health policy implementation and governance to address NCD prevention, I look to Morgansen’s work on biopolitics in the context of settler colonialism. This scholarship details the fact that colonialism never ended and that theories that focus on the biopolitical state and regimes of global governance must attend to “settler colonialism [as] a historical and present condition and method of all such power” (Morgansen 2011, 54). In thinking about the way in which settler colonialism serves as a framework for organizing relationships of power, I use it to construct how bodies are organized within this method and condition and build on the evidence that “white supremacist settler colonisation produces specific modes of biopolitics that sustain not only in settler states but also in regimes of global governance that inherit, extend, and naturalise their power” (Morgansen 2011, 52). Through this exploration, a migrant indigeneity framework for understanding the Hebrew efforts to implement indigenous Hebrew policies for chronic disease prevention is clearer. This is particularly salient as scientific inquiry of race, genetics, and identity permeate anthropological discourse (Tallbear 2013).
What Then is Migrant Indigeneity as a Theoretical Framework?

I look to the Hebrew community to think through these questions of racialized Blackness and productions of indigenous identity formation and to define migrant indigeneity. Specifically, in the United States, I think about the defining constructions and social scientific work that have sought to capture the cultural contributions and the particular cultural processes of these communities. I interrogate the claims of the Hebrews that challenge our understandings of what has been identified as Black through the processes of racialization. Through their attempts to be seen as indigenous, I have sought to contribute a theoretical framework that can attend to and provide nuance for the specificity of their claims of indigeneity. I argue that doing so requires a re-scripting of the cultural norms that have been written onto these communities. In this section, I navigate through the scripts that structure indigeneity in order to further elucidate this concept of migrant indigeneity.

Building on Corntasel’s work (2003) on indigenous identity, I propose a structure of indigeneity that is “flexible and dynamic.” Migrant indigeneity is a dynamic formulation of indigeneity that is attentive to the migration, movements, and histories of the communities it is drawn from to understand how this form of flexible indigeneity is conceptualized. Moreover, I build on Yeh’s (2007) claim that indigeneity is a relatively recent uniting ideological and political framework for the articulation of identity claims. Yeh writes,

Before the 1980s, the term indigenous was rarely used to describe people
anywhere in the world. Today a transnational social movement has made “indigenous people” both a legal term and an identity claimed by many peoples with diverse historical situations. It is widely understood to imply, among other things, firstness, nativeness or original or prior occupancy of a place; attachment to a particular territory or homeland; marginalization within a culturally or ethnically different wider society; and often, a history of colonization. As such, it has been used in international conventions, academic works, and activist organizing around issues of sovereignty, dispossession, human rights, and environmental stewardship. Basic demands of the indigenous rights movement include respect for collective rights to land, recognition of cultural difference, and the right to self-determination. Many indigenous struggles are centered around the appropriation of land, artifacts, and knowledge and are predicated on a mutual acknowledgement of a historical debt created by dispossession. (Yeh 2007, 69)

In an effort to reclaim indigeneity as a flexible and dynamic source of identity, I situate migrant indigeneity on a more durable epistemic framing of identity that decolonizes indigeneity through the decentering of European colonialism and imperialism as central to its claims. Anthropologist Audra Simpson (2014) discusses the larger project of refusal as a structural response to the structural project of colonialism. Similarly, co-articulation with migrant indigeneity research on the Mohawk in North America has produced theory on “feeling citizenships’ that are structured in the present space of intra-community
recognition, affection and care, outside of the logics of colonial and imperial rule” (Simpson 2007, 76). The idea of firstness and nativeness continues to allow the identity of indigenous communities to be arbitrated by European presence and modes of governance. While I am completely in support of the need for justice and reparations to respond to the heinous and egregious efforts of European colonialism on these communities, I promote and advance a construction of self that is not dependent on the models, transformations, and objects of the colonial encounter to give life to framing of identity, the self, and community. Given that this claim is being made on the grounds of theology and spiritual practice, it is important to acknowledge that “defining indigenous religions as the religions of those communities that imagine themselves in indigenous style—as organically bound to a land site—brackets the impasse between so-called romantic or essentialist and deconstructivist views of indigenous societies” (Johnson 2002, 306). Therefore, I return to the argument that the Hebrew Israelites represent an indigenous community—embedded within many indigenous communities in the Americas—who argue for forms of modern indigeneity unencumbered by European settler colonialism as a temporal and spatial marker. Moreover, while I ground migrant indigeneity in familiar notions like the recognition of cultural difference, the right to self-determination, and sovereignty, this work unsettles traditional constructions that have classically defined indigeneity through its attachment to a particular territory or homeland. It is important to recognize that many of the traditionally-defined indigenous communities have been stripped
from their homelands and have had to deal with the issues related to dislocation. As such, attachment to a particular territory has remained salient for indigenous communities for obvious reasons related to collective rights to land, repatriation, resource rights, and ownership. Nevertheless, given the particular mechanisms of racializing Blackness in the Americas, the predominance of territorial claims has made the visibility of indigeneity of certain groups, like the Hebrews, difficult.

The defining discourses on indigeneity have primarily been structured by the definitions provided by multinational organizations like the United Nations (Merlan 2009, United Nations 2004, Niezen 2003, Muehlebach 2001); see appendix for United Nations’ definitions of indigeneity. Similar to their approach to studying diaspora, anthropological perspectives have embraced the dynamism and fluid construction of indigeneity. Similarly, within the literature on indigeneity, research on the performance of indigenous identity against the standard of the “noble savage” is a central theme. The politics of authenticity related to “appropriate” forms of indigeneity have been a sustained area of study and heavily criticized in the anthropological literature (Oldham and Frank 2008, Kuper 2003, Niezen 2003, Beteille, A. 1998). The work of many anthropologists has advocated for a more nuanced approach (often through the concept of “articulation”) to understand the construction of indigenous as a category for analysis. These claims of authenticity (Muehlebach 2001) and the constructions of what an authentic indigeneity “looks like” are read and leveraged primarily in response to overarching definitions of indigeneity structured by and steeped in
liberalism discourse. de la Cadena (2010), in discussing the current direction in the field related to historic formations of indigenous politics as ethnic politics, challenges culture as the appropriate discourse or “anthropocentric” space, advocating for a different political practice that does not impinge on determinations of categories which separate nature and culture and privilege humans in the generation of such categories. Given the new trends in the discipline, analyses within the scholarship have focused on identity, connections to land, participation in global indigenous movements, and clarification of terminology related to identity (Muckle 2012). A similar problem arises in the authenticating of indigenous identity, which Garrouste (2003) defines through multiple mechanisms such as legal, cultural, biological, and personal. Miller (2003) details the problems of visibility regarding indigenous groups naming the challenge of defining who is indigenous as complex despite the fact that global indigenous communities have politically united across boundaries of nation. Nonetheless, it is the focus on defining who is indigenous that reinforces the problematic characterizations that make indigeneity in racialized Black communities invisible in the larger political project of visibility/recognition.

Addressing the trouble in distinguishing ethnic groups from indigenous peoples, Niezen (2003, 5) suggests that the latter “derive much of their identity from histories of state-sponsored genocide, forced settlement, relocation, political marginalization, and various formal attempts at cultural destruction.” In light of the proliferation of multicultural neoliberal discourses that promote
“diversity,” de la Cadena and Starn (2007, 8) argue that the anthropological preoccupation with populating the “savage slot” (Trouillot 1991) continues to “equate indigeneity, or at least authentic indigeneity, with autochthony and the premodern.” Trouillot’s concept of the savage slot is helpful here to consider the ways in which the political mobilization around exclusive categories validates the principles it seeks to unfurl (Wilderson 2010). In each of these questions about indigenous politics, which emphasize a focus on the politics of land, questions of sovereignty, and the rights that emerge from adherence to the performance and embodiment of a particular indigenous subjectivity, are often formed collectively (de la Cadena and Starn 2007). Indigenous scholars have focused on the ways in which communities appeal to the interstitial spaces in the neoliberal order to feature their own (decolonialist) agendas, subverting and utilizing categories that are often incompatible with their projects (Smith 2007). The current anthropological attention to indigeneity is also mindful of how these processes are embedded within an increasingly complex and globalized world order through which global indigenous movements “endorse authenticity and invention, subsistence and wealth, traditional knowledge and new technologies, territory and diaspora” (Tsing 2010, 33). And yet even in the contemporary configuration of a globalized and interconnected set of indigenous movements, racialized Black communities remain mostly invisible in multiculturalist registers.

Examining the cross-section of the scholarship on diaspora, Blackness,
and indigeneity illuminates the difficulties in the proposals for indigeneity amidst the racializing processes of Blackness. The scholarship within the Americas generally makes a clear distinction between Indigenous (generally read and prescribed as Indian or Native American) and Afro-descendants. Greene (2007) writes “Indigenous people are thought to possess traits that make them bearers of a distinct ethno-cultural group status; [whereas] Afro-descendants are constructed primarily as racialized subjects without a distinct culture apart from what is understood as the national culture.” Although work with Black Indigenous communities throughout the Americas challenges this notion, the fault lines of race and ethnicity have been firmly established in American anthropology. Mark Anderson (2009) writes, “indigeneity has provided a crucial frame through which members of rural communities defend themselves against a variety of forms of oppression, particularly land and resource appropriation.” He attempts to conceptualize and orient “[B]lackness and indigeneity not as mutually exclusive categories but as modalities of identity formation that can overlap with each other.” Newton (2013), citing Sylvia Wynter (1970), explores the tension of relinquishing indigeneity to the diaspora because of the trauma involved in the exile produced in and by these spaces. Acknowledging the right of every person to identify as Indigenous, she also highlights the potential erosion of Indigenous rights. Moreover, Wynter frames Indigenous and Diasporic (here understood as Creole) as opposites in the realm of historical experience and contemporary theory rather than as symbiotic categories of inquiry in the
Caribbean. While in other spaces throughout the diaspora, Black indigeneity is a political impossibility given the structures of articulating identity in reference to the nation-state’s boundaries, scholars (e.g., Jackson 2012) propose that the Caribbean might serve as an exceptional space in the formation of the literature on Black indigeneity, warranting further analysis by scholars of diaspora, Blackness, and indigeneity as it can serve as an ethnographic ground-zero for these categories as inextricably linked. Although there is not much literature about this in the United States, the work being done in Latin America has drawn attention to the role of nation, empire, and other geo-political processes (such as governmental policies) that have maintained the categories of race and indigeneity as separate but related. Peter Wade (2003, 36), writing on race and ethnicity in Latin America, states, “Blacks and Indians have both been characterized as Others, located in the liminal spaces of the nation, but they have fitted in different ways into what I call the structures of alterity.”

In their volume on indigenous cosmopolitans, Maxmilian Forte (2010, 2) asks four questions that are central to the construction of migrant indigeneity as an analytical and theoretical framework for this dissertation. Forte asks,

What happens to indigenous culture and identity when being in the ‘original place’ is no longer possible or even necessary? Does displacement, moving beyond one’s original place, mean that indigeneity (being indigenous) vanishes or is diminished? How is being and becoming indigenous, experienced,
practiced along translocal pathways? How are new philosophies and politics of indigenous identification (indigenism) constructed in new translocal settings? What is specific about an analytical engagement of the Hebrew indigeneity is the way it forces us to consider what is and becomes indigenous if one has to reclaim or remember those aspects of indigenous identity. Although many of the world's indigenous groups in North, Central, and South America, Asia, Africa, and Australia have experienced forced migration and even migration for other reasons, often their relationship to the larger political project in their particular nation or within the continent produces different effects in their social and cultural legibility as indigenous. For many who are racialized as Black and without a traceable and definitive connection to the African continent living outside of Africa, indigeneity has not been an option that has been available for social, cultural, or even effective political mobilization as determined by the nation-state.

Subsequently, the cultural logics that define identity that have arisen in and through the cultural landscapes of these communities have been flattened by the works of social scientists who have been blinded by the effects of globalization and migration combined often with enslavement and colonialism. Such scholars read these communities as having few options, having no ascertainable separate culture, having a culture that is based in and on pathology and poverty, or retaining “African” culture. Therefore, as an intervention, I propose migrant indigeneity to add to the indigeneity literature that considers movements, that
considers indigenous groups outside of their “original place,” and when the production of indigeneity vanishes or is diminished. This scholarship helps illuminate the ways in which indigenous formations are being registered within the literature and makes space for the introduction of migrant indigeneity. This is to engage with Johnson, who defines

the indigenous community as one that is imagined: (1) as practiced by a discrete, bounded social group that clearly marks insiders from outsiders by genealogical descent; (2) as practiced on a discrete, bounded land site since beyond the Western historical record; and (3) to consist of traditional beliefs and practices, uniquely that group’s, which are not invented, borrowed, or syncretic. This ideal-typical indigenous community fuses, in a pure logical sense, a people, a place, and a set of beliefs and practices within clear limits. But let me repeat: there is no such purity in the world, nor has there ever been. In history, there is always mixing, always migration, always exchange; the question is only one of degree. (Johnson 2002, 312).

In the article, “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy,” Andrea Smith names the three pillars of white supremacy. She argues that the “three primary logics of white supremacy are (1) slaveability/anti-Black racism, which anchors capitalism; (2) genocide, which anchors colonialism; and (3) orientalism, which anchors war” (2012, 68). I utilize this model to discuss the ways in which anti-Blackness is woven into the fabric of the formation of race in the United States that instantiates a racial hierarchy in which “Blackness
becomes equated with slaveability.” Therefore, I argue that in order to really decolonize knowledge production and undo its foundational grounding in white supremacy as the undergirding logic that supports the construction of the Americas, we must restructure the categories of racialized identity. I argue that racialized Blackness and Black culture as constructions seek to reify white supremacist notions that anchor the identity of Black subjects in a property-based identity, as well as one tied to enslavement that re-centers the European subjects and their role in creating global migration. The set of logics that construct who is indigenous and under what terms calls into question the penetrating depth of white supremacy on the subaltern’s ability to speak (Spivak 1988) and narrate self and community in language that does not resonate with the discourses provided by the supremacist structure.

Paul C. Johnson, when discussing indigeneity and religion specifically related to Candomblé and Garifuna, suggests,

I share the view that modernity and its epistemologies were derived from and accomplices to colonial conquest and intrusion. But that is all the more reason to investigate and interpret the insidious fact that even rebels against the world-system, however diverse their ideological motives, must stages their rebellions in strangely familiar forms—in print, on television, on the Web, in style. (2002, 37-38).

Therefore, the critical analyses to disrupt and complicate the terms of rebellions have all been familiar and have produced a similar result. I employ migrant
indigeneity as a way to destabilize the deeply colonial categories of identity and to employ new frameworks for conceptualizing identity formation. Furthermore, as Anderson puts it:

I simply want to reiterate the deep geographic associations with the categories “Indian” and “Black” emergent from colonialism, associations that still resonate in the production of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity in the Americas...Recognizing the importance of such differences [variation in the incorporation of Blackness and Indianness as a part of national culture and identity across nation-state], however, should not blind us to the ways in which Negro and Indian became transimperial and later transnational categories shaped by the geographies of power that produced them. (Anderson 2009, 15)

Given the far-reaching impact of white supremacy, globalization, and interactions with the nation-state, it has become almost impossible to disengage from the cultural dominance of identity, race, and racial hierarchies in almost every aspect of life. While many have utilized the distinct cultural practices of a group that maintains traditions of an earlier culture, there has been less focus on what occurs when that group migrates or is forced to migrate. I am proposing a re-reading of the anthropology of Afro-American culture that does not solely build on the cultural continuity argument. Instead of utilizing reductive racial categories, it seeks to broaden our notion of the dynamism of a transnational indigeneity in the global moment. Instead of thinking about “New World” cultures, I will discuss the cultural production outside of the dichotomous frame,
which does not give enough attention to transnational migrations and diaspora that have been overshadowed by the dominance of colonial and imperial historical formations. My research focuses on a community that believes they are indigenous and who also have long histories of migration. Although the community has a geographic region that they believe is the land of origin, I focus more on how they produce their notions of indigeneity in lands and spaces where they have lived for extended periods of time. Specifically, given the centrality of the United States in the formation of Hebrew community history, I look at the migration of people and ideologies in this context. This work borrows from the scholarship of other critics who named the omission of the Great Migration in the United States as a major lacuna in the regional categorization of cultural communities in the African Diaspora. By emphasizing the Great Migration and overlapping Caribbean migration as central to a majority of the members of the Hebrew community, I think about migration and indigeneity as an unlikely yet fitting model for the practices of the community. I will rely on the ethnographic data to support the construction of identity amidst the migratory patterns, transnational connections, and local iterations of the indigenous.

Drawing on a legacy in anthropology that engendered, bolstered, and intensified a binary between indigeneity and Blackness, I work to dismantle this construction by demonstrating the ways in which the logics of white supremacy served as a theoretical framework contributing to the ongoing dispossession and intellectual ghettoization of the study of race and ethnic identity in the United
States. Although a number of scholars discuss the relationship between Black and Indigenous communities as separate communities and their overlap in shared histories and alliances, I would like to discuss the relationship in a different way. In my argument, I illustrate the ways in which the settler colonial environments that appear in my ethnographic research have fostered limited understandings of identity, which promote and continue to support supremacist, racist, and hierarchical notions of identity. I argue that there are ways in which communities racialized as Black have developed, structured, and solidified indigeneity amidst the horrors of white supremacy that have moved towards cultural erasure, or cultural syncretism, creolization, or hybridity at best. I posit that these constructions work to further the theorizing of Blackness as culturally inferior in the United States, which has been based on the histories of enslavement among a subset of the population as well as lacking a source of identity predicated on territorial dispossession. Moreover, I argue that indigeneity is intellectually seductive as a framework that elevates the position of certain communities through the destruction of previous frames of indigeneity that hold together white supremacy. However, I am calling for is a reconstruction of race and ethnic studies that does hold groups separate in ways that promote the previous formation by which different groups were loyal to their position in the hierarchy because of the benefits accrued in reference to other groups.

What I demonstrate is that migrant indigeneity is relational to the construction of modernity by dislodging the Amerindian and the African slaves
from static disparate categories in order to think broadly and more responsively to the construction of the Black subject through subjects that are committed to another ontological alternative. Here specifically, as the spiritual is a mechanism to reconstruct and rework the body. Moreover, I bring ethnographic material to argue against the prototypical construction of identity that attempts to supersede modes of self-identification. Therefore, while migrant indigeneity specifically seeks to respond to efforts, practices, and beliefs of the Hebrew Israelites, the interventions can be seen in the literature that addresses the colonial legacy of strategic deployment of the “honor of being named indigenous” (Nyamnjoh 2007). This further marginalizes and isolates racialized Black subjects in the Americas, which substantively reinforces the difficult claims to indigeneity. More centrally, this intervention comes at a time when the discussions of race and biology have re-emerged and discussion of the racialized Black body, disease risk, and mortality are extremely urgent. It is imperative that anthropologists participate in debates that structure the analyses of racialized identities in the United States. This reifies the importance of “theories of global health and globalization more broadly, [which] must shift their accounts of colonialism to respond to Indigenous people who challenge settler colonialism in global arenas, including in Indigenous peoples’ relationship to health” (Morgansen 2014, 189).

What is important to highlight here is the overlap in the discourses about modernity that signal to the anthropological study of indigeneity and the historic absence of attention to the cultural productions of racialized Black subjects.
While Americanist (North, Central, and South) anthropology has emphasized the study of “Native Americans” or “Indians” and has situated these studies in theories of ethnicity, contemporary global scholarship in the field recasts the anthropological perspectives that have framed indigenous communities as “primitive” and “uncivilized” with debatable cultural complexity. There has recently been a renewed interest in indigeneity under different guises with commitments to incorporate post-colonial critiques and to address American anthropology’s history of focusing on ethnicity regarding Native Americans across the Americas. A genealogical approach to indigeneity clearly illustrates its connections to ethnicity, specifically in the literature in the Americas with Native Americans and “Indians.” The move from “tribe” to the study of culture in bounded ethnic groups is reflective of larger shifts in the field that have responded to the dominance of social evolutionary discourses (Cohen 1978, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Eller 1999). As it relates to the diasporic literature, the culture and ethnicity discourse is placed in opposition to race to reveal how racial hierarchy surreptitiously advances the Native/Indigenous person to the position of “noble savage” (Jackson and Warren 2005, Hames 2007). The more fluid and malleable constructions of indigeneity pioneered by different groups of anthropologists, and activist anthropology more broadly within cultural anthropology, have allowed for a more multi-sited and deterritorialized approach to understanding indigeneity that structures my contributions to migrant indigeneity.
Therefore, migrant indigeneity is a signal to the physical, intellectual, and cultural migrations and re-negotiations of identity (Boyce-Davies 1994). Migrant indigeneity is a testament to the indigenous efforts to construct an identity and create institutions, societies, associations, groups, and a number of cultural products without a stable territorial foundation to which they can lay claim. It is a reference to the continuous and ongoing processes of identity and subject formation that are recovered, reclaimed, and newly historic.

**Reconceptualizing Space & Grounding Indigeneity in Spirituality**

Migrant indigeneity is ethnographically grounded in Hebrew understandings of theology and spiritual practice. I borrow from Razack’s construction of unmapping, which allows us to understand that “there is an important relationship between identity and space” and to address the ways in which “mapping colonized land enabled Europeans to imagine and legally claim that they had discovered and therefore owned the lands of the “New World,” unmapping is intended to undermine the idea of white settler innocence (the notion that European settlers merely settled and developed the land) and to uncover the ideologies and practices of conquest and domination” (Razack 2010, 5). While indigeneity has historically mapped relationships between identity and space through the settler colonial frameworks, I propose a decolonized approach to unmapping that draws on the particularities of place that is still deterritorialized and does not seek to arbitrate indigeneity solely based on spatial
claims. As Morgansen (2011) cautions, such claims are grounded in the governance of white settler colonialism, which naturalizes its power here in reference to the identity of people. Therefore, through migrant indigeneity, I engage indigenous diasporas to think about forced migration and a rupture of the continuity of indigenous life (Smithers and Newman 2014, Harvey and Thompson 2005). Such disruption does not forego the complex ways that an indigenous community like the Hebrews negotiates their relationship to belonging, home, exile, and place. I draw from Johnson’s identification of Candomblé and Garifuna as indigenous communities “because they imagine themselves in the indigenous form—as, in their own self-understanding and presentation, oriented toward and organically related to a particular place” to structure an analysis of the Hebrews (Johnson 2002, 303). With Hebrew communities, the imagined builds on a theological epistemology reflected in their self-understanding and presentation. Nevertheless, it is a critique of the epistemologies that have brought us to conceptualize indigeneity, specifically the fact that modernity and its epistemologies were derived from and were an accomplice to colonial conquest and intrusion. We need, in other words, to also evaluate issues such as the standardization of the immense variety of indigenisms into predictable forms, not to mention the identity politics wherein indigenous communities hotly debate who is “really” in the group and who is not—issues only accessible by considering the indigenous not only as a historical relation to land but as also a style of imagined community. (Johnson 2002, 305)
Therefore, while indigeneity has been framed through the set of epistemological parameters that are colonized, I re-think indigeneity through new epistemologies. Specifically, I rely on M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) and Omise’ke Natasha Tinsley’s invocation of the spiritual as an epistemology. Through a recalibration of the epistemes to approach indigeneity, I draw from the ways in which Hebrews employ spiritual practice and theology to ground indigeneity. This work is indebted to the construction of how “spirituality functions as an epistemic framework facilitating ways in which subjects employ M. Jacqui Alexander’s ‘spirit knowledge/knowing as the medium” (Díaz-Sánchez 2013, 155).

A re-situation of the epistemic framings of indigeneity vis-à-vis spirituality engages Johnson’s notion that “rethink[s] the category of indigenous religions in such a way as to escape both the romantic and deconstructive versions, by considering the indigenous as a style of imagined community that employs identifications relating itself to a specific territory, quite apart from the actual fact of the duration of that territory’s occupation” (Johnson 2002, 324). Therefore, migrant indigeneity, as a theoretical intervention built out of the religiosity and embodied spiritual practice of Hebrew theology, responds to the “need [for] categories that help us describe not just indigenous versus other kinds of people and religions, but the sense in which, and processes by which, peoples indigenize new territories and historical conditions to make them their own” (Johnson 2002, 311).
The Migrant Part of Migrant Indigeneity

As I sat across from the Hebrews in the opening vignette, I thought through a number of questions concerning identity. The primary question that continues to structure my engagement of the community is, how were they able to hold this identity together amidst all of the opposition? And what was the purpose of these identity claims? While they were accustomed to the visits to their village by people from all over the world and were often vetted by community leaders before speaking to outsiders, their performance of self and identity were inherited from the previous generation’s attempt to situate these claims amidst, between, and often against the structures I detail earlier in the chapter. What was fascinating for me was that in Dimona, most of the youth had the opportunity to live these identities from birth and only experienced the real traction of their performance of these identities in late adolescence and early adulthood when they interact with other members of society, like those coming from mostly different parts of Europe, Russia, Northern Africa, places in the Americas, and from all over Israel/Palestine. Engaging with members of the community, I was forced to deal with the question of migration and indigeneity. Why is this such a puzzling query when I began engaging this question in Israel/Palestine, two nations occupying one land (wherein Israeli claims to indigeneity might inaccurately be positioned as the prototype for a brand of migrant indigeneity)? I have presented an argument that describes the difficulties for racialized Black subjects with a past in the United States, and I want to
marshal evidence to demonstrate the significance of migration to the argument I am making.

Moreover, I frame migrant indigeneity through a series of migrations that construct recent Hebrew history and give credence to the term’s formation. Specifically, I build on the literature and movements surrounding the Great Migration. The Great Migration outlines the larger shifts in identity that emerge from this period. Here, I cite the New Negro Movement, as way of understanding how the Great Migration in tandem with in-migration of Black Latin American and Caribbean populations overlaps with a period of renegotiating identity that will lay a foundation for subsequent Hebrew migration. Similarly, through this historic period of migration, the birth and resurgence of spiritual communities respond to what Scott outlines as the most central anthropological issue confronting New World Blacks. Scott writes:

The New World Negro had been ideologically constituted by dominant and racist nineteenth century discourse as a figure with neither a determinant past nor its supposed corollary, a distinctive culture. And by the mid 1920s, black counter discourses were, in the articulation of racial identity-politics, making impressive and unignorable claims for an active African heritage. Therefore, on the conceptual terrain established by the categories of Boasian culture, the task presented to new anthropology was to show in as scientifically conclusive a way as possible that then New World Negro did in fact have both a determinate past and a distinctive culture. (Scott 1991, 277)
On the tiny racialized islands in Chicago, which has been described in the literature as the cultural capital of United States, religious communities responded to the articulation of racial identity politics through a rejection of U.S. Blackness as a frame for identity and subsequently through spiritual projects that gave them a way to understand the self, community, and the world. In a place like Chicago, Hebrewism gave community members knowledge of a determined past that provided a sense, as one respondent said, “that we came from somewhere beyond the [U.S.] South,” and a culture that was distinctive to a community that was perceived to be largely lacking such a culture. The work of the Hebrew community and other aligned communities responded to the need of a large group of migrants for grounding in a past, with culture that frames an identity.

Given the transnational nature of my fieldwork as well as the structure of this Hebrew Israelite community, I look to anthropologist Kamari Clarke (2004) in her work, *Mapping Yoruba Networks: Power and Agency in the Making of Transnational Communities* as a methodological and analytical guide for multi-sited fieldwork and for interpreting what she terms “Black cultural citizenship” (Clarke 2013). Moreover, for transnational religious movements like Hebrewism, her work has facilitated a rich understanding of the complexity of deterritorialized formations in the Black Atlantic world, albeit with the limitations of Black Atlantic interpretations for the form of indigeneity I am trying to explore here. Specifically, this generative work at the intersection of anthropology and the African Diaspora has demonstrated that the meanings,
processes, and production of the Black Atlantic are not bound by geographic space. Clarke (2013) describes the Black Atlantic in the following way:

It is a deterritorialized domain of engagement in which meanings of inclusion are negotiated and signified through complex interactions. This work—ranging from Africa to the Americas, Europe and its former colonies—has come to life as a product of modernity and has come into focus through processes of racialization and particular types of labor which set in place the conditions under which various meanings of blackness and Africanness are being vigorously interrogated. Not only are deterritorialized notions of belonging central to the way people are remaking themselves (Clarke 2007; Thomas 2004) through varied signifying practices in time and space (Goldberg 2002; Jackson 2001, 2005), but competing conceptions of racial membership are cross-cutting ways of making sense of group belonging. This includes the way that people have understood citizenship in terms of the nation-state.

Drawing from works like this and others in the field that have supplied models of cultural production supported by transnational analyses, I apply this model of deterritorialized identity formation to the larger and specific study of racializing processes of Black subjects whose claims of indigeneity have been ignored. Thus, this allows me to substantiate the migrant component of this theory of indigenous cultural production. I utilize the established deterritorial approaches
to the transnational study of Black identity in the Americas combined with the histories of territorial dispossession to re-route and re-root analyses (Gilroy 1993) and to revisit what Clarke describes as “deterritorialized notions of belonging” that foreground the Hebrew self-making and collective re-making processes. Although significant work has been conducted in diasporic spaces, on diasporic communities, and about diasporic subjectivity, there is less work on the set of practices that determine group belonging among communities whose experiences and existence is mediated by and through a perpetual dis- (possession, location, connection). Although there are many groups in the United States who would be understood as indigenous through traditional definitions, their migrations (involuntary and voluntary) have not precluded them from retaining indigenous identity. Nevertheless, migrant indigeneity is a frame for racialized Black communities whose migrations combined with territorial disenfranchisement make their claims to a formation of indigenous identity seem suspect to audiences. The Black Atlantic has been deterritorialized and there has yet to be a discussion of what is uniquely and authentic indigenous as produced separate from the processes of racialization. Such racialization has been rendered invisible from the structure of race that occludes our knowledge of culture.

As told by scholar Saidiya Hartman (2006) in Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route there are multiple dimensions of loss produced by the transatlantic slave trade. Hartman details the loss of identity, of connection, sense of self, and community. Moreover, in a contemporary context,
anthropologist Keisha Khan Perry (2016) has identified examples across the Americas that index what she calls Black dispossession, “a loss of land/territorial rights, housing evictions, gentrification [which] represents a form of anti-[B]lack violence devastating [B]lack communities throughout the Americas.” To her definition, I add the historic violence perpetuated against Black communities that has further ingrained dispossession that reaches epistemic and psychic levels. More clearly, the structure and the formation of the Americas as a transnational project has led to formation of Blackness that is not tethered to a place. While the gift of geographic non-specificity has lent itself to the project of transnational racial solidarity, it has also left many with the socio-cultural, psychic, and ontological dispossession created by having a group of people who are effectively the perpetual products of migration reclaimed by diaspora (in this case the African Diaspora). My work attends to the nature of territorial dispossession through the tracing of the Hebrew migrations and attempts to claim a home that demonstrates the contradictions of this proposal of migrant indigeneity vis-à-vis colonized approaches to anthropology. I argue that the defining feature of migrant indigeneity is the fact that there are communities that have historically had compromised relationships of belonging mitigated by land, like the Hebrews that restructure how we understand indigeneity among these communities. Moreover, engaging with Jodi Byrd’s (2011) work *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, I think about how Byrd pushes the boundaries on indigenous and postcolonial studies through the interactions between the
colonized and previously colonized, mitigated through geography and the production of anxiety. Furthermore, Byrd’s model to repurpose a critical indigenous studies is specifically help for a deployment of migrant indigeneity as it “centers itself within indigenous epistemologies and the specificities of the communities and cultures from which it emerges and then looks outward” (Byrd 2011, xxix).

“Given this distinction, we should resist equating New World Blacks or [B]lackness with a diasporic condition. Black subjects are, of course, not simply members of a diaspora but native citizens of particular nations, regions, places and communities, who belong in place and make claims to place. They have been positioned as out of place subjects by histories of displacement and ongoing processes of racialization and marginalization” (Anderson 2009, 17). It is these histories of displacement and ongoing processes of racialization and marginalization that seek to frame the life and identity of the Hebrew community. Through an engagement of ethnographic data with the community, I work to detail how the histories that position them as out of place cannot overdetermine their claims to indigenous identity that they work to produce through the body. Racialization as Black is a formative and formidable structure that imposes identity through its interaction with the nation-state, which the Hebrews argue cannot supersede their claims, as I will show in subsequent chapters. Furthermore, because displacement is a factor that defines the Hebrews’ experience, I work to think with it as opposed to using it to further
marginalize and exclude racialized Blacks from constructions of identity that match their beliefs. Due to the fact that communities globally are looking to make sense of home, belonging, and identity, amidst migration and living in diaspora, the Hebrews are not alone in their attempts to utilize spirituality to claim indigeneity.

Drawing on ethnographic work with Candomblé and Garifuna religious practitioners, Johnson argues that place is never made except through language and the imagination, creative forces summoned now more than ever from those religions always in motion, yet always looking back. When understood as an imagined community, as a processual term, and as an ideal type never fully manifested in history, the indigenous can yet prove an important category for the comparative study of religion, both to understand those “on the land” as well as those for whom the homeland is an idea and an image. (Johnson 2002, 327)

Migrant indigeneity de-territorializes place-specific connections to indigeneity that ground most conceptualizations of the term. I however make use of flexible definitions of indigeneity to rescale the parameters in order make visible an underexplored dimension of indigeneity. Given the histories of dispossession of Blacks from land in the Americas, and specifically in the United States, understanding and theorizing the relationship to land is not the central feature of this form of indigeneity. What I am arguing here is that migrant indigeneity is a form of indigeneity that seeks to give structure to the experiences of the racialized Black migrant who house their indigeneity in the substance of
the only safe and accessible place to which they were given access under the conditions of their existence in the United States, their being, their culture, their identity. The difficulties of grounding a claim to indigeneity without specific connections to land are obvious but critical to be able to see and witness the cultural production of indigeneity and how it generates a deep understanding of the core arguments for forms of indigeneity that emerge in the global light.

**Conclusion**

Migrant indigeneity is a construct drawn ethnographically from explorations of Hebrew health practices that utilize spirituality as core to ground culture and identity. Research with the Hebrews demonstrates that through the advancement of migrant indigeneity as a concept, it challenges traditional ways of addressing racial disparities in rates in NCDs by focusing on culture and identity. This identity is foundationally rooted in indigeneity that is counter to many traditional definitions of indigeneity.

Migrant indigeneity is a proposition for creation of theoretical framework to ground a specific iteration of identity that seeks to decolonize indigeneity by repealing the centrality of European temporal and spatial markers in defining it, as a way of recalibrating how we understand, identify, and interpret indigeneity on more stable frameworks, which are not (or better, less) vulnerable to the shifting social, political, and economic landscapes of identity as registered through the nation-state. While some communities, particularly those who have
initiated and participated in European settler colonialism, might attempt to articulate their claims under the theoretical frame of migrant indigeneity, this is not the appropriate space for those formations of identity. I argue that what has been produced largely by these communities is a form of “immigrant nativity” that seeks to instantiate and embed a historical dimension to the identities of those who have created semi-permanent residence and have asserted a violent form of dominant identity in different spaces. Such spaces temporally trace and spatially mirror the connected projects of imperialism, coloniality, and white supremacy. By considering how groups produce immigrant nativity we can gain clarity and strengthen the theoretical thrust of migrant indigeneity as an analytical framework for re-situating the claims of racialized Black subjects in the Americas.

Central to migrant indigeneity are the histories of territorial dispossession that leaves the communities, like those who are at the heart of this research, abandoned and adrift in the metaphorical, theoretical, and analytical ocean. To avoid forcing these communities ashore, I seek to wade in the waters of what Sylvia Wynter (n.d.) has referred to as the Black metamorphosis, as a quest to narrate the humanity of “new natives in a new world.” Similarly, utilizing M. Jacqui Alexander’s mandate to gird up transnational frameworks that are grounded in the questions of colonialism and racial formation and following her lead and the Hebrews’ proclamation through the work of the sacred, I utilize the spiritual to lead us there. Therefore, through a deep consideration of the spiritual
lives, subjectivities (and even the religious inter-subjectivities), and praxes, I make an argument to reconsider how we imagine what is possible for indigenous identity.
“They called me a Kushi” It was statement that Liorah, a light golden straw colored woman in her twenties made during a visit to her house. She was the youngest child of four, with three older brothers and who was generally shy, reserved, and silent. I was unfamiliar with the term and waited for more context as the conversation progressed before asking for clarification and their interpretation of the word, the intention behind it, and how she felt when it was deployed. I was surprised that Liorah inserted this as a part of the conversation but grateful that it was occurring in a place where I felt feel to engage openly, critically, and honestly.

Liorah, her family, and their network of friends provided me an outlet and a haven for rest, retreat, and a space to ask direct and honest questions a short distance from the Kfar Beit Shalom (the geographic boundaries of the Village of Peace). Although they were active members in the community responsible for a majority of the community’s food production and distribution, community population growth meant that there was not enough space for all members to live on the kfar. Nevertheless, their home and community provided a space for me to get perspective on what I was observing and learning through interviews. In my signature form, I was longing to ask honest, deep, and probing questions that I had been dying to ask, which to an anthropological audience would sound like,
how do you confront/address/deal with the intersection of race in the formation of your identity? While in community, I said, now, I’ve been here long enough to see enough to know preliminarily that there’s something here in relationship to race but tell me, how do you understand the relationship between Black and Hebrew? I continued with my monologue for a while detailing the type of surveillance that I encountered every time I arrived in Israel/Palestine and how I was understanding the world that I experiencing in Dimona which was being filtered through my understandings of race, but, I wanted to hear how they were making sense of it.

Much like discussed in reference to my question about if this generation’s relationship to being Black and its connections to United States in the previous chapter, we broke the ice with responses about them understanding themselves as Hebrews and have a tenuous relationship to the United States. Liorah, her siblings and parents, and few friends gathered have enough socio-economic privilege in the community to have traveled to the United States and the Caribbean where members of their family lived and were aware of the narratives that accompanied how they were perceived in Dimona. For example, these young people through their engagement with social media, the internet, and friends and family understood race, racial hierarchy, and Blackness from the context that it was generated for the elders of the community. In my presence they made reference to each other as Black, detailed their perception of color difference, and even difference between those understood as Black from different countries and
continents. Nevertheless, they worked to align their formal perception of identity with the community’s dominant narrative. The fact that they maintained some consistency with the story of being Hebrews while a number of racial narratives were a part of the milieu that constructed their identity was a core aspect of how the community more broadly worked to detail identity.

It wasn’t until Liorah’s announcement that earlier in the week she had been accosted on the street by some who called her a kushi that the conversation turned. When I asked for clarification, I was told that many translate kushi to what would be in the U.S., the n-word, and was being leveraged in the current context to address Blackness and foreignness. Kushi had more regional context that sought to bring to the surface a longer history of ancient Kush, the region that is currently lands identified as Sudan and South Sudan, that referenced of Sudanese enslavement in the Middle East and how this history sought to racialize what are perceived as darker skinned people. Other local Israeli understandings perceive kushi to refer to Ethiopians, specifically the Falasha Jews as another group of dark-skinned or African people. Although there are various interpretations of the word, Liorah shared her pain of the word being used again her as she walked the streets of the town where she was born and grew up. As I prodded her more and interrogated the relationship between how she and her family made sense of the racism that constructed their bodies and beings in relationship to localized and more global notions of race; they were persistent in an understanding of themselves as Hebrews. Similarly, they discussed the
challenges and complexity of being raced while operating from an indigenous identity that was not always clear to outsiders. As these young people who were in their early twenties and their parents who were in the forties discussed Liorah’s experience, we sorted through the perils of racism and racialization even in the desert that was created to be a space of peace for this community.

Liorah’s parents, Eleazar and Haviva were both children when they came to Dimona. Eleazar was only five years old where as Haviva was ten years old and had different sets of consciousness about the world and especially understandings of race. While they and their adult children have visited the United States and the Caribbean where they have extended family, they have spent most of their lives in Dimona. From birth, Liorah and her brothers only knew themselves as Hebrews, interacted with Hebrews in school, through community activities, and made their world out of the larger Hebrew universe in Dimona. After completing secondary education, Liorah’s choice to comply with the Hebrew community’s recent community decision to have their children complete “obligatory” military service, her world expanded beyond these confines. And, although her presence in the military had been preceded by almost a decade of Hebrews who had come before her and almost fifty years of Hebrews’ (returned presence) in region since the establishment of the modern nation state of Israel, race still came up in everyday interactions. For Liorah’s parents, they expressed that “there was no real guide” on parenting as a generation of children who were raised in mostly complete isolation from the outside world as they
described that televisions and radios were prohibited before the inception of the internet. Haviva who was born in Florida detailed that she was old enough to have a burgeoning sense of self by the time she arrived in Dimona (after a short period of transition on the island in Chicago) but also came of age during the greatest period of transition in the community. Therefore, she chronicled during the conversation, that her socialization around her ethnic identity was one aspect that she claims “wasn’t as much as a priority as everyday survival.” For Eleazar, who was born in Chicago, he built his world in Dimona as a Hebrew who lost a parent to his father’s decision to move to Dimona and his mother’s choice not to accompany the father and their son. As a young child, he was able to live through the separation of his parents and crafted an identity from how Hebrews defined themselves over the years to the current de-prioritization of race and an emphasis on being indigenous as Hebrews. Everything from his entrepreneurial identity to the way he described himself to outsiders, like me, was built around “all he has in his identity as a Hebrew.” Together Haviva and Eleazar gave their children what they had, a life and identities as Hebrews that built on their inherited understandings of race drawn from their parents’ understandings of race and the community’s rapidly shifting approaches to race and identity. Nevertheless, their understandings of race did not affect how the outside world perceived and responded to their presence which sought to racialize them at every step.

Our discussions of what is means to be framed as a kushi in a land where they argue their claim for indigeneity was a charged discussion about how
conflicting notions of identity for them are confounded by questions of race, nation, and while they would not perceive it this way, religion. To be named as a kushi was as Liorah described “to be attacked for just being who you are.” And while this specific anti-Black violence was not uncommon in the country, between the responses that Liorah, her brothers, and parents narrated on this night, it ran deep for a Hebrew family like Liorah’s who were invested and sacrificed a great deal to live their lives completely as Hebrews without real knowledge of the historicity of the xenophobia that was being unleashed on them in their everyday actions. Similarly, as child who was born in Dimona to a Hebrew family, the implication of being an other and/or outsider that was entangled in the word kushi sought to undermine her family’s history in Dimona where Liorah’s life was, where her family and friends were, and did not acknowledge their work to structure their lives around their identity as Hebrews.

Kushi, as a verbal representation of denigration of perceived foreign Blackness and general assault on the humanity of the person whom it is directed would serve as an entrée for understanding identity among the community. During the two-year period of transnational ethnographic research with this community, I was able to analyze the embodiment of their theological beliefs, which inform their collective identity formation process. Here, I respond to a central question that the community raises through this ethnographic encounter which is, how do you analyze the theology and the spiritual practices of the Hebrews, a community who are racialized as Black and argue for an
indigenous identity? The ethnographic data, combined with a deep historical and contextualized interpretation of the Hebrew community’s claims, led me to understand the Hebrews as embodying an indigenous theology that connects their theological beliefs to their identity, as well as to their community health practices.

My quest to understand the relationship between identity and health allowed me to recognize that the Hebrews on a journey, one that I refer to as the Hebrew conscientization and strategic self-making process, which attends to the fissures and ruptures in the relationship between God and the Hebrews for their disobedience. Through their spiritual practice, or “finding their way back to God,” the Hebrews (re)discover their purpose, their culture, and their identity. I claim that this process, of Hebrew conscientization and self-making, is a way of engaging their diasporic past, while they claiming their indigenous future. This indigenous future relies on adherence to indigenous spiritual practices as the epistemological ground by which to level their claims for an indigenous identity. The process of creating this indigenous identity relies on theology to contextualize the entire Hebrew world for community members and outsiders seeking to understand their practices. For Hebrews, convincing others of their theological claims as a proxy for their spiritual practice and identity is the goal for creating an entire universe of “evidence-based” practices, principles, and structures that are central their way of life. Specifically, I seek to analyze the

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3 The Hebrew Israelites believe that their disobedience to God is what led to their exile into Egypt, then into the rest of Africa, and finally into the Transatlantic Slavery Trade.
emergent “theor(ies) of culture and self-grounded in embodiment” by exploring the “theme of inseparability of bodily experience and cultural meaning” (Csordas 1994, 13, 17), which for the Hebrews has been grounded in what Weisenfeld (2017) names as “religio-racial identity.” Most importantly, in order to access embodied Hebrew theology, it is critical to analyze and examine the health policies (or indigenous health practices) as one of the community’s most central and prominent forms of demarcating indigenous identity undergirded by their interpretation of an ancient form of Hebrew spiritual practice.

The Hebrews have established community, residences, and a number of institutions in Israel/Palestine that have been the basis of their appeals to identity, belonging, cultural difference, and even citizenship; however, my ethnographic data has led to me to an analytical and theoretical claim that positions their indigeneity as fundamentally deterritorialized and built on their successive migrations. The Hebrews who have social, economic, and political violence enacted upon them in the Americas, Europe, and in Israel/Palestine, and on the African continent have worked diligently to re-structure their identity and presence across a number of places, centrally in the modern nation-states of Israel/Palestine. Nevertheless, after almost a half a century, the efforts to re-circulate their claims to indigeneity based on the Israeli nation-state’s legitimation of these claims have been largely unsuccessful in attracting the desired outcomes, such as citizenship, validated indigenous identity, and spiritual and cultural belonging. This is illustrated in Liorah’s experiences. Due to the fact
that the Hebrews are largely without citizenship in Israel/Palestine, and mostly are United States citizens, and the majority of the Hebrew’s history and leadership is drawn from the United States, I center an analysis of their proposals for indigeneity in the Americanist literature. Therefore, I argue that given the established incompatibility of Blackness and indigeneity which is grounded in the foundational racial hierarchies of the Americas, combined with the co-constitutive nature of race, religion, and nation (Goldschmidt and McAlister 2004) across each of the spaces where I conducted research with the Hebrew Israelites, there has not been an appropriate framework for understanding the Hebrew Israelites claims to indigeneity. While built upon their theological beliefs and entrenched in the spiritual worldviews of the community, Hebrew indigeneity is best understood through the analytical and theoretical framework I have coined, “migrant indigeneity.” I introduce this framework to interpret and engage with the claims to identity formation that are and have been produced by Hebrews and similar communities for a century and to situate Liorah’s cultural dissonance between understanding herself as an indigenous Hebrews but yet perceived as a ‘Kushi.’

For many interested in the theological worldview of the Hebrew Israelites, New Religious Movements (NRM) have primarily been a frame for understanding the community. While some literature has framed the Hebrew Israelites as combining “traditional African American identification with biblical Israel and Pan-African philosophy—to the modern state of Israel,” there has been
less work done to understand the Hebrew Israelite claims outside of normative and constricting identity frames (Michaeli 2000:83). Moreover, Hebrew Israelites challenge our acceptance of what Weisenfeld (2017) outlines in her work about the co-constitutive nature of race and religion for all communities and forces us to take serious her study’s guiding ethic of “the agency of [B]lack people as religious subjects in constructing, revising, or rejecting racial categories and thereby producing frameworks for religio-racial identity” (7). I utilize this rubric, with a correction based on Weisenfeld’s research, that the agency of people who are racialized as Black who reject racial categories as a primary category of identity and argue for indigeneity to interpret the Hebrew Israelites in my ethnographic work. Moreover, I build on the construction of the spiritual as epistemological (Alexander 2005) in order to bolster the epistemic foundations of migrant indigeneity.

My theoretical intervention, migrant indigeneity, draws on the development of this Hebrew community’s experiences of migration and the impact of successive migrations on the emergence of a set of indigenous spiritual practices. Specifically, I propose this deterritorialized form of indigeneity that builds on the experiences of being racialized as Black in Chicago (primarily, although in other places in the U.S. and in the Caribbean) as a framework for its elaboration of a theological grounded identity. Engaging with the historical literature, I seek to demonstrate how the Great Migration is one of many integral migrations to explore in theorizing and analyzing this transnational Hebrew
community. The Great Migration framed Liorah’s grandparents’ experience which was shared with me by her father, Eleazar and was the path of migration that her mother took to eventually get to Dimona. The scholarship that works to situate the Great Migration as a core formation in Black transnational identity making and, specifically, Black transnational religious life, shows that “during and after the Great Migration, African American religious persons and institutions as a whole—whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim—increasingly expressed their identity in transnational terms. This transnational sense of blackness constitutes an important and sometimes ignored element of African American identity—namely, the creation of black ethnicity... As several authors point out, the absolute emphasis on the “racial” identity of [B]lacks in some scholarship has robbed African Americans of their diverse and vibrant ethnic identities” (Curtis IV and Sigler 2009, 9).

Through works like these, I mine data from within religious history to combine with the ethnographic material to further my argument about migrant indigeneity, as a way to understand the cultural production of identity arising from this community, given this history of underexplored or unexplored identities of spiritual and religious communities whose identities were overly-racialized to the point that their cultural identity was either ignored, neglected, or perceived as irrelevant. In this chapter, I work to demonstrate how the Hebrew Israelites address this history of being racialized as a primary configuration of identity and then explicitly produce details that demonstrate how they
“spiritually synchronize” into Hebrew as a primary identification for self and community which forces Liorah to speak up in the opening vignette about being identified as a kushi.

In this chapter, I present an argument for how Hebrews, racialized as Black, have been autonomous agents in rejecting American racial frameworks to define self and community. I build on the literature to propose indigenous identity as a structure that challenges the transnational anti-Black configurations of race, religion, and nation across spaces where Hebrews reside. Therefore, because of the categories that have historically constructed indigenous and Black as separate, mutually exclusive categories in the United States, there has not been understanding of the religious and spiritual traditions of those whose bodies are racialized as Black but yet argue for an indigenous identity. Given the extensive history of religious communities who are racialized as Black, particularly those who have understood their identity beyond the United States configurations of racial categories and utilized their theological beliefs and spiritual identity as a guide for defining individual and collective identity, I analyze and theorize the Hebrew Israelites as one in a line of indigenous spiritual communities.

I demonstrate how the Hebrew Israelites’ construction of an indigenous identity is grounded in their theology and spiritual practice. Focusing on their theological beliefs, I contextualize this community’s efforts of articulating an indigenous theology as connected to the historic identification efforts of Hebrews and other religious communities who have resisted the United States’ racial logics
to define the self. Moreover, I examine this community’s specific employment of theology as a mechanism that distinguishes their foodways or consumption patterns and rescripts their relationship to the body, health, and particularly NCD disease risk in the populations from which the Hebrew Israelites are derived. Engaging with literature on embodiment, which focuses on the ways in which culture structures the body, I explore the body as a significant and meaningful hermeneutic which serves as the ultimate illustration of Hebrew theology. To do so, I examine the Hebrews’ embodiment of theology as expressed through the rhetorical formation of the indigenous Hebrew body. In this chapter, I examine how the undergirding principles of Hebrew theology structure the embodiment of Hebrew culture as evidenced through the implementation of their transnational indigenous health practices.

**Winds of Transformation: Chicago as Home to Theological Identity Formation**

The Hebrews living in Dimona often say, “a plane ride didn’t cure or change everything.” This reflects the intense process Hebrews undergo to embody their identity while prefacing work that will come later to ground the claims for indigenous communities with a long history of migration. I will focus on where the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem began their most recent part of their community’s journey, in Chicago, to examine the socio-cultural processes structuring the transformation of racialized Black bodies, through the
implementation and adherence to the community’s theological beliefs by scaffolding the community with similar religious communities. As argued in the introduction to the dissertation, I make a case for the particular formation of racialized Blackness in Chicago. In this section, I seek to explore the community’s embodied pilgrimage that animates the work that is primary concern for the community, how one transforms from racialized Black subject to Hebrew, and the re-commitment to Hebrew spiritual practices that illustrate the overarching identity claims of the community to indigeneity. I utilize this section to ground the formulate of indigenous identity that is counter to being called kushi and other local iterations of the term.

The Hebrews are connected to other spiritual groups in Chicago that work to either undo or restructure the hierarchy of identity politics for Black communities living in the United States from a race-centered way of seeing the community to a more theologically-focused identity that, nevertheless, often utilizes the shared experiential knowledge of race in the United States to create collectives and solidarity among populations. For example, the Moorish Scientists, who relocated their headquarters in Chicago, espouse a theological belief in the Moorish heritage of all persons who, in the contemporary context, would be racialized as Black in the United States. Weisenfeld (2017) writes that the Moorish Scientists “declared forcefully in public that their correct group name was not Negro, Colored, or Ethiopian, but Moorish American and insisted on its use” (104). It is through this belief that the community of believers aligned
with the Moorish Science Temple of America worked to restructure their identity around a claim of ancestry deriving from ancient Moabites who resided in Northwest Africa and who practiced Islam. This is of great importance for the Moorish Scientist project working to restructure the identity based claims of some of those racialized as Black in who believe and assert their true identity as Moors. It is as Nance (2002, 626) writes, “the members of the Moorish Science Temple did just this in creating Moorish-American identity and redefining American [B]lackness” Through the privileging of theological belief as the supreme and ultimate source of determining cultural identity and decentering the efforts of the U.S. nation-state to racialize these communities into a broad reaching form of Blackness, the Moorish Scientists’ pursuits are aligned with that of the Hebrew Israelites. I argue that the context and legacy of communities that are racialized as Black, like these two groups, work collectively to 1) indigenize their cultural identity through their spiritual practice grounded in ethno-theological beliefs; 2) renegotiate the terms and the primary heuristic of United States Blackness (i.e. race) as the sole framing for cultural identity; and 3) re-narrate enslavement as the epistemological starting point for understanding the cultural history and cultural practices of communities racialized as Black in the Americas.

Mostly centrally, the Hebrew Israelites are connected to the legacy of Black Jewish and other Hebrew communities that work to insert and assert themselves within narratives that destabilize claims made by Black persons as implausible.
Most prominent in the United States in the Black Jewish community is Wentworth Arthur Matthew who founded Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation of the Living God Pillar & Ground of Truth, Inc. in Harlem in the late 1910s. Matthew’s congregation and his spirituality were shaped by the Black Nationalism of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Similarly, the belief that communities of Blacks in the Americas were the original descendants of the ancient Hebrew Israelite tribes that shaped the community and continue to be a hallmark among Black Jewish, Black Hebrew, and Hebrew Israelite communities globally (Jackson, 2005). In a space like New York City, the Commandment Keepers faced a great deal of opposition, hostility, and racialized religious violence, that even appears in the anthropological literature which deems Hebrews as only imitating Jews or cite the groups as con-artists, inauthentic, or participating in a “racist movement” (Brotz 1965; Landes 1967; Michaeli 2000). Dorman (2007), however, reads the Hebrews differently with attention to the nuances and complexity of their efforts. He writes, “other observers have suggested that Black Israelites either imitated Jews or were descended from Jews in Africa or the Americas. However, with closer analysis of the existing evidence as well as the acquisition of a small collection of vital Black Israelite records by the Schomburg Center of the New York Public Library, we can see that Black Israelites did not simply imitate Jews, but rather were bricoleurs who constructed a polycultural religion that creatively reworked threads from religious faiths, secret societies, and magical grimoires” (Dorman
2007, 63). Dorman demonstrates that historically Hebrew communities have been severely misunderstood and under-theorized. And as Liorah’s experience demonstrates, this trajectory continues in the present. My work builds on Dorman’s argument by breaking out from polarizing and constricting views that frame Hebrew practice as stemming from or imitating African or American Jews and focuses instead on an interrogation of the theo-cultural production of the Hebrew community as indigenous.

Utilizing the cultural importance of Chicago as an analytical frame, the Hebrews are among scores of community members who utilize religious practice informed by theological belief to re-negotiate their relationship to terms of engagement and the structures that inform their cultural identity. Moreover, I draw from the larger New Negro Movement, which sought to encapsulate both radical and bourgeois perspectives on how to reclaim, rebrand, and renegotiate identity beginning in the late nineteenth century through the early quarters of the twentieth century (Gates 1988) to make this argument. Similarly, the larger anthropological questions of the Negro’s culture, past, and identity were a part of the thrust of the New Negro Movement. Likewise, religious communities, such as the Hebrews and Moorish Scientists (Chatelain 2015) responded by providing an identity that was not aligned with the racial logics of the state, thereby presenting argument for indigeneity. Moreover, scholarship presents the Chicago as the cultural capital of the United States, displacing former arguments that advocate for Harlem’s occupation of this position and, specifically, the role of the Great
Migration in framing new formulations of identity (Baldwin 2007). This argument is contextualized by the specific, geographic, ethnic and racial boundaries of Chicago Blackness, often referred to in the literature as the Black Belt, which has historically and continues to in the contemporary moment outline residential and spatial logics of race and Blackness in the city. Therefore, I argue for a theoretical framing of Chicago Blackness as a nation of geographically racialized islands (Khabeer 2016). Subsequently, in the current moment, I utilize this frame with this Hebrew community, to focus on an examination of this process by looking at the relationship between the body and health with an emphasis on consumption.

My theorization builds on years of study, beginning with my informal ethnographic research with these religious communities that started when I was young growing up amidst families who utilized religious practice, religious rituals, and often spirituality to re-invent, re-determine, and transform themselves and their cultural identity. These strategies of defining who they are have been a principal strategy utilized among the Hebrew Israelites. They have, for decades, argued that they retained the “power to define,” especially regarding their identity (Ben Israel 1990). This supports their strategies for defining who they are, which also co-articulates with other prominent religious communities in Chicago, such as the Nation of Islam (NOI). When I was young I did not understand these practices. Attending school among those named to reflect the forms of “consciousness” of their parents, I was educated among of those who
adhered to and attended services at Mosque Maryam where the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan presided, those whose family members donned the red fezzes of the Moorish Scientists, the pan-Africanists who practiced a form of religious Afrocentrism, and even those who engaged in what they believed was a radical, progressive, and even liberatory form of Christianity. This colorful world of fabrics, natural products, alternative forms of dietary consumptions, celebration of holidays and festivals not on the standard United States’ calendar was a beginner’s course in the long-standing history I inherited as a resident of the “island” resident. Furthermore, as a high school student, I took a college-level anthropology course that allow me to begin preliminary analyses of these communities.

It was not until the 1990s that the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem came onto my radar, those painful days of being dragged across the city in the car with my mother who was a vegetarian. Although strange enough my parents did not force certain practices, like this one, on my sister and I because we, without question, were not vegetarians as children. Nevertheless, we were aware of a suitable vegetarian diet consisted of, since our mother (and sometimes my father) made two separate meals: her meal and the rest of the family’s meat-based diet. This did not stop my mother from taking us into the world of Southside based hub of Alvinia Fulton’s (most often associated and affiliated with Dick Gregory and his health practices) Health Food Store where we would purchase colon cleanses, herbs, vitamins, or be forced to stay for seminars or a ride to the West
side (one of the adjacent islands) at a small health food store where we would buy herbs like goldenseal (which we had to drink straight, no chaser) and lots of flax seed to steep for tea. But there were also treats, like the most delicious vegan lemon ice box pie and the knowledge we had as my parents narrated the interesting intersection of clientele, like local neighborhood pharmaceutical sales representatives who would purchase herbs to clear their systems and their clients of any residue if needed for drug testing.

As a child, we crossed city in another direction to eat at the Salaam, the Nation of Islam owned restaurant, which was meant to be a beacon for those on the Southside for lavish and luxurious dining at a Black owned restaurant. This place stood out amidst weather-worn buildings: it was immaculate, with its architectural façade that boasted the towering Muslim star and crescent offering salaam (or peace) to its economically-marginalized neighborhood. The restaurants’ iteration of “peace” respected halaal customs by not serving pork and was known for their use of healthy or healthier products like their whole wheat in their pastries, fresh produce, fish instead of red meat, meals suitable for vegetarians, and, of course, the infamous Nation bean pies. These bean pies are said to be a culinary adaptation made in light of Elijah Muhammad’s *How to Eat to Live: Volume I &II* (1967) which prohibited the consumption of certain foods, specifically sweet potatoes which were believed to be for hogs. It is this form of cultural re-imagining and transformation beyond the foodways of the enslaved that was critical to the Nation of Islam’s influence on the dietary patterns of many
Black Americans especially those in Chicago. While my mother relaxed her approach and did not enforce us to take up her friend’s NOI one meal a day method, it was on our radar growing up in Chicago. Similarly, the iconography of the Nation of Islam “brother” who was wearing a suit and a bow tie selling bean pies (and the Final Call, the Nation of Islam’s periodical) on the street remains a historic yet undervalued public health intervention of the Black religious community. I often refer to the promotion of increased fiber intake of the Nation of Islam through the repeated stimuli and wide availability of bean pies, which signaled to me that a story that I wanted to investigate that would bring the intersection of public health, anthropology, and religion together as it produced on cultural constructions of identity.

Although the Salaam Restaurant was certainly more demur in its theologically informed imposition on the dietary patterns of its diners, our visits to Soul Vegetarian East (now known as the Original Soul Vegetarian Restaurant) made me always want to stay in the car. As a child I never encountered a Hebrew in my scholastic context and thus was unfamiliar with the theology that informed the practice of this restaurant. In my youth I could not see how or why my mother would choose this place when we could smell Lem’s (Famous) Barbecue, which was only a block away, Leon’s (also a barbecue place popularized in one of Kanye West’s early music videos) was about a mile away, and given that we were on the main island (the Southside), there was a Harold’s Chicken in close radius. I was annoyed, frustrated, and confused by my mother. I did not understand why she
would, as my sister would say, “pay so much for some vegetables when she could get some of that good ol’ meat for cheap.” Like most tweens and adolescents, I did not understand my parents and I especially did not understand this form of my mother’s derangement. I did not want to be seen near a restaurant that served Black Nationalist delights like the Garvey burger or things like “Hebrew bakes.” This restaurant served things like tofu, which was no friend to me and extra-large salads with carrots, cucumbers, broccoli, red cabbage served with Prince dressing (a vegan creamy dressing), with large price tags. For me, the tipping point was the adjoining juice bar section of the restaurant. This was the space where things went from bad to worse. It was here where juiced wheatgrass could be ordered, one could purchase one’s home delivery of fruits and vegetables (which my mother, of course, signed us up for), and where people bought food that was not cooked. What was even more annoying about this place were the loud-talking people. Everyone wanted to discuss something, mostly the food, what they were or were not doing, eating, or drinking and something related to race, religion, or politics often in Chicago. I could not understand who all of these insane people were walking in and out of this restaurant and were actually paying for the food (cooked and uncooked) and the slow service. I wanted no parts of this whatsoever. And I kept to my promise until an ice-cold snowy day that I turned up at the Original Soul Vegetarian Restaurant a few months before I would begin my doctoral program to do some of my own personal preliminary investigations.
Things had changed from the 1990s to the 2010s when I began my inquiry into the chronic disease prevention strategies of the African Hebrew Israelite community as a researcher. For one, the leader of the Chicago jurisdiction, Prince Amiel Ben Israel said to be responsible for the community’s relationships with a number of global partners and for Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown’s visit to Dimona, would end up splitting from the community for ideological and personal reasons and eventually would end up incarcerated for several years. So, as is typical of the Hebrew community, there was new leadership and new restaurant management. Conversely, there was a more sophisticated approach to engaging the community around health issues.

Over a decade and a half after my childhood visits, when I would speak to my mother on the phone she would tell me about the vegan cooking classes that she was attending at the restaurant. The community had taken advantage of the increase in veganism globally. In my research in Israel, I would learn that they would promote the idea that their influence was critical to a revolution in the dietary practices of many who were making the shift to veganism or experimenting with Meatless Mondays. Now that my dissertation was on the line, I listened attentively as she described to me her trek to Whole Foods for their products, which were sold in the prepackaged section. Much to my adolescent self’s dismay, I started eating the barbeque twists, kale salad, jerk tofu wraps, and carrot supreme with her as we discussed their endeavors, her perception of a change in quality, service, and portion size yet an increase in price, waiting time,
and plenty of complimentary attitude at the restaurant. What was really interesting for me was her work with one of colleagues at the religious institution she was a part of and his efforts leading a health intervention at the restaurant as a city public health official. Reginald Jones was a biomedically-trained medical doctor, who was a former member of the Nation of Islam, spent the first few weeks of the year leading sessions for dietary change and promoting vegetarianism as a way to prompt this diet-based change. This meant that he was the de-facto doctor-in-residence during January leading groups around the restaurant and teaching. This yearly seminars work served to support the community’s messages about how “your health is your wealth” or their spiritual practices like increased fiber and water intake, reduced sodium and sugar, avoidance of smoking, and the consumption of any drug, including alcohol. Their approach was at least moderately effective, which I witnessed during my fieldwork years with college students who shuttled over from the local Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) or vegetarian/vegan newbies who flocked to the restaurant for vegan soul food.

The Hebrews reveled in the amazement from others about seemingly mundane aspects of Hebrew life, like the fact that many young people in the community were lifelong vegans or their ability to prepare “healthy” vegan soul food, dairy-free ice cream, and desserts, which of course allowed them to tout the “strength of their spirituality.” As a researcher for several years with the Hebrews that began in Chicago, I observed how food was a critical marker of demarcating
cultural difference for Hebrews. I witnessed that when placed next to or rubbed against localized (perceived to be normative) constructions of U.S. Blackness, the Hebrews work to illustrate their cultural differences from Blacks in America. Their dietary patterns are a major site for determining identity, which I will discuss further in the following sections.

During fieldwork, I spent hours in the two main Hebrew restaurants in the U.S. South, where I heard messages like “you can pay for your health now or later” and other information that incorporated their beliefs into their menus or the information served with the food by the staff. While scholars (Hughes 1997; Whit 1999; Witt 2004) have examined soul food as a cultural production that is tied to identity formation, less attention has been given to what the Hebrews do in the employment of food to signal to ideological work particularly around identity and theology (Rouse and Hoskins 2004). Weisenfeld (2017), whose manuscript focuses on the religio-racial identities of the Hebrews, NOI, Moorish Scientists, and other communities, when writing about the Ethiopian Hebrews states that members interpreted their foodways as reflective of their “religio-racial” commitments, although the earliest scholarly examinations by Brotz and others “focused heavily on the differences between Ethiopian Hebrew dietary practices and those of Jews of European descent and generally evaluated the former as irregular and confused” (Brotz 1965, 137). Subsequently, it is the comparative anthropological accounts of Hebrew communities in relationship to European Jewish ones that have stymied analyses of the theoretical work of these
communities on their terms, which make the promotion and advancement of this particular form of indigeneity produced by Hebrews especially novel given the trajectories of analyses that have preceded this one.

In the observations of everyday interactions, I found that foodways and the restaurant space was one of the site and space to demarcate difference. At once Hebrews celebrated the influx of mostly racialized Black patrons as it provided the wait staff with an opportunity to do their version of community-based public health education much like Dr. Jones did with the community in Chicago. On the other hand, in doing so, the Hebrews utilized cultural “differences” in certain forms of what they describe as health literacy and culturally based dietary practices to reference the difference in identity formation through the transformation of the body, the self, and community through consumption and oftentimes through a description of health outcomes. The public space of the restaurant continues to be a major site where Hebrew theology is performed and embodied.

**If you can believe it, you can achieve it, in (Yah’s) name: Making Spirituality the Core of Every Action and Interaction**

When they left America in the late 1960s, the Hebrew Israelites framed their project in exclusively racial terms: black versus white, Jacob versus Esau, Israelites versus Edomites, chosen people versus imposters. Racial authenticity was their quintessential organizing principle for belonging. The logic of inclusion
was strictly genetic and patrilineal. Being an “Israelite” was presumptively and
undeniably predicated on being “black,” and there was an unapologetically
racist underpinning to their entire mission. After forty-five years in Israel and
continuous revelations from Ben Ammi about the true nature of their leadership
role on the planet, they had become clear in the early 2000s about the fact that
their former focus on race was also a kind of misplaced preoccupation. It was not
that they were anti-black. Indeed, their entire project placed the Garden of Eden
squarely in Africa and defined a large swath of Africa as peopled by descendants
of Jacob. Race was not completely irrelevant. It was just that race had formerly
been such an obsession, they claimed, that it did not allow them to accept their
more universalist goal, which they began to make more explicit almost half a
century after arriving in Israel
(Rouse, Jackson and Frederick 2016, 189).
Here I draw on Jackson’s account of the changing significance of race to
contextualize the embodiment and the intellectual distance from the process of
spiritual synchronism that reflects the community’s understanding of the impact
of the processes of racialization on the structure of their identity and the intent to
move from that identity to what they believe to be their true identity as Hebrews.
My initial engagement of the Liorah and her family in the opening vignette
illustrates the generational transformations and reifies the claims that I make
within the chapter about the shifts in Hebrew identity formation. Plainly worded,
kushi would no longer be an appropriate or effective insult for Hebrews who work
to understand themselves and their community beyond the primacy and exclusivity of race.

In the broad landscape of identity politics, I initially could not understand why a community as politically rousing as the Hebrews would say that there were Hebrews and everything else was secondary, tertiary, or lower than that to a framing of who they were. I was shocked by this representation as it had not been detailed explicitly ethnographically prior the beginning of my field research. In fact, during some of my initial interviews I was convinced that I was being lied to and that this was part of a scheme they were just telling me and they did not actually believe. Whether that is true or not, the community continues to promote themselves as Hebrews and utilize every opportunity they can to remind others, as well as themselves, of who they are. While I was and continue to be puzzled by this framing, the positioning of the Hebrews claims works to synchronize their anthropological, sociological, and economic aspects of life with the paramount role of spirituality to being Hebrew. The spiritual lineage of the Hebrews is the key to every other dimension of community life, particularly to the Hebrews’ most important claim: being the descendants of ancient Hebrews, thus giving them access to a special, yet significant, if not complex, formation of indigeneity. By branding themselves as Hebrews, the work of becoming and being indigenous is mitigated by the ways in which they know/learn/re-learn the self and represent the self to others. I argue that the performance of self is connected to overarching theological beliefs (or as Hebrews would refer to as Truth) that foundationally
grounds an indigenous identity that is central to a construction of identity. This performance is also central to other often more urgent and practical necessities, such as the obtainment of citizenship. Overall, my analysis of the Hebrews’ construction of identity highlights the dimensionality to my intervention of migrant indigeneity, which demonstrates the depths of how global processes of transnationalism and diaspora emerge in a contemporary anthropological analysis of this transnational community.

Charles Taylor’s (2003) *Modern Social Imaginaries* and Benedict Anderson’s (1983) *Imagined Communities* are particular salient for the imaginative and praxis-based suspension and subversion of a reality shift and identity formation that is the work of the Hebrew Israelites. The quotidian features of Hebrew practice seek to disrupt what Taylor defines as the “moral order,” which is “more than just a set of norms; it also contains what we might call an ‘ontic’ component, identifying features of the world that make the norms realizable” (10). These ontic permutations are what sustain the efforts to attach and align with narratives, which are part of a cosmological social imaginary but far from the secure fixtures, which stabilize the universals of religion that Asad’s (1993) critique of the structure and the starting point of anthropology of religion has serrated. Smith, is also helpful as he specifically focuses on Black Nationalism, a frame that has been used to categorize the Hebrews, writing, “the record of black religious nationalists will not show that their efforts to overcome the limitations of their American surroundings have had a ‘shattering’ effect on
that social order. It will show, however, that by breaking intellectually and structurally from aspects of America’s socially constructed reality, they have pushed further than many toward embodying the Christian imperative of social non-conformism” (Smith 534). Although establishing Hebrew identity through Christian imperative is not appropriate for Hebrews, Smith does help us think about critiques of the marginalization of the study of non-Christian religious and spiritual communities (Curtis IV & Sigler, 2009) have reinforced constructions of normativity in relationship to race-based identities, religious practices, and cultures. I demonstrate the Hebrew community’s deployment of indigenous identity to illustrate how the overt processes of racialization into Blackness often occlude the articulation of the cultural production of indigeneity. While many constructions of indigeneity are bounded by land, a premodern identity, and legibility to parties who dictate the validity of claims many of which are undermined by racialization, I advocate for another approach to indigeneity. Under this approach “identity becomes flexible and fluid, neither binary nor communal at the expense of the individual nor radically individualistic. Identity continually evolves and indicators are continuously uncovered. Fruitful self-identity is based upon a flexible humanization process extending beyond discussions of one’s [B]lackness..” (Pinn 2010, 47-48). It is the process of constructing a fruitful self-identity beyond the processes that racialize Blackness that I theorize in the following section.
At the outset of my formal doctoral research, my first few trips to the “spiritual headquarters” in Dimona were quite difficult for several reasons. One of the reasons I often struggled with the Hebrews was how to make sense a community of people who are read and perceived as Black American, and, as I argue in this dissertation, racialized as Black were arguing for an indigenous identity as Hebrews in the Southern Negev of Israel/Palestine. This is of course, before I met and developed a relationship with Liorah and her family. As I transitioned to the unbearable heat and dryness of the desert in the summer, the patterns of dress (long skirts and sleeves at all times for women), the food (veganism, raw food days, bean day, no salt day, etc.), the language (the Hebrew interspersed Black English), and especially ways of knowing (structure, hierarchy, and the supremacy of the leadership), I could not help but to close my eyes and listen to what were the sounds I could have heard as a young woman in Chicago, in Philadelphia where I was a doctoral student, or any other major U.S. city. This begged the question: if I noticed the seeming similarities between this community of people and those who do not identify as Hebrews and remain in the United States, what, then, is the significance of being identified as Hebrews? And what were the consequences and effects of ‘mistaken identity’ for Hebrews like Liorah when walking down the street in Dimona. When this Blackness was multiplied by a dominance of United States citizenship, cultural logics, accents,
and modalities of being which has roots in United States Blackness, squared by landlessness, social, economic, and citizenship precarity in their current place of residence, and then powered by geographic isolation, a theocratic government that does accept their beliefs as a state-sponsored acceptable way to be, and environmentally unsound living conditions, I wondered how and why would this community would choose to utilize Hebrew as their primary identifier to represent themselves in the world? I was exceptionally puzzled when, according to their own accounts, it has often been the very identity that they reject as a community which has saved them in Israel/Palestine: their United States citizenship. This is of critical concern, as several Hebrews have suffered political economic violence and countless families have been separated due to the fact that some Hebrews have renounced their U.S. citizenship, claimed a stateless identity, and made political attempts to only identify with their Hebrew identity. Nevertheless, the hallmark of their presence in Dimona and foundational to their efforts to demonstrate their “right” to live and maintain a community in Israel/Palestine is their indigenous identity formation project, which is built on this embodiment of their theology: living in what the community believes is their ancestral homeland. Building a life as Haviva and Eleazar did for their children like Liorah, in the hopes that she would do the same. Although the Hebrews believe Israel to be their homeland, their particular history of territorial dispossession for generations, state-generated and enforced constructions of identity, and significant histories of migration, I propose the intervention of
migrant indigeneity to more fully encapsulates their claim to indigeneity which do not rely on traditional notions of historic residence, connection to land or other more deeply colonial definitions.

The rights literature within the discourse on the formation of indigenous identity has presented the terms under which indigenous communities are able make claims to an indigenous way of life. The conditions are variable depending on local, nation-state, regional, transnational, or global structures that dictate the terms that determine who and what is indigenous. Moreover, certain scholars have written that the advice given to different indigenous communities has been conflicting in nature. Some of indigenous literature marks communities by their separateness and their ability to maintain a cultural identity outside of assimilation with the dominant group in the country of residence, while other literature has encouraged or promoted interaction with non-indigenous groups within society (Forte 2010; Gilbert 2013; Phipps 2009). The latter approach has left many indigenous communities scurrying to reclaim their indigenous practices in an era where the visibility of cultural practices are markers of indigeneity (Phipps 2009). For this group of Hebrews, they have and do meet these aforementioned criteria for performing and displaying their indigeneity such as a cultural separateness across different countries of residence, which in Israel/Palestine was somewhat superimposed onto their community by the Israeli government, who only provided them a space in the desert among other groups like the Bedouins, who claim an indigenous identity which is also counter
to the claims of the Israeli nation-state but is interpreted as more plausible in the context of the region. Furthermore, I argue that the Hebrews are perpetually foiled by external processes which racializes them as Black as illustrated in the overarching ethnographic vignette of the chapter. This reality renders what they believe to be their indigenous cultural practices invisible, which mostly emboldens a communal embrace of their theological beliefs that undergird their commitment to embody the ideas about identity, culture, and spirituality that provides the substance and the context for their practices.

The Hebrews are subject to the modes of framing themselves as an indigenous community for visibility to the international communities that are important for ensuring and protecting their supposed rights. In a context like the nation-state of Israel/Palestine as headquarters for Hebrew community life, globally making a claim to indigeneity based on theology and spiritual practice is aligned with the accompanying claims of those communities in the region who make similar assertions about their entitlement to occupation (in most cases) of the land. Nevertheless, the claims of the Hebrew community are largely missed due to co-constitutive nature of race, religion, and nation (Goldschmidt and McAlister 2004). In this case, because people see and understand the Hebrew Israelites as a group of Black people mostly from the Americas, their assertions of an indigenous identity based on their theological beliefs is flattened by the predominance of race as a framing narrative, especially in the ways that race has been inherently connected to religion (or religious lineage). This is hyperbolized
in a region like Israel/Palestine where religious ancestry, lineage, and “birthrights” are highly contested and connected to where and how communities are able to create an existence.

Given the legacy and framework of the social construction of race, it becomes the dominant framework of seeing and understanding the identity even when groups like the Hebrews argue for spiritual practice as the most important identity. Although certain communities have been allowed to embed race into religion or to benefit from or privilege the racialization to advance their religiosity, it is through ethnographic encounters with the Hebrews, like the one with Liorah and her family who challenge dominant narratives of the relationship between race, religion, and nation that challenge us to see the relationship between identities produced from the intersection of race and religion (or better processes of racialization and spiritual identity). Furthermore, because the Hebrews are utilizing the body as the primary site for doing this work of registering indigeneity, most specifically, in the work to transform the racialized Black body in defiance of racial conventions about the relationship between race, biology, and disease risk, we can see work of embodied Hebrew theology not only transforming constructions of race and religion but the body. Reformulating the body, through indigenous theology, becomes a corporeal touchpoint for refashioning the racialized Black body. Furthermore, it is the body as demonstrated by Liorah where the Hebrew claims to indigeneity are rejected and the specific site where racialization is written onto the body by outsiders.
Nevertheless, as Liorah and her family narrated, which I represent metaphorically here, the work of being Hebrew means that one must engage in the ritualistic practice of wrapping, dressing, and clothing the body in Hebrew theology to secure and reproduce what it means to be Hebrew to ourselves, each other, and the outside world.

Pinn suggests that “the body and embodiment become the controlling logic for the production of theological thought, and the body is recognized as being marked by more than [B]lackness and as experiencing life as more than [B]lack. Blackness is only one of many patterns of identification that coat bodies and that are shaped by material bodies. Blackness’ status as a marker of identity and a criterion for participation in the structures of community, must be continuously probed, questioned, and never allowed to shape to authoritatively the dynamics of embodiment” (Pinn 2010, 51). In the quest to frame embodiment, theology, and identity for the Hebrew Israelites, I demonstrate how the processes of racialization that enforces how Blackness is written onto and in the body are challenged by the cultural production of indigenous identity seeking to re-route spiritual identity as the primary logic for construction the body and producing claims about the body. Theologian M. Shawn Copeland (2010) gives us insight into the sheer difficulties of this process in her discussion of the ways white racial bias “defines, censors, controls, and segregates different, other, non-white bodies” (Copeland 2010:15). She demonstrates how non-white bodies are rendered “invisible in the processes of historical, cultural, and social creativity
and representation, and often subjected to surveillance, inspection, discrimination, assessment, and containment if found to be non-compliant with this racially biased social order” (13). In the Americas, this has most often translated into indigenous identity being structured in a way that precludes those racialized as Black from being understood and interpreted indigenous as a disruption of wider racial order. In Israel/Palestine, this has translated into a normalizing of whiteness as a proxy for the paramount example of the relationship between race, religion, and nation, with select exceptions such as Ethiopian, Indian, and Moroccan Jews. Blackness is a prevalent frame that is unbearably restrictive in precluding persons who are embondaged by the processes that racialize Blackness to have or embrace an identity outside of it. For the Hebrews, who have been denied access from identifying outside of the traditional racial logics in transnational contexts, beginning in the United States, it provides another dimension to these claims. It is the specific impacts and reverberations of the United States’ “racecraft” (Fields and Fields 2012) on the Black body that are critical to the articulation of a self and community identity beyond it for the Hebrews. As Copeland claims, “in a negrophobic society, Black ontological integrity suffers compromise. On the one hand, massive, negative, transgenerational, assault on Black bodies has ontological implications. In such a society, Blackness mutates as negation, nonbeing, nothingness; Blackness insinuates an ‘other’ so radically different that her and his humanity is discredited. Then Black identity no longer offers a proper
subject of sublation, of authentic human self-transcendence, but a bitter bondage
to be escaped. Blackness becomes a narrative of marginality” (Copeland 2010,
19). For Hebrews, claims to indigeneity have ontological significance, as well as
significance for everyday lived experiences and an understanding of humanity
beyond racialized scripts of marginality, nonbeing, nothingness, and negation.

Anthony Pinn attends to these racialized scripts of marginality in his
discussion of DuBois’ conceptualization of double consciousness to explore the
relationship between race, embodiment, and theology. He writes,

behind the veil black bodies have double vision—seeing themselves within
a localized geography of meaning and place, and also seeing themselves within an
elusive larger ethos of identity. Framed in psychological terms, the racialization
at work here ‘is the process whereby the psychological suturing effects that meld
self-perception with an idealized image of wholeness dissolve.’ It is in large part
here that race (and gender) has discursive and existential force...Whereas
[Black(ened) bodies encounter race and experience race as “the dividing force
that splits the self beyond (unconscious) suture. For the racialized subject, both
the splitting and the suturing of the ego are made apparent, visible, conscious...
In response, through aesthetics, language, and practices Du Bois “aimed to
reanimate the African American body, transporting it from the realm of (racist)
science to that of class and culture (Pinn 2010, 37-38).

While Pinn utilizes DuBois’ (1903) widely cited concept of double consciousness
to discuss racialization and embodiment, I employ it here to think about how the
larger aim of the dissertation: how Hebrews must balance the processes of racialization that understands them as Black, as well as cultural production of indigeneity that frames what they believe to be their authentic mode of identification. I work to demonstrate what they want to be their primary mechanism for identification. Although I do not focus on the psychological experiences of duality, I illustrate how the Hebrew community uses the body, through Liorah’s experience on the street to show the impact of this duality that lingers and structures the community’s efforts to spiritually synchronize.

In their attempts to undo the damage and the imposition of the nation-state’s processes of racialization through its imprint on identity formation, the Hebrews endeavor to embody their theological beliefs, yet their experiences demonstrate the difficulty of undoing race as a dominant framework for seeing and experiencing a community beyond the imprint of Blackness, which implicates a global set of actors ranging from national governments to local personal interactions, in addition to intra-communal relationships and autobiographical narrations. What the Hebrews demonstrate through their efforts to transform is that processes of racialization are not superficial but have historically become the ways of knowing the self that, if successful, can penetrate and permeate every level of life, from birth to death and even one’s corporeal possibilities. Therefore, through the embodiment of this specific Hebrew theology that informs health practice, Hebrews utilize community members’ bodies to argue against one of the dominant discourses about the pathology of the
racialized Black body: that it is diseased. This is a theme that will be taken up more fully in subsequent chapters. Contemporary manifestations of these biological arguments about disease and disease risk based on race have been structured around health disparities discourses that often incorrectly make race biology (Gravlee 2009). What is important here is to see how the Hebrews attempt liberatory theological work with the power of spiritual practice, one, as a counter to the scientific and narrative discourse about deficiency and non-humanity central to claims about the Black body, as well as demonstrating the Black body as a pathway to redemption and self-discovery through efforts to reduce and eliminate chronic disease. The Hebrews’ efforts to transform the primary heuristic for understanding their community from race to spiritual identity is critical and important for contextualizing their efforts to embrace their indigenous future without being over-determined by their diasporic past by racializing them into an identity that is inconsistent with who they believe themselves to be. Moreover, drawing from their history in Chicago and in a space like Israel/Palestine, these efforts are directly in line with claims that have been and are being made about spiritual identity as a primary identification.

Goldschmidt and McAlister (2004) in their volume, Race, Nation and Religion in the Americas, provides context to the specificity of the Hebrew Israelite claims and the difficulty of their project relative to the conditions of the relationship between race, nation, and religion in the United States. Their work seeks “to disrupt the supposed boundedness of race, nation, and religion; by
showing how these categories of identity are always already inextricably linked by demonstrating that they are in fact, co-constituted categories, wholly dependent on each other for their social existence and symbolic meanings” (7). This argument, Goldschmidt claims, is particularly relevant in the Americas. The theoretical production of race, nation, and religion buttresses Asad’s (1993) notion that belief, as a way of accessing as religion, is very much imbued with racial and nationalistic qualities that must be acknowledged and accounted for in the differential equations of any anthropological analysis of a religious community. How then do anthropologists think with the dependent category of religion if it is part of a trifecta of co-constitutive categories that cannot be epistemically teased apart? How can this be addressed in the case of the Hebrews?

Goldschmidt (2004) provides perspective saying, “yet while Black Americans have struggled to reach the ‘Promised Land’ of racial equality, a number of their White neighbors—both Jews and Gentiles—have stalked their own racialized claims to the identity of ‘Israel.’ As narratives of Israelite descent lie at the heart of White supremacist Christian Identity movement, and help to define the movement’s views of Blacks and Jews as ‘mud people’ and ‘Satan’s spawn,’ respectively. These competing claims to the privileged status of God’s chosen people have all taken shape at charged intersections of race, nation, and religion in the Americas” (10). What is fascinating about the identity claims to Israel is how they function under the ontological essentialism of anti-Black
racism that renders groups like the Hebrew Israelites invisible and destabilizes their claims to being indigenous based on a seemingly epistemic shaky ground by ontologically blighting a community of people trying to make sense of their world and their humanity outside of the prescribed norms at the intersection of race, religion, and nation. This is reified in the complexity of how to address the verbal assault that Liorah endured in the streets of Dimona when she was called a kushi. This highlights what is at stake in examining Hebrew spiritual practices and their claims to a religiously informed indigeneity. Although this scholarship frames the previous research on Hebrews and I employ it to demonstrate how their claims are destabilized, I also work to situate their claims on theoretical and epistemological stable foundations through my intervention of migrant indigeneity, which allows us to imagine deterritorialized claims to indigeneity.

M. Shawn Copeland (2010) in her work, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, & Being* discusses the construction of race and how it operates in and with people’s experiences. She writes, “the putative meanings of ‘race’ are transmitted through a series of “durable, transposable dispositions” that structure, (de)form, direct, and predispose an individual’s “perception and appreciation” of social experience” (13). Although Black theology seeks to make meaning of the Black experience and re-narrate the relationship between God and Black people, what the Hebrews do with their theology is utilize it to reject the United States racial logics and re-establish themselves as autonomous agents in constructing their indigenous identity. Through their return to a Hebrew theological and ethical
universe, they adjudicate the residual effects of what Copeland identifies as the embodiment of Blackness: “preconceived patterns or stereotypes of [B]lack body, life, and being—promiscuous, loud, illiterate, diseased” (19). Similarly, the Hebrews’ project is, as Jackson writes in his book about the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, “an attempt to think the unthinkable, to prove that the seemingly impossible is actually inevitable, doggedly forging (in ways that are not always liberating or inspiring, but sometimes certainly can be) a world into being that refutes and even transcends longstanding denials of African humanity.” Here, Jackson’s reference to the long-standing denials of African as a synonymous for Black humanity is part of the genealogical tradition that engenders and sustains anti-Black racism, which limits human reality in the post-modern context. The Hebrew Israelite effort to synchronize their identity with their spirituality is difficult but central to the Hebrew self-making process. For the Hebrews who are holding together a transnational project, the stakes are higher given the connections between race, religion, and nation across states that foster disbelief and disregard for the claims of those who are racialized as Black to be indigenous and reducing them to Kushis.

**Conclusion**

This chapter relies on Liorah’s experience of being assaulted as a kushi on the streets of Dimona to examine the centrality of embodying theological belief to the grounding Hebrew Israelite project of identity formation. Through a
consideration of the refutation of intersection of presumed foreignness, Blackness, and inferiority implied in the term, an emergence of how Hebrews understand themselves in the context of race, religion/spirituality, status, and indigeneity emerged. Similarly, the chapter has worked to demonstrate how the construction, formation, and employment of an indigenous identity is grounded in their interpretations and understandings of Hebrew scripture as a proxy for Hebrew embodied indigenous culture. Foremost, this theology has served to re-narrate the inextricably linked constructs of race, nation, and religion (Goldschmidt and McAlister 2004) in their attempts to decenter American racial logics as the a priori mode of foregrounding perceptions of identity among Hebrews which are replaced by theology, spiritual practice, and, subsequently, indigenous Hebrew culture. Through this interrogation of the role of theology in undergirding the efforts of the Hebrews, I have presented evidence that the Hebrews are among other Black religious (or spiritual) groups, especially through with extensive histories in Chicago, who have set out to re-landscape the formation of identity among those who have been embondaged by the narratives of Blackness through specific constructions that embed culture and identity in the body.

Therefore, by looking at communities like the Moorish Scientists and other Black Jewish and Hebrew groups, we see a legacy of alternative identity construction beyond the processes of being racialized as Black. From these analyses, combined with my ethnographic research, I have proposed migrant
indigeneity as a deterritorialized approach that attends the community’s history of territorial dispossession for generations, enforced constructions of identity, and significant histories of migration. Moreover, through an examination of another aligning community, the Nation of Islam, we understand how this construction of identity is practiced and transmitted through the community’s most notable forms of public theology/spiritual praxis: dietary consumption. The Hebrews, through their engagement with the non-Hebrew public in restaurants, on community grounds, and in everyday actions are able to demarcate cultural difference through dietary practice and demonstrate one of the community’s prominent claims, “spirituality in practice.” I have argued that the Hebrew health policies, which are the basis of the Hebrew holistic lifestyle, are a primary factor by which to understand how the construction of Hebrew theology frames and models the overarching indigenous Hebrew self-making process.

Building on the efforts of Weisenfeld (2017) who acknowledges “the agency of [formerly racialized] [B]lack people as religious subjects in constructing, revising, or rejecting racial categories and thereby producing frameworks for religio-racial identity” and Jacob Dorman (2007) who has suggested that the Hebrews are “bricoleurs who constructed a polycultural religion that creatively reworked threads from religious faiths, secret societies, and magical grimoires,” I focus on theoretical insights of the Hebrews’ integration of theology, embodiment, and culture to further an argument about identity that privileges belief and centralizes the community’s ‘power to define’
themselves, their community, and the world. I have illustrated how Hebrews have worked to embed these theological beliefs in their efforts to perform and advance claims regarding this indigenous ontology that has practical implications for the obtainment of citizenship, the construction of identity, and for highlighting how Hebrew “bod(ies) [are a] productive starting point for analyzing culture and self” (Csordas 1990). This is particularly important for the dissertation project of global health to understand the “lived and embodied experiences of people” (Brotherton and Nguyen 2013)

Throughout the chapter, I emphasized how Hebrew formations of indigenous identity are part of broader efforts of illustrating their systems of belief and structuring cosmological worldviews, which the Hebrews would argue is a strength of their entire project and is the foundation of all their interventions, especially the re-integration of their indigenous health practices in Hebrew culture. By understanding the Hebrew self-making process, grounded in their spirituality, which is embedded in theology and spiritual praxis, most prominently seen through dietary consumption patterns, and in urgent social and political matters like citizenship and illuminating global identity formation processes, one has better insight into the construction of indigenous identity among Hebrews even when people on the street cannot accurately read their bodies.
CHAPTER THREE
‘Once You Go B(l)ack’:
Palimpsestic Processes of Diaspora, Blackness, and Indigeneity

I exited the Marta (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) station and passed through crowds of people who were selling ‘Obama’ or government sponsored phones, loose cigarettes, and a wide variety of seasonal items ranging from clothing, flowers and candy in February, baskets for Easter or Mother’s Day, and other gift items for friends, children, and other loved ones. After making my way through this sensorium, the directions told me to make a left on Abernathy, but it was quicker to cut through the Krispy Kreme parking lot, with its red light shining for all to see when the donuts were hot and ready. I landed in the West End, ground zero for a mélange of Black cultural and religious expressions in the United States. Suburban flight turned what was once a white neighborhood into an almost entirety Black community with the predictable markers that characterize communities with declining economic bases. There were signs, a strip mall, a Taco Bell, Popeye’s, Church’s Chicken, Domino’s Pizza, Little Caesar’s Pizza, a nail salon. The fading linoleum in the Chinese-American food restaurant had all but turned gray, the relationships between servers and customers mediated with bulletproof glass. In addition to these institutions, there was a store that sold ‘African attire,’ body oils, shea butter, and an assortment of accoutrement for the caricatured ‘natural Black conscious’ person in Atlanta. There was also a Boost Mobile, a Metro PCS, a wig store, a rim shop, a hair braiding salon, and a Goodwill, all within eyesight from my vantage point walking...
the blocks between the station and the Hebrew place of commerce. Of course, my walking tour also featured plenty of overpriced gas stations, as well as Atlanta’s famed strip clubs that operate during the day (in for any lunch-time needs) and well into the night.

While this scene could be set in many Black urban metropolitan areas, its vegan and vegetarian religious community-owned restaurants were distinctive. On one block renamed for a Civil Rights Era activist, there was a row of Black religious ‘healthier’ food options: Local shoppers could pick between Rastafari vegan food, an Ausar Auset owned vegan restaurant specializing in raw food and kale wraps, another Rasta-based doughnut shop, now brick and mortar after its initial popup phase, or the Hebrew Israelite vegan soul food. The Hebrews who had been established the longest were proprietors of a complex that included their bookstore that also sold clothing, oils, and other assorted goods, a colon hydrotherapy space, a hair salon and barber shop, and a great hall for events. For the Hebrews in the United States, their current presence in these diaspora was a touch point, a reminder, according to Hebrew belief of the variety of the places that are result of the Hebrews’ exile.

Over the months I spent with the Hebrews in the southern United States, a region that doubles as spatial signifier to the many places imprinted by a confluence of diasporas, Atlanta’s cosmopolitan center proved a meeting ground and market place; for those looking for change who flocked to the city from across the rural South and for the patchwork collective of those from around the
country and world who found a home there. This unique mixture of local and
global community created a particular space in which the Hebrews emerged and
flourished. While situated in Atlanta, the Hebrews narrated their presence across
different regions of the United States, reflecting their commitment to Hebrew
diasporas and spaces of displacement. Most significant were the Hebrew
accounts of the community in Dimona, Israel (Palestine) as their ‘homeland.’
This group’s ability to move across sites of exile, displacement, diaspora, and
homeland maps onto and across their bodies. By working to embody a geo-
political communal history in indigenous community practices, the community
recounted an alternative history to those often associated with Blacks in the
Americas. While serving vegan soul food classics in urban environments in the
U.S. South, Hebrew community members’ vision of identity was bound by not by
American national borders, but rather by what they called the ‘kingdom.’ The
Hebrew Israelite nation provided members with a passport to a homeland
(Dimona, Israel) that took root and expanded in Hebrew Israelite residences
around the world. Within these spaces, a shared religiosity allowed the Hebrews
to work together with their neighbors at the Shrine of the Black Madonna, to be
in community with the Rastas, and to fellowship with the Ausar Auset, even if
they believed their own theology to be superior to that of other groups.

Anthropological definitions of diaspora often use Jewish diasporas as a
framework to think about dispersals in a presumed historical way. Nevertheless,
for the Hebrews who draw on multiple and overlapping, or a palimpsest of
diaspora, the kinds of religious movements in which they participate are not Jewish. This becomes especially clear when placing claims to indigeneity in conversation with other indigenous communities whose food practices anchor in spirituality. My fieldwork in the United States demonstrated these diasporic synergies.

In this chapter, I illustrate how Hebrews utilize their diasporic past as pathway to an indigenous future. Through an engagement of religious, African/Black Atlantic, and indigenous diasporas, I frame the processes through which Hebrews become legible to themselves as an indigenous spiritual community. These processes shape a hermeneutic for being and becoming Hebrews: a people characterized by an understanding of self, community, and the world relative to space, place, and identity politics, and of particular import for this dissertation, transnational health policy implementation. Throughout this chapter, I examine ethnographic accounts to illustrate the significance of diaspora in animating Hebrew indigenous identity. These accounts, and their diasporic resonances, are the building blocks for understanding the spatial, intra, extra, and trans-national migration narratives that inform implementation of Hebrew health policies.

This emphasis on the narrative constructions of diaspora takes seriously Patterson & Kelley’s (2000) impetus that “just as the diaspora is made, it can be unmade, and thus scholars must explore the moments of its unmaking.” Subsequently, I assert “the need to examine overlapping diasporas from many
historical locations” (Patterson & Kelley 2000). Drawing on ethnographic data
with the Hebrews, this chapter builds on one of the dissertation’s foundational
themes: engaging a particular diasporic past to embrace an indigenous future,
thereby examining the ways that diaspora is unmade and remade. To excavate
the unmaking and remaking of a people, I examine three sets of overlapping
diasporas through which the Hebrew construct self, community, and practice.

The particular ways that the Hebrew community remembers its historical
narrative makes my attempt to parse these diasporas difficult. In one telling of
their history, diasporic movements collide and collapse: A group of Hebrews
primarily from the United States decide to return to Africa (Liberia). There, the
group engages conceptualizations of the African diaspora but eventually returns
to the nation-state of Israel under the Law of Return. Once resettled, this same
group participates in Israeli theocratic understandings of religious diaspora.
These overlapping Hebrew claims to diaspora are based on an emic
understanding of indigeneity that they believe pre-dates Jewish constructions of
belonging. These claims and constructions emerge in conversation with both
indigenous diasporas and settler colonialism narratives. These overlapping
diasporas are not easily unraveled. In thinking through the construction of the
African diaspora, I challenge movement “beyond the cultural survivalist/cultural
nationalists who want to locate the common seed of Afro-diasporic culture and
identity, and the anti-essentialist who insist on the hybridization of black culture”
(Patterson & Kelley 2000, 22). Therefore, I assert the theoretical intervention of
migrant indigeneity as an identity that both attends to the claims of the Hebrews and responds to this group’s early formation in the academy’s conceptualizing of the African diaspora. This theoretical move serves a two-fold purpose: to frame identity for groups of people racialized as Black, and to move beyond that distracting category to the larger project of indigeneity and its system of holistic health.

This chapter builds on the previous chapter’s work of examining how spirituality undergirds the construction and maintenance of the Hebrew self-making process in relation to the implementation of the Hebrew health policies. In this chapter, I explore the systematic utilization of a Hebrew conceptualization of diaspora. This specific concept emerges in the context of a transnational community with migration histories and patterns that are foundational to organizing and understanding Hebrew community life, selfhood, and the implementation of health policies. Specifically, interconnections between spirituality, diaspora, migration, and indigeneity for the Hebrew self-making process will become clear. Similarly, previous insights about the role of spirituality will contribute to this chapter’s exploration of place and space.

This chapter demonstrates how the Hebrew Israelites’ indigenous identity is connected to their understandings and deployments of, as well as appeals to, constructions of diaspora, all of which undergird their health policy implementation process. I describe and examine the Hebrew-specific processes of identity formation that often articulate with and deviate from broader and
overarching claims about geo-historical and social politics of place, space, and race. I further unpack migrant indigeneity as a framework for understanding both Hebrew Israelite cultural production and American anthropology’s evolving treatment of racial and ethnic claims. I engage religious, African, and indigenous diasporas in order to better understand claims to an indigenous identity and inherent cultural logic that support Hebrew health practice and policy. My final argument engages diasporic logics, transnational community frameworks, and communal migration histories as core aspects of Hebrew identity, which abet the implementation of Hebrew health policies across geographic, ethnic, and national boundaries. Throughout, I emphasize how Hebrew formations of indigenous identity shape broader efforts to restructure community identity, reconceptualize space and place, and to retell histories.

By examining the indigeneity literature in the field which predominantly includes, Native, First Nation, and Aboriginal populations in the U.S., Canada, and Australia, I revisit the works of Mintz & Price, Herkovits, Hurston, etc. which outline the context of Afro-American (North, Central, and South) anthropology and Black American (writ large) culture. The Hebrew Israelites provide an ethnographic case that prompts a re-reading and re-consideration of Black culture in the United States. Casting the Hebrew Israelites as catalyst for this change, I do not solely build on the cultural continuity argument, nor do I utilize reductive racial categories. Instead, the Hebrew Israelites broaden our notion of the dynamism of a migrant ‘indigeneity’ in the global moment. Instead of
thinking about “New World” cultures, I discuss the Hebrews’ cultural production of indigeneity outside a dichotomous frame whose colonial and imperial historical formations otherwise overshadow transnational migrations and diaspora. This work borrows from the scholarship of other critics who named the omission of the Great Migration in the United States as a major lacuna in the regional categorization of cultural communities in the African Diaspora (Nicholas, 1991; Gregory, 2006; Grossman, 1989). By emphasizing the Great Migration as central to a majority of the Hebrew Israelites’ self-conception, migration and indigeneity serve as unlikely yet fitting model through which the practices of the community and community-formation emerge. I rely on ethnographic data in this and other chapters to support the construction of identity across migratory patterns, transnational connections, and local iterations of indigeneity.

The Hebrew community is enveloped in multiple, and to use Lewis’ (1995) term, “overlapping diasporas” or palimpsests of diaspora. I focus on demonstrating that diaspora is critical to understanding this particular community and how, in turn, a critical examination of this community can enhance our understandings of diaspora. To illuminate these processes of identity construction, I illustrate how diaspora is not only an external force, but also a theological episteme that grounds the community’s claims to the practice of their faith, which they had hoped to leverage for citizenship under the Law of Return, and to a better sense of ethnic and religious origins.
Although some might anchor the Hebrews’ participation in conversations about religious diaspora in the ongoing violent struggle to claim rights and territory based on sacred notions of homeland, I draw on those religious diasporas that have supported and sustained the Hebrew community beyond questions and conversations about Israeli or Palestinian indigeneity. By placing their bodies in countries and places where people appeal to alter(native) constructions of indigenous identity that rely on connections between spiritual practice and racialized identity frameworks and by creating family roots in communities that grew in the gardens of the Southern Negev desert, the Hebrews worked to embody a cartography that gives dimension, substance, and credibility to their claims.

Morris Lounds Jr.’s scholarship on the Hebrew Israelites highlights the importance of eschatology and ideology to this community. He maintains that “ideology/eschatology provided a rationale for immigration” and the leaders of the community “explained emigration as the fulfillment of a prophecy, and the initiation of their exodus” (1981:112). Diaspora and migration theologically infiltrate and are actively involved in every part of Hebrews’ (historic and modern) narrative interpretation of history. Additionally, a covenant with God, an act central to defining one’s self as Hebrew (in both a historic and normative sense), is woven into the diasporic fabric that is foundational to the theological and ontological framework of the community. The Hebrew Israelites believe that they “are the descendants of the ancient Hebrews, the chosen people who made a
covenant with God...and have a unique and special relationship with an omnipotent and omniscient deity” (Lounds 1981:119). These theoretical insights make clear that the textual evidence catalyzes mechanisms of theology to support diaspora as a theological episteme. Theologically, the Hebrew Israelites are able to move through the “fluid, irregular shapes” (Appadurai 1996:33) of the Hebraic diaspora, which have been deterritorialized by the scattering of Hebrew people throughout the world and by the transcendence of the modern nation-state as a reference point for power, identity, and structure. More importantly, Appadurai suggests that these scapes are not objectively given but deeply perspectival, theologically lending an ethnic, religious, political, and historical interpretation of the “text” in a variety of ways. Utilizing scripture as a theo-historical medium, Israelites are able to identify themselves in the Old Testament narrative through chromatic idioms present throughout the text. The hue of one’s complexion is a signifier that connects this diasporic community to their Hebraic compatriots and co-religionists through quantifiable and qualified spaces. The racial frameworks that have been inscribed in the minds and on the bodies of the exiled Israelites in places like the United States and South Africa also become the very substance of the frameworks that reconnect them to these “overlapping” diasporas and allow them to remake diaspora as Patterson and Kelley note. The analytic of diaspora as a theological episteme also engages the abstraction/anti-abstractionisms that Edwards challenges us to consider. Theologically, the diaspora of the Hebrews is certainly abstract in a scattering similar to the “African” diaspora that Edwards
references. However, through his intervention of anti-abstraction as a mechanism of understanding diaspora, we are forced to consider the claims of the Hebrew Israelites as “discourses of cultural and political linkage through and across difference” (Edwards 2001:64). Martina Könighofer further expands our understanding of the theological diaspora abstraction/anti-abstraction model: “by reconstructing their historiography as an actual earthly and historically-based link to the promised Zion, the African Hebrew Israelites dropped the symbolic anchor and by bringing it down to earth the concept of Zion and by taking Jerusalem out of the sky...[therefore] Zion... is no longer a mystical religious concept but an actual homeland that can be reached and inhabited” (2008:29). Theologically, diaspora is concretized and is a canvas on which communities can literally stake claim to land, tracing cultural and political heritage to a specific place even when and if they are not living in there. In Atlanta’s West End, the Hebrews constructed religious diaspora through the sharing of commercial space and through efforts to collaborate with other religious communities to provide alternative food options.

For the Hebrews, diaspora is a theological episteme that narrates, animates, and engenders the community’s faith. Diaspora explains and gives significance to not only to the generational lapse in practice of the Hebraic faith, but also explains why these Israelites are in a such distant land when they discover the disconnection and return to their traditional faith practice. The Hebrews’ sacred text provides evidence as to why the Israelites find themselves in
places like the United States and South Africa, as opposed a region closer to Israel. Through the text, geopolitical claims to Israel are justified and disbelief is mitigated through the law (specifically their understanding of Deuteronomistic law). Moreover, theologically diaspora assuages a number of the Hebrew Israelites’ concerns--tensions with an angry and revengeful God, the suspicious and often discriminatory state of Israel, skeptical and cynical practitioners of Judaism, and others struggling to make sense of their history as diasporic people. Diaspora as a theological episteme grounds in rhetorical strategies and community-based cartography a process of self-knowing otherwise ruptured by European colonialism, involuntary movement, and forced religious conversion. Theologically, Hebrews are armed with the tools to engage the Israeli nation-state, possible co-religionists, and/or non-believers who do not understand their claims and desires to return to a religious, social, and cultural homeland that was severed from them in the process of diaspora.

An ethnographic examination of the Hebrew Israelite community demonstrates that diasporas are not only an external frame which aids in the characterization of the transnational movements of people between and through spaces. They also function in the teleological endeavors of a people seeking to assuage existential anxieties and attend to the eschatological concerns produced by and resolved through diaspora. John L. Jackson Jr.’s (2006) work highlights a critical nuance in the research on diaspora; naming race as an essential feature of the frameworks that evoke an affective investment in qualified and quantifiable
transnational ebbs and flows of people through space. Hebrews were and often are deeply invested in a geo-racial politic that, in this case, has serious consequences for religious identity, community, and notions of authenticity. Clarke and Thomas are attentive to this valence of race on globalization and are careful to determine how racialization and racial formation—“having similar effects across a wide range of locations” (2006:3)—can be mined at the site of excavation. In the case of the Hebrew Israelites, racialization factors into multiple layers of their existence: in the spaces of exile and community life, in the process of identifying and connecting to their homeland(s), and in reflecting on how they are received by their diasporic Hebrew nationalist compatriots in Israel and native Black communities in the U.S. and South Africa. Deploying diaspora as a theological episteme, Hebrew Israelites destabilize prescriptive geo-racial frameworks by rupturing the hegemonic structures that authorize identity and community by origin.

Moreover, Edwards’ work on diaspora has illustrated the flexibility and capability of diaspora to suspend and extend the boundaries of time and space. Hebrews literally transcend diaspora by traveling outside the boundaries of the ordinary, inherited, and accepted. And yet, they also revel in the immanence of multiple diasporas that is very real (materialized), fixed, and accessible. Theoretically, the dominant discourses of diaspora, particularly the Jewish framework and the construction of African diaspora, provide a structure that informs Hebrew Israelite navigation of their dispersion without usurping their
“power to define.” Edwards’ notion of décalage provides the intellectual latitude for a theological notion of diaspora with which the Hebrew Israelite’s transcend boundaries and decenter dominant discourses of diaspora that exist in “real” and “imagined” space. Appadurai’s research on deterritorialization and ethnoscapes exhibits the inventive quality of homeland that is not territorially bound. In the case of the Hebrews, Appadurai’s work reveals how a community’s perceived relation to power informs the reception of their creative process in the imagining of a home and homeland. The conflict that results between the Israeli state and the Hebrew Israel nation demonstrates that invention has grave consequences for those subjected to it; for those who are not imagined in the quantifiable space of “home.” James Clifford’s essay “Diasporas” challenges us to “be able to recognize the strong entailment of Jewish history on the language of diaspora without making that history a definitive model,” (1994:306) thereby risking a focus on ideal types. What my work demonstrates is that the Hebrew community serves as model for disrupting the paradigmatic and discursive rigidity of diasporic identity. Hebrew Israelites utilize the great flexibility in the diasporic canon to undergird their own project without being weighed down by the restrictions of those who use diaspora consciousness negatively... While some scholars have “constitute[d] [diaspora] negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion” (1994:311), it does not impede the project of the Hebrews. Through their communal process of knowledge production the Hebrews are able to draw from multiple constructions of diaspora as they build identity. Clarke and
Thomas’ work emphasizes that an analysis of diaspora among the Hebrew Israelites must attend to how individuals and collectives “negotiate, revise, and sometimes subvert the hegemony of the global political-economic and cultural marketplace thereby playing an active role in defining global processes for themselves” (2006:8). The contemporary processes and modern political, cultural, and spiritual systems that govern the Hebrews’ “real” existence frame the backdrop for any engagement with their diasporic project. Only a critical analysis of this community will honor these nuances.

Creating diasporas, moving in between places, and positioned among a host of diasporic discourses, Hebrew Israelites make and remake diaspora in an effort to expand their own definition. The community troubles simplistic configurations of diaspora and points toward its more sophisticated and intricately nuanced iteration. While dominant discourses on diaspora are often historicized, rigid, and impermeable, Hebrews innovatively use traditional notions of religious diaspora to build local relationships among their diasporic partners in the United States’ South. This allows us to understand the three types of diasporas that emerge in Vertovec’s (1997) research with South Asian religious practitioners. He describes diaspora as a social form, a type of consciousness, and a mode of cultural production. All three forms emerge as Hebrews in Atlanta’s West End build identity and community through efforts to transform health.
Friction and the Making of Hebrews

While living and researching among the saints in South Africa, I sweated through the summer heat and often spent unbearable nights in the tropics doing what most people did before the advent of unlimited data and widely accessible Wi-Fi and 24-hour television programming. Without radio or affordable phone service, I stared at the walls until I was able to fall asleep. As I was housed with a local a family of faith, I was not without the comfort of the words, thoughts, and ideas of Ben Ammi, the community’s esteemed and recently deceased leader who best represented the community’s geo-political framings of its Hebrew world. At community’s gatherings, many Hebrews wore t-shirts printed with images of the African continent. In addition to the traditionally mapped African continent, the t-shirt included the modern nation state of Israel/Palestine, tacked on as a vital land bridge to the Hebrew homeland. The Hebrews did not want anyone to forget that, in their estimation, Israel was located in Northeastern Africa. The Hebrew community worked hard to reinforce the notion that the modern nation-state of Israel was located on the African continental tectonic plate, thereby confirming their own beliefs in an expansive “Africa” rather than yielding to geopolitical divisions of land and academic construction of place.

Lying in the bed in South Africa, I couldn’t escape the Hebrew world map that narrated a Hebrew-inflected history of the world. This map haunted me and grew to include notes and arrows to detail the migration patterns of the Hebrews throughout the world, the time periods of said migrations, and current locations.
of Hebrew communities. Even in my subconscious dream state, and more woke moments of fieldwork, I was surrounded by an ideology reflected in a community-based and produced cartography. What was most compelling were the ways in which community members carried their narratives with them; or better yet, embodied this cartography, utilizing it as a strategy to map and narrativize their indigeneity. In the following section, I make an argument for how the Hebrews across international jurisdictions mobilize regional and local histories of migration, broader historical narratives, and overarching Hebrew stories as strategies for embodying the community’s cartography, diasporic ideologies, and arguments for indigeneity.

Friction is an anthropological concept popularized by Tsing’s (2004) work on global connections that refuted previously accepted narratives about cultural clashes. I note that this concept of friction informed my work and writing in two ways: both in my experiences with the Hebrews as I struggled to understand, interrogate, and examine their beliefs; and as a mechanism for exploring the ways in which cultures rub against each other to produce a frictive energy critical to the production of a new cultural identities. When I first arrived in South Africa, I struggled to understand how and why these seemingly native Black South Africans would abandon their recognized cultural heritage to claim Hebrew identity, especially the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, as opposed to an European derived Hebrew identity. I wondered how and why these descendants of the Ndebele, Tswana, Xhosa, and Zulu traded in their ethnic identities, access
to presumptive knowledge, and recognized nativity in their country of birth and residence for an ethnic consolidation to a cultural identity that was not recognized by an organized body outside the community ranks. I struggled to believe the stories the Hebrews told me about the facts they renounced to swap one cultural identity for an arguably more tenuous existence. I was taken aback by what I read as half or mis-truths about how some community members acted when outsiders like myself and the ‘real brokers of authentic Hebrewism’ (Hebrews who lived in or were born in Israel/Palestine), were not present. For example, it was not clear to me if they were telling me how they identified and then were choosing to identify differently if the audience changed. I was perplexed by this choice to identify as Hebrews when as an outsider I could not initially see how on a global scale beyond the community it afforded them the privileges, benefits, or social or economic capital that would improve their lives. Instead, the Hebrews in South Africa seemed to be appeased by the benefits afforded those understood as culturally different, eccentric, and knowledgeable, especially in relation to ‘Black’ or Pan-African histories. Over time, I was able to see how as members of a broader Hebrew diaspora, it gave them benefits through exchange within this transnational community that could be extended beyond, produced, and performed nationally and internationally. This embraced and embodied difference created connections to people from the United States, the Caribbean, and other parts of the African continent, ultimately producing a cultural lifeworld distinctive from that which might be considered normal and
acceptable to a Native Black South African; even when and especially when living in the native units (or NUs) which bore witness to the enduring colonial legacy of displacement and cultural denigration.

I struggled in the summer heat yet I finally was able to adopt their interpretive frameworks to begin to see the ways in which the Hebrew Israelites invested in this narratives that supported their identity claims. From this new perspective, I was able to understand better that the Hebrew Israelites' were telling stories not only for my benefit, but also for their own self-making and maintenance processes. Through the continual rehearsal and productions of self, the Hebrew Israelites were participating in the human rite of affirming, confirming, and expressing who they are—to one another and to the world. Living in and working from their cultural milieus (which were often were not accepted by others), the Hebrew Israelite's work to perform identity through a complex set of signs and symbols is complex and rife with fault lines. In order to stabilize, strategically convey, and deploy their identity claims, I witness how the Hebrew Israelites were challenged to navigate multiple mediums. My assessments of the production and deployment of Hebrew claims to diaspora and migration make clear that the body is a critical feature for performing Hebrew indigenous identity, mobilizing claims for a diasporic past that connects communities around transnational spaces, and engages with theories on racial formation and Blackness. Similarly, two critical analytics for understanding the efforts of for the Hebrews are diaspora as a theological episteme and embodied cartography. Here,
I present how the Hebrews’ historic rejections of United States’ citizenship to further their commitment to living as a people in Israel and their unwillingness to concede to Jewish religious identity in Israel/Palestine combined with recent denials of Native Black ethnic identity for Hebrew identification in South Africa to make these arguments.

The Hebrews create new categories of spiritual and cultural definition in which collective understandings of cartography, original homeland, and identity become increasingly salient. This epistemic, psychological, and cultural work of cartography by this particular community utilizes multiple technological sciences to produce the desired effects related to resignifying the spatial boundaries of existence and origin. History, geography, geology, and social science are central to this process, but the most critical set of technologies are spiritual; the tools, techniques, and methods of spirituality which guide the remembering and re-imagining of borders and lands familiar to a people’s ancestors both physical and spiritual. Embodied cartography is the term I created to describe the Hebrew practices and rituals that allow them to imagine a diasporic past and produce an indigenous identity connected to constructions of Israel. The Israelites utilize science to critique ‘the science’ of who they are, wrestling with epistemologies that appear to cage them in. They rewrite their epistemological framework and intervene in the a priori myth that details where they come from. For the South African Hebrews, blending a multiplicity of origin stories is part of the self-making process which co-articulates with other diasporic and transnational
features of identity formation. This narrative is clearly a strong feature of the community’s identity, even as the Hebrew Israelites become increasingly aware of the historic production of racial formations in the modern context which engender the expression of surprise and disgust by many, including the Israeli government upon their arrival (or return to, according to the community’s historic record) in the “Land of Israel.”

The Hebrews intervene in normative processes of racial formation and the mechanisms and methodologies of the racialization process that have enveloped their lives and histories in exile. They attend to these “conjunctural moments” that Jafari Allen (2012) describes referencing Stuart Hall in “Black/Queer/Diaspora at the Current Conjecture.” He describes conjunctural moments as “the temporal space in which the articulation (or accretion or collision) of sometimes related and other times opposing or unrelated discourses, practices, or trajectories reshape, reimagine, or alter our view of the present. At conjunctural moments, ‘new’ ideas and practices emerge and take on added significance precisely because of this articulation.” Hebrews utilize inherited frameworks (i.e. Blackness, diaspora, religion, and culturally entrenched dietary patterns) to produce new ideas and practices which take on added significance within this constructed realm of modernity. They bring the conjectural moments of the United States Civil Rights Movement, Black Nationalism, South African apartheid, Israeli theocracy, alternative health practices, neo-racialisms and new spiritual cosmologies to “alter our view of the present.” Furthermore, Allen’s
theory allows us to see the conjectural moments within anthropology, in the anthropological inquiry of categories like religion, and particularly as the nature of ethnography changes rapidly.4

Through these conjectures and palimpsest of diasporas, we are able to experience a community of people who tell a story that is contrary to the dominant, normative narrative of what it means to be racialized Black, diasporic Africans returning to Africa by living in Israel, yet tending to the interstitial cavities of the diaspora (and members of their community who continue to occupy the far-reaching places of their exile) by their most aggressive and popular approach for interacting with non-Hebrews, offering their strategies of eternal life on Earth through their constellation of global Hebrew community-making and their strategic placement of vegan restaurants. Instead of utilizing the definitiveness of a singular episteme to reconcile their identity, they consolidate across a spectrum of conjectures, which coheres in the intervention of one of spiritual leader Ben Ammi’s most iconic statements; that they retain the “power to define” (God, Black Man & Truth, 1990). By attending to Allen’s conjectural moments, we can ultimately think about how to queer the African diaspora. In one rhetorical move, the Hebrew community reserves the right and claims the power to define their identity and to make revisions to their own proclamations. Hebrews use diaspora to create a narrative of the past and expand

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the boundaries of Africa to map onto this storyline, then utilize these constructions to build community with South Africans.

Although displacement and migration have been normativized in contemporary discourse on native studies (Clifford, Indigenous Experience Today), scholars continue to limit the boundaries of indigenous and native communities to a predictable model that ends with European contact. Although scholarship has begun to redress the static, no contact, land-owning-only model of indigeneity in a modern context, scholarly communities have yet to examine the indigeneity of racialized Blacks specifically in relation to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. With the exception of seminal works like those of Sylvia Wynter (1970) and Edward Brathwaite (1974), and more contemporary work focused on the Caribbean (Jackson, 2012; Newton, 2013; Price, 2009), the scholarship on these specific forms of indigeneity, especially beyond creolization models, is lacking. Through analyzing ethnographic material across multiple spaces, I look at the production of migrant indigeneity both on and beyond the African continent that does not deploy its epistemic foundation to an ontological construction of indigenous identity of a diasporic community of migrants rooted in West Africa. This research seeks to advance scholarship in anthropology of race, Blackness, and indigeneity, as well as Black studies, African American studies, Africana studies, and ethnic studies to revisit how the construction of identity moves beyond European interventions and inventions into history.
Moreover, what the Hebrews detail is a way of re-thinking culture and identity through, between, and amidst these overlapping diasporas.

Ontologically, communal knowledge production, or the subjugation of knowledge, is a teleological endeavor that is best-understood utilizing Edwards’ model of décalage. Décalage validates and valorizes not only the multiple and overlapping diasporas which envelope the Hebrew Israelite community by “reestablis[h]ing a prior unevenness or diversity” (Edwards, 2001:65), but also creates a discursive and paradigmatic frame for the production of knowledge within the community and the creation of ontological “isness” that mediates the community’s self-knowledge. Ontological “isness” or identity in the Hebrew community is particular and therefore deserves special attention within the context of diasporic analyses, especially considering what Edwards outlines as the two-jointedness of articulation. Hebrews “articulate” through a multi-dimensional diasporic palimpsestic frame. This frame is in practice often embodied and in its theoretical thrust, theologically and belief based, with consequences for communal and individual ontological mediations of self and knowledge. Dominant discourses of diaspora, specifically of the African and religious diasporas, inform this articulation, but do not confine or retrain the production of this newly formed diaspora, diasporic identification, or diasporic repositioning.

The pre-existing architecture of diaspora has created a structure through which the Hebrews can identify, but also is theoretically manipulated to produce
new “articulations” which allow the community to retain power in the creation of knowledge claims and constructions of self. While knowledge is mediated through these multiple and overlapping discourses of diaspora in which the community is enveloped, they do not trump the community’s “power to define.” This agency is a central element in the emergent Hebrew Israelite identity that speaks from the interstices of new and old décalage models of diasporic past as they give way to a migrant indigenous future.

**Indigenous Diasporas**

The making and the remaking of indigenous diasporas is a complex process among the Hebrews. For example, for weeks I saw how the community organized around an idea of indigenous diaspora that further corroborated their claims to indigeneity in the context of Dimona. During New World Passover, the feast that celebrates this specific group of Hebrews’ return to the Promised Land, the community leveraged their relationships with others in the desert to communicate a message about indigenous diaspora. The radiant and deep brown Arabic speaking Afro-Palestinians I first met on one of the Sacred Visitation trips were first to speak for the collective. Abdallah Ismail, the community’s primary contact and his wife Fadeerah, formed mutually beneficial relationships around Black racialization to showcase and broadcast how their indigeneity made sense in the region. Moreover, the relationship was built on making contacts that benefitted each other’s communities across religious and geo-political difference.
Abdallah was also an imam and therefore, well networked across the region. The Hebrews benefited from the legacy of people who looked like Abdallah, Fadeerah, his daughters, nieces, and nephews, all of whom made the trip with him as natives to the region. This group leveraged their generations-long presence in the region in support of the long history of people now racialized as Black whose existence prior to the arrival of “white Arabs who now dominate” contributes to the nativization of Blackness in the region. Similarly, to a different audience they worked to debunk of the global circulation of “images of Yeshua (Jesus) as white” that further construct the people of the region.

The Ismail family were in conversation with another more proximate group of Afro-Palestinians/Israelis– those living in East Jerusalem’s Old City. While newspaper reports mark them as descendants as Chad, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan, which others their ‘Blackness’ from the region, their presence in the Old City complicated race narratives across at least two nations. Passing through the Israeli state police checkpoint, Sacred Visitation guests walk through the antiquity of a place shrouded in political and religious debates about rights and claims to homeland. Peripheral to these discussions always have been and continue to be those who are racialized as Black. As East Jerusalem native Basir Zain spoke, he discussed his life in the Old City for over six decades. His story details the heartbreaking organizing work that members of his community undertake to combat racially motivated attacks and violence. Mr. Zain’s wrinkled face accompanied his petite frame that he folded, often hunching his body over as
he spoke. His soft voice did not detract from the gravity of his discussion of the long history of his and his ancestors’ presence in the region. His presence and story worked to substantiate the Hebrews’ claims about their ancestors in the same region.

One of the last groups to speak were Sudanese inmates imprisoned for their attempts to flee violence and conflict in Sudan. Through their stories of oppression by the Israeli state, the violence in Sudan, and targeted anti-Black violence in Israel, this collective found much in common. The stories of being held captive in prison camps, the constant threat of deportation, and the lingering trauma of escaping violence of their homeland in the hopes of migrating for a better life resonated across geo-political lines. Mustafa, one of this group’s spokespersons, is a brilliant orator. He is powerfully tall, yet slim, with soft features who, although in his forties, wore a backpack which housed his materials for study and oration. At the event, he is eloquent in his expression of “a shared oppression across our people.” Mustafa works to rouse the crowd over the continued injustices that the groups experienced in the region, making connections which might seem strange and unlikely between each of these parties appear completely straightforward. The Hebrews round out their diasporic indigenous collective with these Sudanese inmates who have been central to narratives of ‘racialized Blackness’ through enslavement in the Middle East (Powell, 2012).
Together, these three groups form an indigenous diaspora in the region that the Hebrews utilize to further their argument about migrant indigeneity. Through connections with the Ismail family, they think about the Abrahamic faith traditions as relationships of people whose beliefs forged from a shared place. Through Abdullah’s work of building community with Hebrew leaders, they signal to the governments that rule their separate nations that peace is possible. Furthermore, their coalition demonstrates one of the many lingering problems that lie beneath the conflict of violence, illuminating an entrenched anti-Blackness drawn from both sides of the border and processes of racialized exclusion in a region that claims its battles are grounded in religion. Similarly, Old City resident Basir represents the heart of one conflict over a form of indigeneity that Hebrews fight against: namely the processes of racialization of Blackness that often denies or occludes a cultural production of indigeneity. Mr. Zain’s lived experiences in the region predate the occupation and construction of the nation-state of Israel and the development of two states where there was formerly one. His inclusion on the itinerary for foreign dignitaries and scholars attempts to re-narrate anything that these outsiders may have learned about the history and current reality in ‘the Land.’ The Hebrews have used their diasporic past to ground arguments about “the erasure of the (Black)African presence from the Land” to move into their indigenous future among racialized Black communities in the region who work to indigenize Blackness there. Building on the scholarship pioneered in *True to Our Native Land: African American New*
Testament Commentary (Blount, Felder, Martin & Powery, 2007) and a host of other Black theological studies and liberation theologies the Hebrew community has used these palimpsests of diaspora to re-envision themselves as central to the religious and spiritual narratives connected to the faith they practice. Similarly, through their connections to Mustafa and the groups of Sudanese inmates who live with them in the desert, their long history as the slaves of the region that dictates a narrative about Blackness and their imprisonment in Israel is connected to neo-colonial forms of anti-Blackness that are fostered by the United States government. The surveillance of Blackness shared between the Hebrews and the Sudanese consolidates in the threat of deportation which continues to color the experiences of this group of Hebrews, as well as trying to escape the ongoing violence (broadly construed) in their country of birth.

Hokulani Aikau’s work on indigeneity in diaspora serves as a critical frame for the Hebrews merging religious and indigenous diasporas albeit outside of discussions of Blackness. Examining Native Hawaiians in Iosepa, Utah Aikau acknowledges that most literature on indigenous people in diaspora focuses on the connections to homelands. Aikau changes the conversation by instead asking, how do “we maintain our indigeneity not only in relationship to home but also to the native peoples upon whose lands we dwell?” (Aikau, 2010:477). Aikau states that this begins the uncomfortable conversation of unsettling “settler colonial tendencies.” In Aikau’s estimation, “the settler-colonial frame cannot accommodate the diasporic indigene: the natives who have been exiled from their
homeland and who carry their own history of dispossession, exploitation, and expropriation with them as they settle in diaspora” (ibid, 479). Therefore, grounding her definition of indigeneity as a political category that draws from Jeff Corntassel’s re-definition of term, she writes that “indigeneity, then, is a broad category that reflects shared experiences of struggle against dispossession, exploitation, and expropriation as well as a point of view grounded in the particular cosmology and history of peoples that emerge out of their primordial relationship to a place” (Ibid, 480). It is this definition of indigeneity that gives voice to the migrant indigeneity of the Hebrews whose shared experiences of dispossession, exploitation, and expropriation have left them in a precarious position around settler-colonial politics in Israel/Palestine, in addition to the United States, and South Africa. Nevertheless, it is these definitions of indigeneity that illuminate how the formation of indigenous diaspora can move beyond discussions of indigenes in relationship to homeland and begin to analyze and theorize indigenous communities, like the Hebrews, out of a specific history and cosmology. The complexities of settler colonialism make indigeneity in diaspora difficult, particularly when racialized subjectivity seeks to repeal indigenous claims to land, non-slave status, and ethical, moral, and religious worthiness that have long been part of religious narratives.
Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Hebrews navigate their diasporic past to access their indigenous future. Moreover, throughout the chapter, I have illustrated the multiple and overlapping or palimpsests of diaspora that the Hebrews navigate to approach an indigenous future. I utilize indigenous identity formation as a modality for imagining solidarity and shared practice across national, ethnic, cultural, and spatial boundaries. Similarly, the chapter has worked to demonstrate how this tooling of a diasporic past and transnationally constructed indigenous identity is employed to power and empower community efforts to achieve goals like the purported adherence to community-wide health policies. By investigating the Hebrew diasporic logics, transnational community frameworks, and communal migration histories as a core aspect of Hebrew identity, one can more clearly see how, as Kelley and Patterson argue, diasporas are made and unmade.

My engagement with ethnographic data led to the development of two theoretical analytics, which are seminal to understanding the efforts of the Hebrew community. I presented diaspora as a theological episteme and embodied cartography to demonstrate how the vast canon of evidence that the Hebrews utilize is mobilized to organize, structure, and implement supporting belief and aligning policy within the community. Given that the Hebrew health policies are the basis of the Hebrew holistic lifestyle, analyzing these policies across diasporic, transnational, and migratory borders of the community is the
perfect entryway into understanding the indigenous Hebrew self-making process.

Throughout the chapter, I engage the spectrum of what I label as the Hebrew’s ‘diasporic past and indigenous future’ as a trajectory for framing the process in which the Hebrews are engaged that has implications for the anthropological inquiry into issues of identity relative to diaspora and migration. The Hebrews force us to consider how the dominant theories in anthropology warrant further nuance and analysis when brought to bear on a community like the Hebrew Israelites. Through a queering of the cultural productions of diasporic worlds outside of conversations of homeland, specifically those within the African diaspora that invoke the African retentions or the absence of a culture debate, migrant indigeneity, the core thrust of this dissertation emerges, as a mode of analysis for thinking through and with the communities like the Hebrew Israelite who do not inhabit stable theoretical moorings under which to find ideological safety for deploying identity-based claims. Working with Appadurai’s ethnoscapes as a frame for thinking about the intersections of identity formation, space, and place, this work illuminates the contributions of the Hebrew Israelites to our understandings of Black subjects who utilize theo-ethnic frameworks to construct identity. Building on the insights of the previous chapter, by eschewing the boundaries of the American nation-state to define identity, we witness how the Hebrew self-making process is constructed through the liminality of political belonging, local residence, and spiritual longings and nostalgia for ‘home’ that broach uncomfortable conversations about settler colonialism through which the
Hebrews claims to indigeneity are muddled among the multiple claims to land that arise in the multiple spaces and places they reside.
CHAPTER FOUR
Cooking Up Indigeneity:
Food, Performance, and Hebrew Self-Making

Whhzzz . . . was the sound the machine made as it chugged through ice, protein powder, and fruit, accompanying the whirl of the juicer that ran through tufts of wheatgrass, hunks of beets, and mounds of carrots. Here, in the US South, against the rev of the motor's engine and in its silence, I sought to ask questions about community practice while conversing with Uryon, the juice bar operator at the Hebrew restaurant, as he served community members and patrons. The first time I heard the whhzzz . . . I was in Dimona, in the southern Negev. There, it was the sound of Chaviva using the blender to mix together a concoction made of spirulina, bananas, tahini, and peanut butter, which would be breakfast for her youngest child. Whhzzz . . . was the same sound that startled me from my sleep one early morning in South Africa as Ahuva, my host, noisily prepared food in her Vitamix food processor, which was integral to producing just the right textures for the vegan provisions slated to be served during that afternoon’s festivities in a nearby park. As the wife of a community leader in that city, it was her job to stand as a model for newer members, especially as it related to cooking "Hebrew food" that met all the regulations and standards outlined in the community’s manuals.

In this chapter, I examine Hebrew food as cultural artifact and Hebrew food processing techniques as metaphor to analyze and theorize the connected processes of indigenous self-making across Hebrew diasporas. The sounds of
machinery—mixing up, breaking down, blending, and processing—mirrored their commitment to a “global” health project of non-communicable disease prevention and to the project of presenting the self and community as indigenous. This is demonstrated in the community's dietary practices, but also, most importantly, in their efforts to move them all closer to their goal of returning to what they believe to be the practices that would render them legible as "indigenous" to the arbitrators of authenticity where they reside.

Like the uneven sounds of the machines that often grunted, growled, and occasionally howled, the process of working towards an indigenous identity was one of the community's many perceptible challenges. I witnessed the Hebrews' numerous attempts to demonstrate a brand of cultural authenticity that would be believed and taken seriously by those outside of the community. It was confusing to most audiences how Uryon, who came to the community as an adolescent, Chaviva, who was born into the community and its practices, and Ahuva, who was an adult when she came into what is referred to as "Hebrew knowledge and identity," could serve all as cultural workers who could equally produce this form of indigeneity. To detractors, these were just Black people who were pretending to be something they were not. The complexity of the Hebrew argument for their existence as an indigenous community amid significant cycles of migration was difficult for many to believe. The lack of scholarly attention to the claims of indigeneity produced by this Hebrew community combined with the seeming implausibility of an identity grounded in a theological belief that many who had
been racialized as Black in the Americas (and spread this indigeneity to other Hebrew who were lost in exile) are descendants of ancient Hebrew Israelites was a conundrum for many. Nevertheless, the three aforementioned Hebrews work diligently to cook up indigeneity through their work in the kitchen and other spaces of food preparation, by producing the sounds of indigeneity that are counter to what others might believe is and can be authentically indigenous for this community. Through the sounds produced by their food preparation devices, they work tirelessly to illustrate their spiritual beliefs and shared practices through the vegan meals they prepare and the seemingly mundane commitment to uphold particular dietary standards for their families, the Hebrew community, and the wider public.

I frame ethnographic data with the Hebrews, which illustrates how their efforts to “cook up indigeneity” are structured in and against the Hebrews' presentation of popularized depictions of the nutritionally-bereft food cultures of the communities of Hebrews’ most recent migrations (i.e., the United States, the United Kingdom, the Caribbean, South Africa, etc.) and the residue of the processes of racialization on the dietary practices in these location. This builds on the previous chapter’s discussion of the overlapping diasporas that the Hebrews engage to construct indigeneity. I examined the Hebrew indigeneity manufactured by Uryon, Chaviva, and Ahuva, who work to decimate old ways of constructing their identity in light of their desire to advance new, yet what Hebrews believe are, historic modes of being. Here, through their work in these
food preparation spaces, each one of these Hebrews models the community’s goal of returning to what they believe to be their former indigenous selves through adherence to a foundational cultural practice: a plant-based lifestyle. Their indigenous self-making project focuses on producing, articulating, and translating claims about the self and their community through a register that often affords certain indigenous communities institutionalized rights and subsequent protections. Moreover, this construction of an indigenous identity works to address the condemning and enduring legacies of Blackness as a framework that often denies communities like the Hebrews authority to determine who they are culturally, in the world, how they would like to be understood, and what it takes to be respected by a larger doubting public.

That does not mean however, that the Hebrew process of indigenous self-making is always intelligible to those do not understand the symbolism of Hebrew vegan cooking. For many, there is a comfort in the traditional knowledges of indigeneity, which adhere to more normative definitions, emphasizing histories that predate colonial encounters, situated geographic residency, and the maintenance of cultural difference. Nevertheless, for the Hebrews, their avant-garde model of indigeneity is produced more unconventionally, grounded in shared belief and group belonging, and that utilizes spiritual texts to complement these cultural productions across the diasporas created through the community’s successive migrations over time. For Hebrews, their exile into these diasporas does not foreclose the possibility of
indigeneity because of their multiple migrations but, in fact, it foregrounds their indigeneity by drawing from an argument about cultural memory being produced through the reconstruction and recommitment to indigenous practices (such as the plant-based diet outlined in Hebrew Scripture) and the assumption of a durable spiritual identity that cuts across multiple sites of migration. Uryon, Chaviva, and Ahuva, while residing in different locations within the Hebrew diaspora, share an indigenous identity that is not connected to their residence in one space but rather to an indigenous mode of being in any space, which they demonstrate, in part, by their ability to produce or better cook up their indigeneity wherever they reside.

In this chapter, I focus on the work that the Hebrews do to perform, promote, and advance their indigenous identity through food and eating. As I demonstrate below, the work to cook up indigeneity among the Hebrews is difficult and filled with a number of challenges in their efforts to achieve their goals of recognition. In conversation with the literature in anthropology to understanding the relationship between food, eating, and identities, I utilize it to build on ideas about how the Hebrew goals of visibility and the construction of an ethnic cuisine that is often built on imagined construction of ethnicity, nationhood, and resulting ethno-national cuisines (Mintz and Dubois, 2002; Lockwood, and Lockwood, 2000b; Murcott 2001). Moreover, the relationship between food and identities has demonstrated the relationship between food, identities and gender and, in particular, the relationships between gender and
obesity, division of labor within families, sexuality, the right to food, and more (Mintz and Dubois 2002; Counihan and van Esterik 2013). Among Black communities in the United States, Whitehead and Williams-Forson (2002), Liburd (2003), and Rouse & Hoskins (2004) have written anthropologically about the relationship between food and identity. What is clear are the ways in which Hebrew Israelites utilize food to build on how they imagine ethnicity (indigenous Hebrew) and nationhood (the transnational Hebrew nation). Food and Hebrew foodways become a building block for how Hebrews structure, fortify, and construct identity. Throughout the chapter, I draw on ethnographic data to demonstrate the ways in which food, Hebrew foodways, and food preparation are central to how Hebrews cook up indigeneity.

In anthropology, Mary Douglas’ seminal work *Purity and Danger* (1966) on taboo, food, and purity pushed forward the study of food in the field and focused specifically on the Israelites’ commitment to God. Similarly, Douglas’ *Deciphering a Meal* (1972) establishes the complexity of the relationship between food and Hebrew dietary laws and considers the relationship between symbolism, religious practice, and the ordering of social life through Hebrew dietary laws. Her intervention in the literature illustrates the role of purity, maintenance of laws, and the relationship between food and society. As discussed in the outlining framework of the dissertation and previous chapters, the anthropological work on Hebrews has not included or focused on Hebrews who were raced as Black; therefore, this group of Hebrews, and their health practices, have not been
included canonically in the literature on purity and Hebrew dietary laws. Historically, anthropologists of this generation who have studied Hebrews who are read as Black have been marginalized from ethnographic work from other religious communities of practice, and/or their claims have not been taken seriously. However, more recent work like Jackson’s (Rouse, Jackson & Frederick 2016) has interrogated Hebrew dietary laws. Similarly, Singer’s (1981) efforts to understand the role of social medicine and Jackson’s (2013) work that provides an overview of the community are the only works that seek to really dig into the community’s efforts live out their laws which govern the community.

**Craving Indigenous Hebrew Food: Performing Dietary Preferences in and Out of Context**

On one of my first days conducting research in South Africa, I had a fascinating experience with the community in which I was working. It was an unseasonably warm day in the Western Cape, and the brilliance of the sun’s light reflected off the ocean and onto every part of the city. Although I had landed not even a full day before, I was eager to get my research started and participate in Hebrew community life in any way I could. Therefore, I phoned Sofiyah and Levi, the husband and wife who were the leaders of the community in Cape Town. They told me that they would come and pick me up and we would then go to the Hebrew class. While I was familiar with Hebrew time, when combined with South
African time, I was a bit confused about when exactly class would begin and how long it would all last.

Nevertheless, we were finally able to coordinate, Sofiyah and Levi arrived sometime before noon, only a couple of hours after we had discussed, and we headed out to the suburbs of the city to the office where Levi worked. When we arrived, the other Hebrews were already there, and we were ready for a full out discussion. Given my presence in class that day as a visitor from the U.S. and the fact that it was a current event in the news, they launched into their perspectives on President Obama’s warning to impose trade barriers after South Africa refused U.S. poultry imports following an avian flu outbreak. Although I felt the effects of jetlag, fasting, and informational overload hit me at once, I pushed through it all to try to take in all that they were saying.

Their engagement in food politics, U.S./South Africa trade policies, and the context of health in the nation was a natural segue into a discussion of the Hebrew community’s larger concerns about the influence of Babylon (in this instance the U.S.) on the health of those on the African continent. The refusal of South Africa to accept ‘bad chicken’ would become a metaphorical entrée into the complex confluence of factors and political struggles that were a centerpiece for local South African Hebrew rhetoric. The discussion of chicken and the U.S. would lead to a conversation about their perception of one of South Africa’s largest ills: KFC. The multinational conglomerate was the face of dietary vice and a corruption of the bodies, and minds of South Africans according to the
Hebrews. While the members of local Hebrew jurisdiction in Cape Town oriented me to the 24-hour KFC, and the abundance of this fast food outlet within a three-kilometer radius in the center of the city, I continued to listen to their points about diet throughout the class. The class would follow the same pattern as in other cities; current events, health watch, and then the main class. That day we spent four hours together primarily focused on the intersection of current events and health watch (vis-à-vis, bad chicken, U.S. trade policy, and KFC) which lead to the main class about the importance of Hebrew faithfulness and a focus on the upcoming national gathering of Hebrews across South Africa the following month.

In the aftermath of the class, I was exhausted. As I stood outside ready to depart, the heat of the sun made me weary, combined with the fact that I was hungry from fasting and was languishing from experiencing the intensity of Hebrew class all through the jet-lag haze of disorientation. I was not alone in my hunger, and Sofiyah and Levi decided to end our day by taking me to Cape Town’s Oriental Cuisine. Before heading there, we stopped by one of the towering centers of commerce to pick up their son and Levi’s mother, MaKarabou, who were enjoying their Saturday at the mall. I realized that this experience demanded that I perk up in order to capture the rich ethnographic data that was sure to emerge. Oriental Cuisine was an indoor food court where, according to members of the Hebrew community, you could find affordable vegan food. When I entered, I was surprised by the décor, attempts to recreate a blend of the
different countries, the mix of regions, cuisines, that all uniquely and distinctly made up a group of the populations now known as South African Colored. The place buzzed with people talking, purchasing tickets for food, placing orders, holding tables, and all other manner of street noise that wafted in from the center of downtown Cape Town. I surveyed the options and saw that there were places to get Indian, Pakistani (distinction theirs not mine), “Middle Eastern,” Chinese food (as well as pizza and gelato). My hosts were well acquainted with the place and decided on their choices quickly. The husband eagerly went to the Indian restaurant for vegetable biryani, and the wife settled on the hummus and pita. I had difficulties making a decision and took time to choose an item that I hoped would be worthy of breaking my fast. I eventually selected the Indian restaurant and purchased a vegetable curry.

Although Hebrews challenge the seemingly confusing identity of non-white persons who were and vegans, and MaKarabou lived in the same house with her son who confessed these beliefs for years, I was surprised by her response when she was visiting from Johannesburg. She was supportive of her son Levi’s decision to become a vegan and even purchased the food that he needed to consume when he was living with her. Despite this support, she wanted to consume and participate in the specifically class-marked and global forms of consumption, and she picked at the food her son purchased for her at Oriental Cuisine. Sofiyah took this opportunity to pipe up while we were eating, announcing that she loved hummus and pita and how she craved it. She declared
how she “missed the times during her pregnancy when she ate too much hummus in Israel.” Like many others, she raved about the difference in quality, richness, and flavor of the hummus she ate in Israel/Palestine as she recounted her time there. She relished in her nostalgia for Hebrew life and her devotion and expression of love for hummus.

Her mother-in-law, however, was confused by the entire scene and decided to interrupt her performance. MaKarabou asked, “where did you learn such things and since when did you start craving this food?” Sofiyah spoke about her visit to Dimona, where she first encountered Hebrew hummus while she was pregnant with the child who was responsible for gathering them all in celebration. MaKarabou dismissed Sofiyah’s cravings and this dramatic longing for Hebrew food in its most authentic form in its most authentic place in Dimona, then she promptly turned her attention me. We were sitting across from each other in close proximity, and I could hear her whispering about me and my consumption of this food. While I had only met MaKarabou that afternoon about an hour prior this conversation, she had already identified me in relationship to the American nation-state, then questioned my consumption of “vegan food.” She could understand the couple’s consumption of vegan food but not mine, because she could not believe that a person from the United States could be not be white and vegan (and not Hebrew). She was frustrated that, during her vacation from work to visit her first and only grandchild, she was subjected to this vegan food by a bunch of Black people eating after a long day of fasting on Saturday.
MaKarabou continued to indirectly question my consumption patterns. How could I have any relationship to the United States and not want to eat at the transnational fast food restaurants that surrounded us right outside the archways of the Oriental Cuisine? She did not ask me directly, but instead asked Sofiyah and her son Levi right in front of me, “Why is she eating this food? Is she Hebrew too? Doesn’t she want chicken?” It appeared to me that ideas about Black American cultural productions were circulating globally and for MaKarabou there was not much room for me outside of the stereotypical understandings of what Black people in and from the United States ate. While Sofiyah continued to relish in stories about the taste and textures of her hummus and pita, and while Levi quietly ate his biryani, MaKarabou continued to question, trying to find a “crack in the narrative” as well as camaraderie in her desire for some “good food.” Eventually, she had enough of this performance and made clear to Levi her plan to obtain something else to eat. At the end of our meal at Oriental Cuisine, she and Levi would go to get her some “real food” from KFC. MaKarabou could and would not suffer through story after story that Sofiyah and Levi were telling about their change in dietary patterns and cravings informed by a cultural logic that authenticated and indigenizes particular culinary preferences, patterns, and practices. When Sofiyah and I returned to the car with the baby, she would narrate a version of the Hebrew KFC argument that was the focus of most of the Shabbat class. She said, “you see what we mean now about South Africans and
their KFC? It’s crazy how they can’t live without it even when there are healthier and more affordable options.”

This ethnographic anecdote helps illuminate the ways in which the Hebrew community positions members of their community as ambassadors for crystallizing and disseminating their truth about the ways that racialized Black people can be outside of dominant narratives of dietary consumption that frame not only what is on their plates and in their bodies, but the very foundation of who they believe are that informs every aspect of what they do. For this reason, Sofiyah and Levi, who were celebrating the first birthday of their child, made sure that MaKarabou, who was with the child during the day, was given very strict instructions about what the child could and could not consume in one of the largest shopping malls in the region. This practice of navigating the marketplace as a vegan is part and parcel of the pride and heritage that the Hebrews construct as indigenous migrants who create, construct, and reinforce their identity through a daily practice of living, breathing, being, and consuming in ways that exceptionalize yet force the community members around them to see them for who they are in a real way.

For the Hebrew Israelites, the cultural work of creating dietary unity among members across continents is critical to the project of consolidating a particular formation of indigeneity. For example, in the above vignette, the South African Hebrew woman performed her cravings for foods she was taught to understand as Hebrew foods: here, hummus and pita. Moreover, critical to the
Hebrew portrayal of an indigenous veganism that challenges hegemonic constructions of veganism as it co-articulates with larger global indigenous veganism (Robinson, 2010) that otherwise depicts veganism as white (Polish 2016). As vegans, Hebrews were invested in demonstrating the distance between the processes of racialization and the cultural production of indigeneity, in this chapter that focus is on food. Given this premise, Hebrew racialization as Black challenged the perceptions of veganism as white and the origins of vegan diets to trends promoted by white enthusiasts (Harper 2011; Guthman 2008). The Hebrews are not alone in advancing an argument about indigeneity and veganism; there are other communities who are traditionally understood as indigenous around the world whose engagement of food and diets is often focused on decolonizing their dietary practices (Mihesuah 2005; Mailer and Hale 2015). Efforts like the American Indian Health and Diet Project (AIHDP), the Decolonizing the Diet at Northern Michigan University, and work through the Research Center for Indigenous Health Center at the University of Minnesota work to build an online knowledge depository on food, nutrition, and indigenous health work across anthropology, history, and health field to work to construct diets that many indigenous communities consumed prior to European arrival (Mailer and Hale, 2015). This research positions the work of Sofiyah and Levi in this encounter against MaKarabou’s perception and wider cultural notions that indigenes “who choose a meatless diet are portrayed as sacrificing cultural authenticity,” although in a country like South Africa and “in many of the poorest
areas of the globe [people] have a diet that is primarily vegetable-based due precisely to the low cost of vegetable production” (Robinson, 2010).

In a city like Cape Town, where veganism was the domain of the posh white circles often culturally, socially, and economically separate from non-white South Africans, that I observed through my life navigating the city without Sofiyah and Levi, I illustrate how Hebrews were able to access a gastronomic indigeneity that overlapped with their own community. They accessed a global-based vegetarianism and veganism of the pan-Middle Eastern, Indian, Pakistani, Malaysian, Chinese, and other ethno-national groups built on the religiously informed diets of Buddhists, Hindus, Jainists, and other groups that comprise the Cape’s Colored communities through which an indigeneity was cooked up for the Hebrews to consume (Nath 2010). While MaKarabou tried to call Sofiyah’s bluff in her hyperbolic performance of her craving for this food, she referenced her visit to Dimona during her pregnancy as her cultural cache for and of a specific non-South African otherness that created cultural difference and distance from the Native South African racialized Blackness between her and her mother-in-law. Although MaKarabou understood that I was a guest watching all of this play out, she, on cue, performed what is the antithesis to and the case for a Hebrew indigeneity: a racialized Native Black South Africanness that was interested in consuming fast foods. She decided after a long day and because she was on vacation that she would consume KFC, where she could even get pap (a staple South African food stuff made of maize) with her fried chicken.
Nevertheless, as I struggled through jetlag and the fatigue after a four and half hour class while fasting, I was thrilled by the emergence of this ethnographic diamond after my first day in the South African mines. What was clear from this encounter was the context in which South African Hebrews work to articulate an indigeneity that is consistent across global Hebrew spheres and reflects a dominant Hebrew narrative about Hebrew food, dietary preferences, and modes of consumption that distinguish Hebrews in any context even from family members and other relatives as close as mother and child.

Through these articulations of what indigenous veganism is beyond how it has been co-opted by whiteness, Hebrews also demonstrate the ways in which food is belonging (Slocum 2016; Stead et.al. 2010). In South Africa, this family demonstrates how an alter(native) indigeneity does not co-articulate with the indigeneity of Native Black South Africans. As a result, many Hebrews in South Africa discussed how their commitment to living and practicing as an indigenous Hebrews alienated them from the meat-based traditions and rituals of their tribal groups of birth. Through consumption, they articulate the boundaries of belonging through the creation of a gastronomic universe that is disengaged from the world from the cosmopolitan transnational consumption of KFC that is exceptionally popular in South Africa, as well as participation in cultural rituals with their ethnic groups of birth that demonstrates how food creates a group membership and, for Hebrews, an ethno-national universe of people across transnational boundaries.
Moreover, the Hebrews in this encounter demonstrate the ways in which a migrant indigeneity, the practice of Hebrew indigeneity, differs from a United Nations and internationally recognized local Khoi-San indigeneity in the Western Cape of South Africa, outlines a set of practices and policies that led them to decolonize their diets from the impositions of Western transnational food corporations and, more historically, from the work of centuries of settler-colonialism with the Dutch and British (Barnard 2006). In this vignette, Sofiyah and Levi work to illustrate the difference and distance between themselves and MaKarabou and her diet which they argue through the course of Hebrew class and in other moments reflects the impact of colonialism on the diet. For these Hebrews in South Africa, they were participating in a global indigenous movement around decolonizing their diets that connected them to the larger transnational Hebrew community of practitioners who were living the same way. I illustrated how the efforts to decolonialize their diets are motivated by their commitments to spirituality and in conversation with the larger efforts to repeal the imprint of colonialism in their dietary patterns that often manifested in the global disproportionate burden of diet-related chronic diseases in these communities. Therefore, by contextualizing the efforts of the Hebrews to signify to a form of indigeneity in these transnational locations, they co-articulate with the parallel claims of traditionally defined indigenous communities in Australia, Canada, Central America, and the United States who experience and enumerate similar health effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism (i.e. poor dietary health
and aligning health outcomes). Although their migrant indigeneity and the Hebrews as an indigenous community are not recognized their practice of decolonializing their diets and returning to the diets of their ancestors, their work situates them within a larger universe of communities who are working to transform their health through dietary change, to decolonize their body through food, and to re-indigenize the self and community through a set of practices and foodways that distinguish them from other communities. (Calvo and Esquibel 2016; Howard 2014; Nelson 2013; Elliot et.al. 2012; Mundel and Chapman 2010; Foley 2005; Waziyatawin 2005; Wilson 2005; Milburn 2004; Mihesuah 2003).

In the dissertation, I make an argument about migrant indigeneity, an analytical frame to understand the Hebrew iteration of indigeneity. Through my theoretical intervention of migrant indigeneity, I work to demonstrate how the waves of migration for Hebrew Israelites impact the ways in which they are able to “cook up indigeneity.” Drawing on the significance of food, migration and racialized Black identity in Chicago that generates the indigenous practices that Sofiyah and Levi are practicing in Cape Town through Tracy Poe’s work, I illustrate the Great Migration as central to the role of food in strengthening, preserving, and fortifying identity. Through ethnographic work with the Hebrews, I make a claim about how this recent history with migration from the U.S. South to the Chicago continues to permeate the cultivation of indigenous identity through food. Poe writes:

Migration strengthened their desire to preserve their traditions. Migrants'
symbolic identification with Southern foodways was reinforced as communal meals continued at family dinners, holidays, and community gatherings... Migrants managed to retain their foodways despite opposing forces much more pressing than their new neighbors' disapproval. Overcrowded housing with scant-to-inoperable kitchens and work schedules that kept many people away from home at mealtimes both could have prevented migrants from continuing time-consuming food preparation and elaborate extended-family...Contrary to expectation, however, "[B]lacks disappointed those who assumed an integrated American culture would accompany uniformity in tastes." As Cohen writes, "mass culture . . . offered blacks the ingredients from which to construct a new, urban black culture." (Poe, 1999, 10, 13-15).

Although Hebrews disavow the racial schema that would racialize them as Black without emphasizing their primary identity as indigenous Hebrews, this historic work demonstrates how migration functions in the production of indigeneity that I attend to in this dissertation. While traditional notions of indigeneity are unfurled by migration, I illustrate how migration can strengthen the symbolism of food and cultural identity for an indigenous group like the Hebrews. Even in South Africa, the practice of demonstrating indigeneity through Hebrew food is a mélange of commonly typified Middle Eastern food combined with what appears later in the chapter as prototypical Hebrew vegan soul food. Through this consolidation of food cultures, I show the complex work
involved in producing identity through food.

In his work on ackee, saltfish and amalá con quimbombó, Stephen Palmié (2005) shows the ways in which in Caribbean food is indigenized through Mintz’s legacy of the study of Black culture in the Americas. The proposal of migrant indigeneity breaks from the trajectories that seek to theorize Black culture in the Americas through African cultural continuities, which this work highlights in its framing of the historical processes by which “the concrete historical conditions under which heterogeneous cultural forms came to integrate essentially novel collectivities” by focusing on food” (Palmié 2005, 89). While Palmié discusses this work vis-à-vis slave societies, I advocate against narratives which enforce processes of racialization that overshadow indigenous cultural formation. Nevertheless, Palmié’s work helps us understand how “food constitutes a prime symbolic resource for modeling other, non-culinary domains of experience and sociality” (Palmié, 90). Through an engagement with this work, I ground evidence about Hebrew food to demonstrate how indigenous sociality is formed among the Hebrews.

“\textit{You’re not a Hebrew if you eat that}”: Community health policy policing

Spirituality is central to all claims that the community makes and is often critical to the livelihood of individual Hebrew members. For example, Hebrew
organize their lives around the practice of what they understand as the spiritual practices. From the first glass of water in the morning, prayers throughout the day, the practice of how to style one’s hair or dress the body, and ideas about the kinds of employment one should have, Hebrew spirituality filters through every part of life. In consequence, members of the community often attempted to defend the honor, valor, and integrity of the community’s belief system by policing other community members who acted in ways that were seemingly incongruent with the overarching Hebrew belief system. For example, a number of young people have been ostracized and punished for their inappropriate behavior, including conceiving a child before marriage, non-normative sexuality, inappropriate dress, rebellion against leadership, etc. In my interviews, young community members who had been ostracized from the community for their behavior discussed the no tolerance policy on behavior determined to be unacceptable by certain community leaders, which has been documented for through other ethnographic research and accounts (Singer 1981; Peters 2010). Often, these community members were prohibited from engaging with any other community members and were forced to leave the community grounds for months. Sometimes, these young people were sent away from the city or even to another country (another mode of framing life in the United States as a punishment) to complete the terms of their punishment. Public disagreement with Hebrew ways of life is generally not tolerated.
Given that this community has so many restrictions on eating, food was heavily policed. Community members measured how much food one ate, how often one ate, in what divisions one ate, the compositions and textures of food one ate, alongside the preparers’ skills and modes of preparation. Moreover, the results of food and, often, physical activity (or lack thereof) showing up on the body was heavily monitored. People were fat-shamed and accused of not following the “High Holy and Sacred Diet” if their weight was outside the what was perceived as normal.

Women bore an extraordinary amount of such food-related pressure, especially young women who were often pregnant every year or every other year, as they struggled to manage the demands of caring for young children and shedding pregnancy weight under very stressful conditions. Women’s bodies were evaluated in ways that male bodies were not, and recommendations were made on how they could change their appearance. Even as a non-Hebrew observer, I was not exempt from these evaluations and subsequently comments were made about my body weight, and questions were asked about my diet, exercise habits, etc.

Not only were the aesthetics of “health” questioned; what was at stake was one’s “failing spirituality.” For Hebrews, one’s adherence to the diet was a reflection of the right relationship with God and the instructions left to Ben Ammi and the divinely appointed leadership. Even in the desert, women who were part of the community, but lived in the U.S., trucked in waist trainers and
other accessories and ideologies on how to maintain one’s weight. They also fasted, juiced, and watched what they ate. Additionally, the consumption of foods that were on the prohibited list were grounds for any Hebrew to “check” their brother or sister for one’s failing commitment. So for example, one time I was in Dimona in the house of Chaviva, the woman in the opening vignette after she had prepared some fried potatoes to respond to a craving. Chaviva, who was generally a model for Hebrew consumption, prepared healthy and nutritious meals for her children and husband was not exempt from critique. While she was eating her potatoes, her friend walked in and attempted to correct this pattern of behavior when she told her, “You need to eat some salad.” Her friend went on to discuss the importance of a balanced meal and how her health was of utmost importance as a member of the Hebrew community. Although the woman generally ate healthily by her description, the friend’s recommendation to maintain consumption practices that appeared to balance the heavy carbohydrate intake with vegetable intake was a primary concern in the friendship between the two women.

While the Hebrews claim a specific investment in the health of their community and work to transform the rates of nutrition-related disease health outcomes that cast a shadow from their collective past and individual past. For Chaviva, as a child born to two parents who were born in two inner-cities in the United States, her diet was a part of a larger work to renegotiate the terms of engagement relative to identity. In the moments when I witnessed Hebrews tell
others that they needed to eat salad, fruit, or vegetables instead of items comprised of wheat gluten, fried foods, or heavy carbs, I observed how community members carefully navigated a balance between the various reasons for policing the food consumption of other Hebrews. In order for the Hebrews to produce claims about their indigenous identity, they believed that they had to enforce or remind Hebrews that to be a Hebrew means that one participated in the abstention from certain foods. Even among the Hebrew children, they were familiar with dietary policing practices and often some children got their Hebrew training in on me. They often quizzed me about what I ate and did not eat, (as well as what I wore or should not wear, or what I do or did not do) to assess my faithfulness to the Hebrew laws about what dietary practices were moral, ethical, and pleasing in the eyes of Yah even though I was not, am not, nor have I ever been a member of the community. It was evident at very young ages (as early as three and four years of age) the Hebrew children learned a way of being that discouraged would-be deviants from straying from the “path of righteousness.”

For the Hebrews, community policing is not only a byproduct of militaristic rule, living under constant threat of violence, but also a strategy to maintain order in the community. It also serves to police the “holiness” of members within the community. For the women, who are berated for the shape, size, and weight of the bodies, community policing is a strategy for training the body back into submission of what a “pure, divine, and holy” Hebrew woman

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5 This is not to suggest that Hebrews do not keep the secrets of others in the community, offer protection to each other, and/or keep “public secrets” (Taussig, 1999)
would be. Through efforts to maintain purity among the community, women and women’s bodies are the primary targets as Hebrews struggle from the high rates of overweight and obesity among Black women. Hebrew women are forced to manage their physical bodies “and normalize self-silencing in order to effect socially acceptable forms of femininity” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2016, 42).

Although she writes that theoretically there is a limited understanding of how the “costly performance of gender is experienced and borne on the bodies of all women,” Beauboeuf-Lafontant suggests that “for many ‘strong’ Black women, overeating is the outward expression of emotional states that have no direct mode of expression” drawing from this work, “it recognizes that food is a literal and more importantly a symbolic part of all women’s lives that allows them to manage experiences of trauma, powerlessness, and ambivalence with regard to reigning constructions of their goodness” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2016, 42-44).

For these women who have been racialized as Black, their quest to preserve, cultivate, and define the indigenous body requires diligence, sacrifice, and often a form of asceticism that can border on violence. That is, their construction of a form of purity resonates with an idealized body type primarily focused on women’s bodies. This type was drawn from Hebrews conceptions of what the body should look like if one is adhering the policies. As the primary producers of food and, subsequently, the primary producers of indigeneity, women in the community demonstrate the difficulties in cooking up a form of indigeneity that illustrates difference and distance from non-indigenous groups, but yet also
places them in a precarious position of non-indigenous through the quantities of consumption and the changes in their bodies.

Conversely, in her research on food and identity with African American women with diabetes, Liburd, a medical anthropologist and public health practitioner, asks, “how might the eating ritual be reconstructed for future generations of African Americans in a way that perpetuates sociality and a collective sense of community but still reduces the risks for developing chronic diseases?” (Liburd 2003, 164). Hebrews with recent histories in the United States work to detach themselves from an identity as African American, but contend with this diasporic past in which they demonstrate how they can construct a “sociality and collective sense of community but still reduces the risks for developing chronic diseases” (Liburd 2003, 164). The answer to the question for the Hebrews lies in the relationships that emerge between food and identity that are connected to chronic disease risk. Like other communities who have re-indigenized themselves, the Hebrew Israelites challenge normative conventions about eating rituals in what have been understood as traditionally “African American” communities through re-educating the community on their identity which re-structures their eating ritual, which in turn transforms their dietary practices, and often leads to different health outcomes relative to chronic disease.

The reasons that the Hebrews are so invested in ensuring that all members participate equally in efforts to perform a uniformed indigenous cultural identity is because their lives often depend on it. In the United States and in South Africa,
the stakes for these claims are lower in the sense that an indigenous identity was not central to securing citizenship rights. However, in these spaces the limited visibility and the hierarchical structure of the community made it so that the Hebrews were able to promote an investment in the production of collective representation of community law. For example, in U.S. South, I learned that many community members found the community policing and the militaristic rule of the community leadership to be overbearing as members of the community struggled to navigate the paranoia of leadership and the desire to control their every movement. Community policing and militaristic rule was not only for community members, because as I moved across the different international jurisdictions of the community, the Hebrew leadership often attempted to control my observation, participation, and examination of the community’s health policy implementation process. The community worked to control the narrative as well as movement in Hebrew space. The Hebrews who were still in the process of transitioning, becoming, and working towards their indigenous future were afraid I would see their backstage process of committing to the practices, which made them who they were or who they were becoming.

For the Hebrews across the jurisdictions, policing the dietary consumption of community members and outsiders like me was a way of signifying to their cultural identity that worked on multiple levels: 1) to demonstrate to fellow Hebrews and observers that they were faithful to the “Truth” and Yah; 2) through adherence to practices that made them who they were, they could then more
firmly stand in their ability to make claims for higher stakes political agenda items, like citizenship in Israel and also in intra-communal politics like social acceptance and worthiness in the sight of Yah (as determined by leadership); and 3) as a way to reinforce and affirm their knowledge of the “Truth.”

Here, in this description of diets and policing, Hebrews demonstrate how the community’s practice of enforcing community policy, vis-à-vis the histories of community leaders in the military and other hierarchically structured organizations (Singer 2000) serve to provide a theoretical mooring for the community’s practice.

Moreover, community policing has a purpose in the broader context of the Hebrew health policies that governed the lifestyles of the community with the goal of promoting health and well-being. This is significant given that “indigenous nutrition can be described as culturally and bioregionally specific food-related knowledge that results in a dietary pattern meeting basic nutritional needs while avoiding Western diseases. Indigenous nutritional knowledge emerges from Indigenous science with its distinct ‘ways of knowing’ and integrated, holistic worldview.” (Milburn 2004, 421). For Hebrews this builds their argument about a holistic worldview and way of knowing that confirms and places them in conversation with arguments with a global community of indigenous practitioners as well as other indigenous communities around food, nutrition, and disease prevention as elaborated in the previous chapter.
“Are you sick because you aren’t used to ‘our Hebrew food?’:
Demarcating Spiritual & Indigenous Identity Through Consumption

As it relates to food and consumption, during my observations of how community health policies around consumption were implemented, there was no attention to any culture other than Hebrew (which was developed primarily by racialized Blacks primarily from the United States who were also becoming and had become Hebrew). Moreover, I found that when it was meal time, it was not as if local South African vegan dishes were prepared but rather “Hebrew food” (as in Hebrew Israelite recipes developed by members who were born and lived outside of South Africa), the standard fare that they had been preparing and promoting for over three decades in their restaurants, kitchens, and homes. In the quest to be and become a recognized indigenous community, I have shown how community policing has been critical to the governance strategies of ensuring and enforcing a uniform approach to the Hebrew health policies. In this section, I will examine how being Hebrew and its aligning spiritual practices, most clearly represented in the dietary practice, are a way in which Hebrews demarcate spiritual and indigenous identity.

During the community’s largest gathering in South Africa, a biannual national gathering that brings community members from around the country together for celebration, and which happened to take place on the twenty-fifth of December, I had an experience that would assist with my understanding of the
stakes of how food signaled indigeneity for the Hebrews and how the Hebrews went about demarcating difference between themselves and others. In the heat of the beginning of summer in Johannesburg, I was overwhelmed by this four day-long event, which lasted at least twelve to fourteen hours each day. The Hebrews were kind and the energy was high among the saints. For many, it was a moment of celebration and an opportunity to see old friends, make new ones, find a new “pursuit” (a potential perspective “Divine Marriage” partner), demonstrate their commitment to the “real saints” visiting from Dimona, and be reinvigorated by the collective group with whom they shared spiritual practices. I, however, was spent by the frenzy of the event. There was so much going on in general but I was most troubled by the lack of soap in the bathroom. Since I had been in the country for a while, I was prepared (in my full-on U.S. socialized form) and whipped out a travel sized soap bottle I had in my bag along with my hand sanitizer, lotion, wipes, hygienic paper, and other just-in-case items. While I distributed these items to as many people as I could, I was not able to effectively respond to this impending public health catastrophe. By the final day, I was exhausted, and the stomachache I felt developing the night before had become a full-blown issue by morning. Nevertheless, committed, I went to the final day to hear, share, listen to and experience the day’s events. Before the events officially started, I felt ill to the point of not being able to sit up and listen to the final comments. I did not want to make a scene so I caught my breath, drank some hot water and lemon, and refused to ingest another morsel of the food that was
everywhere. When I disappeared into the bathroom to eject the contents that my body had consumed, I was discovered by a little girl who had asked her mother to go to the toilet. She took me into one of the rooms to lie down, and then the healing festivities began. It felt like a scene out of James Baldwin’s characterization of summer tent revivals/healing sessions.

First, I was told to drink charcoal water by the woman who found me through her daughter’s need to go to the bathroom. Later, a woman from Israel who was visiting South Africa and who I have known for several years, forced me into the hands of one of the more prominent local healers in the community. He had already introduced himself the previous afternoon as a person that “I needed to know” based on my research interests. Nevertheless, in my weakened state I was coerced into entrusting my health to man with little training in any system I was willing to submit to that would “heal” me. After triaging me, he recommended “clean filtered water,” cloves in a salt-water mixture, and pineapple juice. Soon another woman came to ask (not knowing I had been in the country for a couple of months), “do you think that you are sick because you are not used to eating our Hebrew food?” I almost sat up like I had seen a ghost. Instead of responding by giving this woman a full report of my research history with the community, complete with my vegan resume, and the amount of time I had been in the country, I laid there processing her theory about the source of my illness in context.
Throughout my time in South Africa, from this moment on, I would continue to hear the saints refer to “our Hebrew food” as a way of claiming an aspect of identity that they would make their own. For the saints in South Africa, learning and ingesting the diet of the Hebrews was critical to the maintenance of an identity that they sought as Hebrews who lived outside of Dimona and who were not born into the tradition. Therefore, the women and men of the community understood themselves and their practices as exceptional. In a place like South Africa, where meat eating was seen as a privilege and welcomed blessing, and where traditional ethnic cultures encouraged and promoted animal slaughter and meat consumption as a form of participation in the social life of the community, the Hebrews saw their veganism as unique, as an exceptional identity that made them unlike their national and international counterparts, and as a practice that was transnationally implemented among jurisdictions globally. Like those in the United States, the Hebrews in South Africa wore their veganism, or, as one woman in an interview described, “her obedience to God through her abstention from meat,” as a medal that signified their diligence in their adherence to the “Truth,” the laws, and the commandments of Yah. Their dietary practice marked their cultural difference from counterparts who do not uphold their indigenous practice. Dietary practice also offered them the prize of belonging to an indigenous heritage which they believed promised the benefits of “good health.”
After this moment of illness, I began to think about how non-Hebrew status could result in the perception that “their Hebrew food” could make me sick. While food safety issues, improper or a lack of hand washing, and lack of refrigeration were all factors that I thought might plausibly explain why the food made me ill, the person who asked the question about the food was not thinking about any of these issues and framed a lack of indigeneity as central to my diagnosis. This woman’s question was about how I, as a presumed regular and active meat-eater, and someone who was believed to be unaccustomed to indigenous food, would respond to their vegan food. While over the years I have often laughed at people who feigned allergies to fruits and vegetables and aversion to “healthy food,” in this moment, I struggled to understand exactly what she thought would make me ill. Although I was raised in a culture of not eating everyone’s food based on their own hygienic, lifestyle, and spiritual practices, as an ethnographer in a community with high levels of distrust, I relaxed my practice so many times in pursuit of the success of the research. In this moment of embodied learning, I was able to experience the boundaries of community practice among the South African Hebrews, in which everyone who did not profess to be a Hebrew was assumed to be an outsider to the spiritual practices of the Hebrew community. For the Hebrews, they believed that their way of life was grounded in “the strength of their spirituality.” The Hebrew spirituality, often assessed through one’s diet, was a method of determining one’s holiness.
For the South African Hebrews who were becoming Hebrews in this instance through food, they learned about the substance of group membership and one’s relationship to God. Nevertheless, about an hour later, one of the leaders visiting from Dimona, also in tradition of Hebrew grand performance, literally stretched his tall frame on the pavement of the parking lot in agony from this food poisoning. Indeed, in the days that followed, several other members of the community would relay messages after returning home that they were also ill and that it was not because I was not used to their “Hebrew food” but that there was a case of food poisoning after all. Still, as the health workers were collectively proposing different disease etiologies, the proposal of not being able to take their Hebrew food was the most ethnographically exciting.

In this above vignette, I examine how the Hebrews make sense of my case of food poisoning as a factor of my outsider status in the community. Through this established relationship between food and indigenous identity in the community and in the literature more broadly, the Hebrews cook up indigeneity through their food, but also utilize the body as a medium for determining who is a true Hebrew and who is not, based on their assumed notions of my ability to process their Hebrew food. For Hebrews, cultural identity is critically important as a medium through which community members signal to each other and outsiders that they are who they believe and say that they are. Similarly, through thinking about the practices of the body, in this encounter the Hebrews demonstrate that through the practices of the body or, as Mauss would say, the
techniques of the body, Hebrews deploy food as a mechanism to structure indigeneity. Through the daily consumption of Hebrew food, one becomes Hebrews; therefore, if one’s body rejects “Hebrew food,” it is a reflection of the fact that the person has not worked to become or been faithfully practicing as indigenous Hebrew.

Furthermore, it is through the diet that the Hebrews are able to produce indigeneity for themselves and others. Through the cultivating of Hebrew recipes, dietary specialties, and specialized practices, Hebrews are able to create globalized practices of indigeneity that can be enacted in small corners of the world by any Hebrew. Through the careful construction of a Hebrew lifestyle, diet, and modes of consumption, identity is expressed, transmitted, and produced by a large audience. For Hebrews whose veganism is connected to their investment in well-being not only for themselves but for the planet, they work to situate themselves with global formations of indigeneity that are connected to the discourses of not only health, well-being, and indigenous knowledge, but also as a connection to spirituality vis-à-vis the environment and God. There is clear overlap between the Hebrews and other groups, the latter of whose “choice to emigrate from the United States in the 1960s, commit themselves to veganism (the diet prescribed by Adam and Eve), and invest in environmentalism (a contemporary manifestation of man’s charge as guardians of Yah’s creation in the Garden of Eden), are acts interpreted as the fulfillment of their literalist readings of sacred texts” (Rouse, Jackson, and Frederick 2016, 187). In the Hebrew
community, indigeneity, which is grounded in theology and based on spiritual practice, food is critical to establishing identity as well as strengthening a commitment to the environment and God.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I looked at how food, Hebrew foodways, and food preparation are central to the work of the community to produce claims about indigeneity. I argue that the Hebrews deploy Hebrew food as a way of demarcating ethnic difference, reinforcing traditional anthropological notions around food taboos and purity relative to a reconstruction of Israelite law, and constructing an indigenous identity that co-articulates with global understandings of the relationship between food, indigenous identity, and health and well-being.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between indigeneity, food, and foodways. Building on the documented relationship between indigenous food and medicine (Milburn 2004), I explore the ways in which food is a proxy for indigenous culture, identity, and as foundational to health. Similarly, I focus on how the Hebrews, through their efforts to “cook up indigeneity,” utilize food and their foodways to perform their indigeneity. I interrogate the metaphorical overlaps between food preparation and identity formation that emerge from an ethnographic exploration of Hebrew indigeneity. Through this work, I look at the significance of indigenous food in the larger context of health and healing, decolonialism, and migration. Given the Hebrews’ history, I look at the ways in
which the promotion of indigenous and Black as separate categories which frames the development of the Hebrew’s global system has created a rupture between these two categories of inquiry. Therefore, I mine the role that food plays in the construction, consolidation, and maintenance of an indigenous identity among Hebrew Israelites globally. Through an engagement of the ways in which foodways are racialized in the Americas examining the separate constructions of Black and indigenous foodways, I illustrate how the Hebrew foodways are a mechanism of reproducing indigenous identity that reflect a larger Hebrew system of cultural values that organize dietary behaviors, meaning, and the significance of diet within the context of health.

Throughout the chapter, I emphasized how Hebrew food is a method for demonstrating their indigenous identity and which is built on their broader systems of belief and structuring cosmological worldviews, which the Hebrews would argue is a strength of their entire project and is the foundation of all their interventions, especially in the central role of food in their overarching health policy implementation. By understanding the position of food in the Hebrew self-making process, grounded in their spirituality, which is built on notions of the “Truth” and spiritual praxis, most prominently seen through dietary and consumption patterns, and in urgent social and political matters like citizenship and illuminating global identity formation processes, one has great insight into the construction of indigenous identity among Hebrews.
CHAPTER FIVE
When Policy Is Racial Exorcism:
Examining the Relationship between Culture and Policy

“No corrupt welfare system,
No guns,
No racism,
No lying politicians
No homelessness,
No locked doors,
No gambling,
No alcoholism,
No drugs,
No smoking,
No jails or prisons,
No fighting of any kind,
No hunger,
No gangs or gang warfare”
-Village of Peace Documentary (2014)

“Girl, you don’t know what you’re doing anyway.” I was confused and perplexed by the statement of the Hebrew woman whose kitchen I was in. I was attempting to assist her with her daily ritual of preparing a meal from scratch for her large family and assorted friends who might show up unannounced. I followed up by saying, “What do you mean by that?” She retorted, “people like you who live in the U.S. get everything out of a can and don’t know anything about cooking real food.” I was specifically confused that the woman before me, who was born and raised in Dimona and had only visited the U.S. once at that point in her life, had a narrative about my purchasing patterns and subsequent dietary patterns. Although we had developed a closeness, maybe even the beginnings of a sisterhood, as we celebrated being born under the same astrological sign, and kinship through our parents’ shared surname, in this
instance, I was reminded the perception of our cultural distance and difference. Indeed, it was in this moment, that we rubbed up against the very fiber of Hebrew cultural difference. I was not totally caught by surprise, as other members of the community had already presented me their theories that it was logically impossible that I grew up in Chicago (in the actual city limits and yet had not demonstrated any tendencies of violence or made any grand performance of stereotypical inner city behavior). If I was raised there, they believed there would be identifiable markers of Chicago in my being that were the substance of Hebrew community lore about the dangers of life in the city. They created the Village of Peace to have a space that would be everything they could supposedly not find in Chicago and places like it: safety, the absence of crime, no vices (like public intoxication, smoking, consumption of drugs), and homes where diets of healthy food made from scratch without the relying on canned food or processed foods, as enumerated in the litany above, were plentiful.

In this chapter, I focus my analysis on the relationship between “policy” and “culture,” as enacted through Hebrew practices related to nutrition and health. Specifically, I examine how “culture” is deployed and activated to construct both “policy” as a site of state power to pathologize Black bodies and health and “policy” as a response by the Hebrews to implement and enforce their own health practices, through a process I call “racial exorcism.” I posit that the efficacy of the Hebrew’s health policy implementation critically depends on the legitimation of certain defined cultural values and boundaries tied to their
conception of migrant indigeneity. As discussed more explicitly in chapter two, this form of indigeneity is grounded in theology and spiritual practice. For Hebrews, their exegesis of sacred texts, in conversation with their lived experiences and health research informs the community’s set of health policies and practices (i.e. veganism, fasting, increased water and fiber intake, decreased sugar and salt intake, as well as limited and prescribed oil intake, etc.). This chapter attempts to understand the global and local processes and competing forms of evidence produced both at the community level and within broader health systems and government structures that create and determine the success of the implementation of the Hebrew’s policies.

To make such arguments, I draw on ethnographic data from the community to show the tensions between state policy and Hebrew health policy, while looking at what culturally-based practices and claims inform the development and implementation of such policies. Through the body of this chapter, I focus on the relationship between state (or recognized nation-state, i.e. the United States or South African) policy and Hebrew national health policy. I utilize policy to reflect the collective of organizing practices and principles that govern matters of the state or nation. I argue that the structure of state policy has influenced counter-national Hebrew policy which attends to how the body is racialized through disease. In short I examine: what sociocultural processes are central to health policy implementation in this and other “vulnerable” and/or “high-risk” populations? What cultural legacies inform or are produced by the
Hebrew Israelite health policy implementation?

“Cultures of Poverty” and Policy

In the previous chapter, I discussed the work that Hebrews have to do to “cook up” indigeneity. I describe the work required to mix up, blend, and create textures for consumption as a metaphor to understand the production of indigeneity among the Hebrew community. In this chapter, I utilize the history of how state policy has been used to control, subjugate, and even “kill the Black body” (Roberts 1997) to make an argument about how policy has been employed to exorcise behaviors said to be attributed to the culture of racialized communities. I detail how the “culture of poverty” narrative is a frame for the “culture of disease” narrative that has been historically instantiated through biomedicine. Through an engagement with biopolitical and necropolitical arguments of race, narratives of the Black body are fully illuminated (Foucault, 1977; Mbembe, 2003) This chapter examines the scholars have helped pathologize the “culture” of black subjects to implement policies that harm and marginalize them; a scholarly position most prominently championed by anthropologist Oscar Lewis. Lewis’ (1963) seminal work on the “culture of poverty” was in direct conversation with the Chicago School work in sociology by E. Franklin Frazier, whose work on Black life concluded that the core issue within Black communities was the pathological Black family headed by a matriarch that led to the absence of the Black father. Frazier’s work formed the foundational
data used in the Moynihan Report released in 1965. The report would serve as a building block for the resulting policies that would continue to target the Black family, Black communities, and have different gendered effects on Black men and women. These effects, which persist until today, continue to be analyzed and disseminated widely inside and outside the university. For example, in the field of education, the school-to-prison pipeline is now a commonly circulated discourse contending with the policies that have favored tougher sentencing, increasing consequences for repeat offenders’, and aligning budgetary measures to allow for government funding to build more prisons. Moreover, Michelle Alexander’s (2012) *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* has demonstrated the ways in which incarceration in the United States is incredibly unjust and is connected to the country’s history of enslavement. Similarly, the discussion among activists and scholars alike about the Clinton Administration’s restructuring of welfare policy re-engages conversations about the relationship between culture and policy, particularly in regards to reproductive justice for marginalized women, as Roberts (1997) has suggested in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*.

To further frame the relationship between the culture of poverty and policy, I reflect on recent policy initiatives and their legacy to demonstrate how the U.S. has utilized policy to work to racially exorcise what they view as “undesirable” and “culturally pathological” behaviors. In 1996, the Clinton Administration’s enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work
Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) sought to reform social safety nets with the hopes of ending welfare, discouraging dependency, and promoting independence through accelerated workforce initiatives: “The passage of welfare ‘reform’ inaugurated a period of intense research activity by mainstream poverty scholars in the United States... Not surprising, much of this research has targeted the U.S. urban poor, particularly the African American urban poor, a group that both demographically and symbolically has occupied the center of public policy debates on welfare and other anti-poverty programs and entitlements for decades” (Morgen and Maskovsky 2003). These public policy debates on welfare and policy continue to demonstrate the absence of anthropological research on inner-city African Americans that seeks to broaden the discourse away from simply portraying the group as only having one socioeconomic class: poor. Indeed, sociology continues to dominate the discourse about inner-cities and the formations of identity there. Nevertheless, there are more anthropologists who are writing about the inner-city in the United States with ethnographic depth to broaden narratives (Khabeer 2016; Ralph 2014; Cox 2015; Vargas 2006; Jackson 2001) and about urban middle-class communities (Barnes 2015).

Morgen and Maskovsky (2003) point to anthropological scholarship that challenges welfare’s pathologizing of the behavior of poor, urban women of color and their household arrangements. Central to anthropology’s critiques of Lewis’ work is Stack’s (1975) *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*, which refuted the portrayals of Black communities as broken,
deviant, and matriarchal and instead presented a view of these communities as adaptive, resilient, and resourceful given the structural violence they face. These critiques have not been popularized or publicized in American society like the theories that pathologize Black culture and moralize the responses of Black communities to structural inequalities. Indeed, in the public media these notions of Black cultural pathology dominate. Davis (2004) demonstrates the power of image coupled with ideology that illustrates the specificity of racialized notions of Chicago Blackness as a prime location and prime fodder for thinking through how these discourses of pathology collide to produce and reproduce narratives about racialized Blackness—often exclusively wielded against Black women. Davis describes the “welfare queen,” which she argues became a household stereotype after Ronald Reagan used the image, produced through the Chicago media, throughout his presidency. The imagined welfare queen, who is believed to live a luxurious lifestyle while simultaneously receiving government benefits, is another result of the creation of the imagination of the possibilities of pathological Black “culture.” Nevertheless, it was not Reagan but President Clinton, who was believed to be a “friend” to the Black community in the United States, who would enact the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA); upholding his promise to “end welfare as we know it” by implementing term limits on assistance for resource-insecure families and children, creating work requirements, placing stricter terms on supplemental nutrition assistance (i.e., the food stamps program), and changing
the forms of assistance available for immigrants. Similarly, the same administration introduced the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994, which reified into law a clear difference in the way law enforcement would treat crack cocaine and pure cocaine. It also eliminated higher education for prisoners, allocated significant resources for the erection of new prisons, and created a dangerous three-strikes rule for repeat offenders. These acts of policy serve as evidence to support the argument that I advance in this chapter, that policies like welfare reform and crime control seek to exacerbate the racial demons created, in this instance, by constructions of pathological Black culture.

Through multiple acts of policy and concentrated efforts, policymakers are able to target and diligently hope to eliminate these cultural demons. I argue that U.S. policy, while working to exorcise the undesirable cultural practices and patterns specifically targeting racialized Blacks, facilitates the naturalization of assumptions that equate Black bodies with pathology and disease.

I argue that in the United States, policy has been the acceptable form for policing stereotypic caricatures and pathologized formations of Blackness. In each of the axes laid out in the Moynihan Report, we see the subsequent development of policy to encourage and promote changes in Black behavior as I have demonstrated above. The report’s effects were first reified into policy changes during President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty and his crusade against “ghetto culture;” policies have developed and evolved to respond to criminality (e.g. war on drugs, three strikes rule), education, housing, and of
course the “pathological” Black family.

**Culture of Disease**

In turn, this “culture of poverty” discourse—built on scholarly observations and evaluations of Chicago-based Blackness and encompassing a host of beliefs, images, state policies, and social scientific research—also transferred to the realm of Black health, producing narrative about the nutritional profiles, dietary patterns, and consumption practices of the poor in ways that further maligned and implicated the Black community. In other words, the “culture of poverty” has shifted to a “culture of disease” narrative, similarly imbued with a sense of concern and “care” for Blacks—much in the same tradition as Moynihan’s Report, which was written as a way of supporting greater demands for racial equity. “Culture” in short has become the dominant explanatory framework for why Blacks in the United States are deviant, dispossessed, and fail to behave and comport themselves like whites.

In efforts to address these cultural woes or problems, I argue that the Hebrews deploy counter policy measures, which are positioned to exorcise the very cultural behaviors they believe are responsible for creating black social deviance. The Hebrews specifically implement policies to eliminate those processes that racialized bodies as Black through disease, and provide as an antidote, cultural practices that promote their members’ indigeneity. In other words, rather than critiquing the “culture of disease” as a problematic social-
construct, driven by efforts to maintain racial hierarchies and inequalities, Hebrews have largely bought into these tropes and seek to address these health disparities by preaching a message about personal responsibility, which can be read as a neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility, as manifested through their spiritually-informed set of health practices that are community health policy. I return to my central assertion in this chapter that we understand policy implementation within the Hebrew community as a mechanism of racial exorcism. And to do so, we need to critically evaluate the role of nutritive practices in terms of both the imposition of modalities that directly impact the dietary practices and subsequently the health and well-being of the racialized Black subject.

In recent years, there have been growing academic critiques of these pathological constructions of Black identity within the larger context of the ongoing “culture wars”, though of course they have not been as prominent or powerful as the transnational efforts to connect Blackness to pathology and disease (Thomas 2009). Nevertheless, Small, Harding & Lamont declare that a “new generation of scholars also conceives of culture in substantially different ways” (2010, 10). This new generation:

“rejects the idea that whether people are poor or not can be explained by their values. [Contemporary scholarship] is often reluctant to divide explanations into ‘structural’ and ‘cultural,’ because of the increasingly questionable utility of this old distinction. It generally does not define
culture as comprehensively as [Oscar] Lewis did, instead being careful to
distinguish values from perceptions and attitudes from behavior... Still
others remain suspicious of the political intentions of the new culture
scholars, and charges of ‘blaming the victim’ have not disappeared from
contemporary discourse (Small, Harding, and Lamont 2010, 7-8).

I propose that the continuity of “blaming the victim” discourse in
reference to pathology combined with Hebrews move from the United States to
Liberia (1967) and then to Israel/Palestine (1969) limited their access to the
growing and more recent critiques of such pathologizing discourses. This is not to
suggest that they do not have critiques of United States-based public policy in
general, some of which have been responsible for their mass migration out of the
country. Nevertheless, the Hebrew demonstrate a complex balance of
engagements with these narratives which informs their internal community
policies and generates discussion around indigeneity. These events, combined
with their histories on the island of racially segregated Chicago, which continues
to produce national and global narratives of Black pathology, restricts their
perspective and their ability to produce community-based internally-generated
policies that acknowledges and incorporates critiques of this dominant
perspective about the pathologies of Black culture.

**Soul Food and the Pathology of Black Dietary Habits**

In order to frame the ethnographic research on policy implementation
with the Hebrews, I advance this argument about policy as a form of “racial exorcism” as a U.S.-based mechanism for behavior change. To do so, I build on Stephen Gregory’s work that seeks to push past dominant perspectives of Black ghetto life seeking to characterize all of Black inner-city life and formation of identities. He writes, “the social construction of identity or the ‘fixing’ of racialized, gendered, and other subject positions within a given social order is not only political, it is also the precondition of politics. From this perspective, the identity of [B]lack people in the United States has everything to do with politics (Gregory 1999, 13). I argue that the formation of racialized Black identity in the United States, which is critical to the development of a counter discourse of Hebrew indigeneity, has been structured out of stereotype and caricature through the alignment of politics, policy, social science, and the conjecture of media images. This foundational denigration of Blackness has led to a mirroring of U.S. policy and Hebrew policy, which functions to exorcise pathological formations of Blackness in order to produce different subjectivities. Through Hebrew efforts to reject the U.S. racial logics of pathology as a primary understanding of identity to replace it with Hebrew-ness as an indigenous way of being, shapes the parallels in the work of policy through the rejection or excision of narratives that racialize the Black body as diseased and Black (health) behaviors as pathological to embrace their spiritually indigenous way of being.

Anthropologist Dana-Ain Davis’ (2004) work emphasizes this argument in her essay about the intersection of stereotype vis-à-vis the “mammy” figure,
welfare reform, and work. Davis states, “welfare policy mandates draw on stereotypes of Black women through what [she] call[s] ‘mute racism’” (274), which enables us to examine the confluence of policy, social science, and the constructed image and perception of Black dietary behaviors. The stereotype of the mammy, which reinforces the image of the overweight/obese Black woman, intersects with other representatives of unhealthy eating patterns in Black communities through documentaries like *Soul Food Junkies* (Hurt 2012) and movies like *Soul Food* (1997), to indict Black cultural (dietary) practices as the culprit for diseases like hypertension, obesity, and diabetes; diseases that have been racialized as “Black.” Whereas research has demonstrated that Black communities in the United States are inundated with marketing to consume high sugar, salt, and fatty foods, while the structure of racially-segregated neighborhoods often makes the consumption of “healthy, fresh foods” mostly inaccessible, Black cultural patterns continue to be implicated for their unhealthy eating behaviors.

Therefore, the notions of Black pathology have been followed with state policy measures to encourage and excise deviant “pathological” behavior. The culture of poverty trope has become the culture of disease when dealing with the complicated relationship between dietary practices, culture, and disease (Lucan, Barg, and Long 2010; Lucan et.al. 2012; Airhihenbuwa 1996). Although policies have not been developed to address the disparities in the abundance of fast food outlets, the limited availability of full service supermarkets with quality food, the
lack of targeted marketing and advertisements to encourage certain consumption and purchasing patterns, and the inequalities between the cost of healthier choices and less nutritionally-dense options in Black communities, there have been numerous interventions to transform individual and family dietary behavior (Greer and Kumanyika 2008; Odoms-Young, Zenk, and Mason, 2009; DiSantis et.al 2012). Given the established relationship between culture and dietary consumption, efforts to change “health behavior” are often efforts to address processes of racialization that are leveraged as cultural practices instead of a more robust understandings of cultural/health behaviors that are determined by structural factors and discrimination.

It is within this context and backdrop that we can then see how Hebrew policies similarly respond to these transnational racial ideologies about the racialized Black body, behavior, and health. For the Hebrews, these ideologies are activated as spiritual practices and policies around “healthy eating” and a rejection of the vices and sins of a standardized Western “modern” diet. Migrant indigeneity emerges from a Hebrew understanding of their health practices as cultural which are drawn from spirituality. In other words, Hebrews’ understandings of God’s commandments co-articulate with public health recommendations for preventing and reducing risk of NCDs, which biomedicine tells us is incredibly difficult to do in “high-risk” populations such as racialized Black communities. Hebrews’ spiritual practices, enacted through their health policies, subsequently align with their cultural production of indigeneity—
understood as an attempt attend to the rupture of their relationship with God—while responding to the biomedical/public health community’s discourses about race and disease risk and still popular discourses around the culture of poverty and its successor, the culture of disease.

**Nutrition-Related Diseases in the United States**

That is not to suggest that governments have not adopted policies to try to address the drastic rates of nutrition-related disease, particularly in Black communities. In the United States, health care reform, in the way of the Affordable Care Act, sought to transform U.S. health care organization, management, and delivery by emphasizing disease prevention and health promotion as a national strategic priority (Koh and Sebelius, 2010; Fielding et.al. 2012; Koh et.al. 2010). Understanding how to implement prevention policies into practice, particularly in high-priority areas such as diet-related NCDs, is one of the most urgent health policy and practice issues today. Changing food consumption practices is a fundamental disease prevention strategy, but has been met with limited success at the population level (Guenther et. al. 2013).

The U.S. Black population experiences disproportionate levels of diet-related NCDs. For example, Blacks in the United States are 40% more likely to have hypertension and 18% less likely to have it under control; similarly, the group is twice as likely to be diagnosed with diabetes, and have the highest rates of obesity (47.8%) compared to whites (CDC 2012). Additionally, Blacks in the...
United States have dietary patterns that are further away from guidelines compared to other Americans (Guenther et. al. 2013; Zhang and Wang 2012; Kirkpatrick et. al. 2013). Similarly, in South Africa, after decades of focusing public health efforts on reducing and preventing HIV/AIDS, the country is now experiencing a major transition in chronic disease risk. A combination of factors, from sustained urbanization to rapid economic, social, and technological changes, has resulted in drastic increases in NCDs, such as obesity and cardiovascular disease (CVD). At the national level, South Africa’s Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases 2013-2017 has prioritized non-communicable disease prevention and called for collaboration among all levels and sectors of the government to implement policies addressing NCDs as a public health issue. Although the strategic plan ended in 2017, the South African Declaration for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases has a target deadline of 2020, which makes understanding how to implement NCD prevention policies in practice one of the most urgent health policy and practice issues in South Africa.

The international attention to this issue has been well-documented; however, less attention has been devoted to how communities perceive what epidemiologists have noted as an “urgent global health issue.” Similarly, there is little known about the cultural aspects of this issue and the relationship between the processes of racialization, cultural diet, and disease that are being formed here. Although health researchers include race as a variable, there is little
information about the meanings of race; where these dominant broad racial categories are appropriate and valid, or how racial categories intersect with cultural practices. My research with the Hebrew Israelites seeks to take on these questions by thinking about the relationship between race, culture, and health, as it relates to dietary practice and health policy, to address the urgent public health issue of alarming rates of NCDs, which disproportionately fall in poor and marginalized communities. Moreover, through assessing the implementation of policy, I point to how the culture of disease narrative has impacted the psyche of policy developers and implementers to focus on work to create a society and people who are not pathological and diseased.

**Hebrew Policy-Making**

Seemingly mirroring the discourses and logics of U.S. policy, Hebrew spirituality encourages work and messages concerning health promotion that privilege the project and concept of personal responsibility. However, I assert that the Hebrew’s individualized focus is not necessarily an enactment of neoliberal subjectivity, but rather a way of privileging autonomy to rebuild new structures and promote individual agency to create new realities both in and through the body and their identity. I point to the ways the Hebrew community, which is racialized as Black but argues for an indigenous identity, utilizes policy as a method of consolidating identity and establishing cultural difference. In doing so, this chapter examines how the process of Hebrew health policy
implementation that seeks to globally unify Hebrew cultural practices specifically related to dietary consumption is engaged with the relationship between policy, social science, and group image. As it relates to the nutrition-related chronic disease, the stereotype of the fat Black woman that normalizes obesity and the family history of chronic disease (either hypertension, diabetes, or both) among racialized Black persons are supported in this trifecta. Through the ways in which dietary practices are connected to culture and, subsequently, race, I look at how policy is a form of racial exorcism.

The Hebrew woman in the opening story is a prime example of how Hebrews employ policy and the formalized principles of Hebrew culture to address the processes of racialization by establishing and living by the cultural practices of indigeneity. For many Hebrews, inner-city metropolitan U.S. Blackness is the cultural foil for their community. Founding and other community members’ actual lived experiences coupled with the constant onslaught of narratives that denigrate, disempower, and dehumanize through a projection of cultural pathology seeks to confirm their own perspectives about Blacks and Blackness. Hebrews who were not privy to the critiques against the dominant, forceful, and defining theories of urban Black life (particularly in Chicago) utilize these theories uncritically as a baseline residual that they must rid their communities of in their quest to spiritually enact their identities as Hebrews and move beyond the externally-imposed racialization processes that have prompted their claims of indignity. Given this history, in this chapter I
examine how Hebrew health policy implementation is utilized to respond to the under-explored culture of disease trope that normalizes poor dietary patterns and accompanying disease (like obesity, hypertension, and diabetes) which are then disciplined, restructured, and often excised through the Hebrew model of health policy.

Dana-Ain Davis (2004) has described the process by which mammies are manufactured and “concretized through policy, we may consider this nexus of policy, images, and ideology as a mechanism.” Likewise, I chronicle the process of how policy racially exorcises ideas about racialized Blacks supposed poor dietary habits, which includes processed or junk foods and which leads to the overweight or obese adults, and persists until the presence of diet-related non-communicable disease, like diabetes or hypertension. Hebrew health policy, which seeks to globally universalize the practices of all members, is similarly built on ideologies that connect Black culture to poor health outcomes. Much of Hebrew health policy insists on undoing the inscription of racialized Blackness within their own habits, practices, patterns, and bodies. Ethnographically, I support this argument through exploration of the process of racializing the Black body that embeds NCD like diabetes and overweight and obesity in and on the bodies of Black women.
Life in rural South Africa can be devoid of what a cosmopolitan person enjoys the most about life, what one may call the “sweetness of life.” There is an absence of the thrills of big city nightlife, the bright lights, tall buildings, and the variability and diversity of life. The differences in the kinds and variety of people to meet, places to go, and things to do can change one’s perspective on life. Moreover, distance from urban life can create a chasm between one’s ability to engage in some of their most desired vices. While away from indoor plumbing, street lights, nightlife, restaurants, bars, and clubs, ethnographically, I found myself situated at a distance from another aspect of the sweetness, the thrills, and one of the joys (and potential dangers) of life: sugar. Now, I would not classify myself as a sugar fiend, and I can fast, juice, and diet with the best, but I have found and enjoyed a certain comfort in sugars. Sadly, during my time spent in rural South Africa, I was confronted with what I would consider the most rigorous aspect of the Hebrews policy implementation.

Although I had conducted research with the Hebrews for several years by this point, when I arrived to this woman’s home, who I will call Ma Dikela, I had never seen anyone uphold the sugarless week in my presence. Given that it is a pillar of Hebrew life, which is widely discussed, I assumed that many community members would take pride in being able to abstain from sugar for a period of time. Nevertheless, I waited but sugarless weeks never came while I was living
with the community in different locations. However, in the unseasonably cold start of autumn on her family’s homestead, I found myself living in a home that rigidly adhered to the policy of reducing sugar in their diets. I was challenged by my time in Ma Dikela’s home to take seriously what the Hebrews professed about the overconsumption of sugar in the diets of those influenced by Western gastronomical colonialism. It was not something that I noticed immediately. I had taken a plane from a major city to a smaller city, waited in the airport, then got a ride from two strangers to the bus station. They ensured that I was in the right place. From there my bus would take me from the smaller coastal city into the lands that used to be the Transkei, the official homelands for Xhosa people, the tribe disproportionately representing Black South African political leaders. Arriving in the former capital city of the republic, the woman who was scheduled to pick me up purchased water, and we began our drive from the city into the rural land. What should have been a forty-five-minute ride turned into a two and half hour drive inland given the conditions of the roads. I was tired from what was already an eight-hour journey before we set off in the car. We spoke in the car about her life in the Hebrew community, and she shared with me some of her experiences and understandings of Hebrew life in Ngcobo.

We finally arrived at Ma Dikela’s home in the darkness that only rural life can provide. The kind of darkness, in which the sky provided the light for the night and required concentration, which was key to navigating the horrible road conditions and the animals who might have found their way to the road. When
we arrived I was grateful to see the woman who would be my host, in the darkness of the night. As a guest, I was given permission to eat even though the sun had already set, and it was officially the Sabbath. The mixture of a travel-weary haze, the new environment, and the new people did not allow me to thoroughly process that my pre-Sabbath meal on the night of my arrival was nothing like the weekly Friday evening seder feasts that were standard in Dimona. I was given a simple mashed avocado paste, some seaweed salad, a cold micro noodle salad, and a glass of carrot juice. The evening was cut short on the account of the lateness of the evening and the fact that the Sabbath had already officially begun. They had already overextended themselves by engaging in activities and allowing me to engage in activities in their home that would not be permitted during the Sabbath like using electricity, preparing and serving food, driving their cars, bathing, etc. Given that it would be at least another twenty-four hours before I would consume another meal in the home of Ma Dikela, I was not aware that the only sweetness available in that home would be her kindness and personality. The next day, the Sabbath meal, while physically satisfying after a long, chilly, and exhausting day of Shabbat class and several interviews with community members, again did not contain any additional, overly accented, or noticeable amounts of added sugar.

It was not until Ma Dikela and I were taken by another community member, who owned a car, to the grocery store that I learned more about her story, which I was able to put in context with the larger community out there on
the homestead. She disclosed that she did not consume any additional sugar, and the only significant source of sugar that she would allow herself to consume was the carrot juice, which was free flowing. Her diagnosis of diabetes prompted a shift from a diet that included foods in the new standard (now modernized and globalized, read: processed) South African diet that would include sugars. She went cold turkey on all additional sugars and even consumed her porridge, a food that her grandniece who lived there with her would not touch, without additional contents. I was not prepared to adhere to this strict approach, and I purchased some raisins on our journey to the supermarket in town, which I put in my porridge or morning oats. It would be my only added sweetness through the time there.

What I learned was that Ma Dikela as well as other members of the community, were not new uninitiated converts to the Hebrew health policies, but instead were already upholding the dietary practices Hebrews outlined for their members in South Africa prior to officially becoming part of this group of Hebrews. This community of women and one man was led by a woman who was formerly a minister in a Christian Church, who was put out because of her radical views and approaches. When this woman, who I call Ma Mafungwashe “left” the church, one woman was with her, and later other women found them through their work. Each of these women were educated and were responsible for educating the young scholars in their rural community as teachers. Ma Mafungwashe had already earned her Master’s degree in Education and was
considering a Ph.D. in Europe or the United States when I was living among them. These women living out on the homestead were social anomalies in many senses in South Africa: they were educated, wage-earning, heads of household, home owners, and most were above the age of forty, meaning that they had come of age under the brutal apartheid regime. Similarly, they were united in their collective commitments to health that predated and yet was framed by their participation in Hebrew life. Almost all of the women were vegetarians prior to their formal absorption into the Hebrew community based on their own study of the Christian Bible and discovery and embrace of their Hebrew identity. It was a simple case of vehicular malfunction that led to their meeting of a community of people who shared their beliefs about dietary practice, reference to themselves as Hebrews, and a commitment to communal life. They surveyed the information they were presented with by other community members that allowed them to make the decision to be a part of the Hebrew community. Subsequently, they had an anchor, a broader community, international leadership, governing bodies and structure to support then when it was just a group of women who were living out the faith they researched. This group of women, which included Ma Dikela, Ma Mafungwashe, and others were some of the most steadfast in their dietary practices. Indeed, they represented the strictest Hebrews in all of my experiences within this transnational community, which is why they made clear what defined the Hebrew policy around food and spiritual practice. Abstention from a wide variety of foods was a form of spirituality that drew boundaries of belonging.
around the Hebrews as localized communities, as well as a transnational community framed and bolstered by their shared identity and practice.

Even in these rural spaces, the larger narratives about race, Blackness, and racialization emerged. It was clear that South Africa, as the democratic leader on the African continent, was also a leader in the rates of NCDs on the continent. Therefore, the narratives of Blackness, the body, and racialization were a core part of the conversations on disease risk. For Hebrews, who imported theology, they also imported ideologies and the overlapping diasporas that made it possible for the community to exist as one. The deficiencies and negative associations that constructed Blackness that the Hebrew sought to rid their community of what were the same principles embodied in Ma Dikela’s desire to treat, manage, and reverse her diabetes.

Women in the age group of Ma Dikela, who celebrated her sixty-third birthday while I was staying at her home, lived with her through a diabetes diagnosis and drastic attempts to reverse it. She told me about participation in another religious community where she was sick for months and months afterwards. It was ultimately the care of this group of women that nursed her back to health. For her the stakes of her mostly sugarless life were the regulation of her blood sugar levels and overall disease treatment, management and reversal. Incorporating the reduction of sugar in her diet along with increased fiber, purified water, and an assortment of vitamins and supplements was a
lifestyle that reflected her theological beliefs, her identity, and her commitment to living beyond diagnosis.

This is what made it easy for her and the women in her rural community to do health promotion work with Christian churches, which invited them to speak about their health practices and beliefs. I observed firsthand how these women shared their Hebrew knowledge of food groups, dietary mixes, and nutrients with these congregations. One of them told me “No university educated nutritionist wants to come and work in the rural areas, but when we try to share our knowledge with people they question our qualifications to do this work.” The women told me on the drives through their ancestral homelands about their efforts to educate their people, not only as an extension of their work as educators who worked in the school system, but as people with knowledge about “health.” They talked about their people dying and suffering without any knowledge of how to care for themselves.

These women were sophisticated in their articulations of race and gender-based violence that was not only initiated by whites and men, yet followed and reproduced the Hebrew ideologies that health was one’s personal responsibility. Therefore, through the distillation of Hebrew health policy, the structured cultural practices, they were able to address the ways in which the South African Black body was racialized and often racialized in gendered ways. Their astute analysis of the politics of how living in a rural environment intensified the urgency of their project and what their presence meant to all subsets of the
population, therefore, was important for understanding the community’s perspectives and the cultural values that undergird their policies. Nonetheless, for Hebrew women like Ma Dikela, they understand the work of treating, managing, and reversing diabetes is their personal responsibility and a demonstration of their commitment to the community and God, which in turns reinforces their identities as Hebrews.

**Racial Exorcism**

Hebrews use their own strict adherence to a particular spiritually-informed health policy to racially exorcise the demons that have emerged from the processes of racialization of Black South African bodies. Hebrewism acts as an agent that actively performs this work of addressing the racialization of the body the continued circulation of the culture of disease trope. Much like in the Clinton Administration’s policy, personal responsibility and work were core components of the community’s approach. Hebrews regularly professed that worship was hard work and recited a community theological belief steeped that personal responsibility would not only resolve their disobedience to God but also address the external processes of racialization that had been embodied. For example, Black South African women’s bodies were racialized in South Africa as being the sources of the highest rates of diabetes, therefore worship was the work that MaDikela had to do to reverse the ways this disease racialized the Black woman’s body. Through her efforts to change her disease status, her invocation of
Hebrew ideologies—grounded in theology and which shapes health behavior practices mediated her adherence to the health policies—reflect a commitment to living according to an indigenous mode of being. Subsequently, through her efforts to excise behaviors (i.e. the consumption of sugar), which is normally widespread among other subjects like her—Black South African woman elder living with the new freedoms of democracy—to uphold the parameters of Hebrew communal belonging in a rural South African space. And in doing so, she is challenging the patterns of behavior and subsequent disease that have become all too common for Black women in South Africa, given that the rates of diabetes in the Black population in South Africa are alarmingly high and have increased in recent decades (Peer et.al. 2012). In other words, her health work and adherence to the policies of the Hebrews help differentiate her from the average Black woman subject and in the process reify the Hebrew claims of “cultural difference” and the empowering effects of personal responsibility and collective agency to achieve differences in health.

Interestingly, within this practice of promoting cultural difference from the ways in which other Black bodies are racialized through strict adherence to their health policies that enact indigeneity, the Hebrews do not fully contend with the ways social inequality and health disparities still affect and afflict their bodies with disease and death—despite these their spiritual practices and policies. For example, after the death of the Hebrew’s esteemed leader, Ben Ammi Ben Israel, the community’s remaining leaders in Dimona engaged in an active public
relations campaign not to disclose the cause of death to the wider public or even rank and file members of the community. I was in Dimona following the death of the leader, when one of the community’s health leaders confessed, “We are still very much committed to upholding physical immortality as a community goal, even more than ever.” There was, in other words, very little room in their narrative for public grief or even an acknowledgement that disease coupled with death could still affect them. They could not provide a nuanced understanding of disease and death that could not be overcome through their spiritual-based practices of health, which they believed could produce everlasting life. The Hebrews only make room in their worldview for the manifestation of social inequality through disease as something that affects racialized Black communities living in Babylon (the Western world), what I refer to as the processes of racialization that are embodied.

Similarly, Hebrews do not attend to the effects of “affliction,” an anthropological concept that addresses social inequality in disease and which suggests “the embodiment of social hierarchy, a form of violence that for modern bodies is increasingly sublimated into differential disease rates and can be measured in terms of variances in morbidity and mortality between social groups” (Nguyen and Peschard 2003). Instead, the Hebrews focus their narrative on their responsibility and role in change. The Hebrews focus all of their efforts on themselves, their bodies, their ways of being, and their acceptance of responsibility for their actions. While they acknowledge the persistence of social
inequalities, social hierarchy, and social disenfranchisement, which have consequences on one’s health, they also believe they have the ability to change these structures one person at time. Strangely, it was the continued evidence of racial inequalities in health in the United States and South Africa that further engendered, fostered, emboldened their efforts to adhere to their indigenous practices and transform their ways of being, and even more profoundly, their cultural identity.

For the Hebrews, they take on a form of personal, communal, and theological responsibility, which sought to address the embodied effects of health inequalities based on race. I argue that this emphasis on personal responsibility and work attempts to distance Hebrews from traditional, local notions of racialized perceptions of how Black diets impact their health outcomes and structures how Hebrew policy is employed as a form of racial exorcism. By eliminating any additional sugar from her diet, Ma Dikela demonstrates how “the violence of racialization is exerted, experienced and performed through the body” (Fassin 2011, 428) and how the Hebrew community institutes practices to address this violence through excision and invocation of a set of cultural practices that are the “true” practices.

Ma Dikela is a prototype for the Hebrew community and her example illustrates two major points: firstly, the relationship between culture and policy that draws from a longer history of how social science, policy, images, and politics converge to produce claims about how the racialized Black body and the resulting
‘scientific’ assertions about biological differences between races, secondly, how excising behaviors that have been naturalized through the processes of racialization is effective for establishing their larger claims for cultural difference grounded in indigeneity. Ma Dikela demonstrates that although the health practices are community policy, they are, at their core, simple practices of Hebrew culture that are being reinstated through the reinforcement of a set of cultural values. These cultural values position Hebrews as culturally different, vis-à-vis indigeneity, compared to their counterparts in spaces around the world and, through the excision of the larger dominant cultural practices, given the community credibility to further their claim of indigenous identity between, among, and within communities of seeming cultural similarity.

This is significant because, as Philippe Bourgois writes (2001), “from a theoretical perspective, the legacy of the culture of poverty debate has impoverished research in the social sciences on the phenomenon of social suffering, everyday violence, and the intimate experience of structural oppression in industrialized nations” (Bourgois, 2001:11906). I argue that this culture of disease framework builds on previous frameworks and establishes that those in this culture are “trapped in self-perpetuating cycles of dysfunctional behaviors and attitudes [... that escalate] facile neo-liberal blame-the-victim interpretations to capture popular imagination and policy debates which must be eliminated and rightfully corrected, as they erode the utility of social science methodologies to explain and detail problems and offer meaningful solutions” (Bourgois,
2001:11906). Subsequently, we know less about how these discourses impact communities of racialized others.

**Transnational Narrations of Health**

The “culture of disease” framework enlivens the discourses that mark the rates of diet-related chronic diseases these communities as “unexplainable” by basic “scientific” methods and, therefore, warrant genetic exploration for a deeper meaning that lies at the cellular level. Moreover, these arguments about disease etiology bypass environmental and structural explanations for the diseases and utilize personal behaviors and seemingly unchangeable genetic material as the cause when one seeks to roots the causes of disease more securely and with greater depth into racialized Blackness. It is this concept, as “the problematic analytical and political utility of the culture of poverty concept [that] demonstrates how dangerously essentializing the phrase ‘culture of ...’ can become with respect to any concept” (Bourgois 2001, 11906). Here, I examine how the Hebrews utilize the culture of disease trope as a reference point to counter racialized constructions of Blackness imposed on the community members from the outside. Through the engagement in indigenous cultural practices, they reassert their sense of self and community to themselves and the world.

I build on Deborah Thomas’ work to think transnationally about commonalities of the imperialistic projects of establishing Black pathology.
Through an engagement with Ma Dikela’s effort to treat, manage, and reverse diabetes by engaging in an extension of the sugarless week health policy, we can better understand how the transnational instantiations of narratives about culture of disease impact racialized Black communities internationally. Thomas writes, “a focus on modes of governmentality across empires helps us (1) maintain a critical dialogue between the two registers in which we mobilize the term diaspora — both as an instantiation of a worldwide black community that is the result of the transatlantic slave trade and as the community formations resulting from contemporary transnational migrations; and (2) clarify how particular state projects were imagined and developed transnationally” (Thomas 2009, 84). Her work is instructive and instrumental in the establishment of this argument, not only for the emphasis on governmentality and analysis at the diasporic level, but also for that latitude that her body of work (Thomas 2009; 2011) demonstrates the wide-reaching impacts of culturalist arguments on the pathology of the Black family—reified, as I have already pointed out, in the culture of poverty tropes. I focus on how culturalist arguments are marshaled to normalize and embed the inherited “culture of disease,” specifically diet-related chronic disease in the culture of Black families, which are operatively framed through an etiological framework that emphasizes the role of individual behaviors as the cause. Furthermore, my work aligns with Thomas’s demonstration of “the development of culturalist discourse vis-à-vis black family formation was transnational, having particular but related effects among
different diasporic (in the sense of worldwide black community) populations and that this discourse also moves with people as they create diasporas (in the sense of transnational migrant communities)” (Thomas 2009, 84). Likewise, I frame Ma Dikela’s experience in broader political and racialized work that seeks to understand the Black body as diseased and Black behavior as pathological. Through the illustration of how these narratives are translated and reproduce new narratives, I draw from Thomas’s argument that “the culture of violence discourse has its roots in the earlier mobilization of the culture of poverty trope, itself the result of a culturalist approach to understanding inequality that became solidified in the aftermath of World War II” to ground my culture of disease narrative in its transnational formation in South Africa (Thomas 2009, 84).

In addition to the work of Bourgois and Thomas, I draw from Jean Comaroff’s work both to locate this research in South Africa and to demonstrate the longstanding relationship between medicine, colonialism, and the Black body. She illustrates how “medicine drew upon social images to mediate physical realities [which in turn allowed] colonial regimes [to draw] upon medical icons and practices to impose their domination upon subjects and collectivities everywhere” (1993:307). Moreover, within this system, Comaroff demonstrates how the Black female body worked in this colonial system. Comaroff writes, “science still found its voice in the contradictory culture of colonization, however: infection continued to emanate from the [B]lack female body, a body more immediately threatening because it had been given entrée into the enclosed white
world” (Comaroff 1993, 321). For Black women within the colonial system in which medicine mediates norms and knowledge about the Black body, they are the believed source of infection. Although diabetes is a non-communicable disease, Black women still represent the source (or the house) for disease, with diabetes having twice the incidence in Black South African women compared to men (Peer et.al. 2012; Levitt 1996). This investigation of the implementation of chronic disease prevention policy draws on these histories to attend ethnographically to how denigrating images and discourses become a part of the contemporary biomedical practice and narratives about the Black body, which orients nutritive practices that inform the development of recent dietary practices and the subsequent portrayal of disproportionate rates of nutrition-related chronic diseases in these same communities in the present. In South Africa, the history of medicine, colonialism, and the Black body shapes health and ideas about illness and well-being. Through these localized processes of racialization, we can see how Ma Dikela’s body is caught in the cultural war about how biomedical narratives shaped the Black body particularly the Black female body. Therefore, through the cultural production of indigeneity, Hebrews work to exorcise the demons of South African colonial biomedical knowledge, which shapes the beliefs and “science” of the racialized Black female body, culture, diet, and aligning health outcomes. Through the practice of sugarless week, and an overall commitment to reducing sugar consumption, Ma Dikela utilizes culture to rewrite her own personal health narrative, as well as narratives about Hebrew
bodies in South Africa that are in conversation with the local biomedical
discourses. Although Hebrew narratives were built primarily on U.S.
constructions of norms of embodied racialization, in South Africa, the
intelligibility of localized constructions of colonial biomedicine knowledge about
the Black body, makes the project of policy implementation as a form of racial
exorcism appropriate, translatable, and intelligible. The global processes of
racialization that inform the construction and development of Blackness on the
continent of Africa (Pierre 2012) are critical for understanding how Hebrews
successfully navigate global processes of racialization as a standard by which to
define the antithesis of indigenous Hebrew culture and utilize policy as a medium
to exorcise these processes from the bodies of community members like Ma
Dikela.

Fat, Black, & Ugly Indigenous Beauty: The Oil-less Diet & the
Performative Maintenance of Impossible Standards

While doing research in Atlanta, I met a number of members of the
community who were and had been active in the community across various
regions and for different reasons. For example, Queen Akosua, was a member of
the community who first encountered the Hebrews in Liberia and lived over
twenty years in Dimona as a Hebrew. Everything Queen Akosua did began with a
Hebrew prayer, and she was quite adept and reliant on the Hebrew rhetorical
style as a way of presenting herself. Through the community networks, I was
introduced to Queen Akosua, through another woman in the community, who thought she might be able to offer something to the research, in addition to the fact that she prepared and sold vegan soul food in the West End and was very involved in the broader health and nutrition world in the city.

When I first spoke to Queen Akosua on the phone, she went from a quizzical, distant person to a fully engaged, animated person. She did so much talking about all that she was doing and still planned to do in her life. She spoke about her passion for vegan food, instructing people on how to lose weight and her recent success with the oil less diet, her connections to the larger Black conscious communities in Atlanta, and other things she had accomplished. She instructed me to look her up on YouTube to see her videos and texted me after we got off the phone to send me photos of her vegan food, as well as her other work as a fashion designer to the stars. Her pictures with some of the community’s most beloved celebrities, Whitney Houston and Stevie Wonder, positioned her as a cosmopolitan woman, who had much success in her many careers. These photos were interspersed with messages about my potential interest in joining a pyramid scheme, though she described it as a “business opportunity” known as The InterConnexions. We agreed to try to meet soon and I continued to scour the Internet in preparation for our talk, especially about her oil-less diet, which was in one of the videos she instructed me to watch.

When I finally encountered Queen Akosua in person, it was at her apartment complex across the street from the train in the West End right around
the corner from the Hebrew’s Soul Vegetarian Restaurant. Her apartment, which doubled as the site of her multiple businesses, was the space where she sold vegan food to her faithful following of customers, a center for her entrepreneurial ventures like the InterConnexions project, her fashion designing, and a communal home space that she shared with her relatives and their children from Ghana. Queen Akosua, as she called herself, certainly dressed the part donning her petite frame with the most extravagant embroidered fabrics and head wraps, which were a reminder that she was also a fashion designer and a walking advertisement for her business. Though we were supposed to be having our first interview, she told me we were going to be going to a meeting at the Hebrew Soul Vegetarian Restaurant a block away. I was perplexed and confused but determined to learn more, and so I followed her to the meeting.

After five hours, however, I was exhausted to say the least. By the time I left, the brilliance of the late winter/early spring sun was no longer and then the sun was setting. I was tired, parched, hungry, but mostly frustrated by the delay. Even though things did not go according to my schedule, I was determined and not deterred by this extended interlude. I was polite and waited as she served her clientele. She then encouraged me to purchase food from her, which extended the wait time for our interview to six and half hours. Although she stated earlier that she was on a strict liquid fast, she did eat after we came back and served me food that had a considerable amount of oil in it. I watched as people called her cell phone and came in her front door for her vegan vittles. I was wedged in one of the
many tables in her living room and the two deep freezers that stored the food and items that belonged to her, one of her sisters, and the two children who were living in the room next door. I sat in awe of the twelve-foot-tall stacks of items that lined the walls and were right behind me in the cramped apartment. I took the opportunity to observe all that was around me and tried to put in context all that was happening in the moment and who this woman was based on what was in her home.

After she settled all her affairs and was prepared to finally talk to me one-on-one, it was approaching nearly seven in the evening. Not surprisingly, she was proud to discuss her lifestyle and diet. She began our conversation by showing me pictures of herself when she was a higher body weight; then she explained how she had transitioned to an oil-less diet. Although she, as a woman who was born on the African continent (as defined by people outside of the Hebrew community not to include Israel/Palestine), apparently her body size was seen as “too large” and “unattractive” to one of the primary leaders in the community, whose attention she sought to win his hand in marriage (or one of her sisterwives hands which would connect her to the plural family). Therefore, although she served all the dense 4 to 6-inch-deep slices of vegan macaroni and cheese, lasagna, barbecue chicken, greens, salad garnished with imitation bacon bits, vegan parmesan cheese to others, she was instructed to fast and cleanse her own body. She now proudly showed off her weight loss to those around her. As a Hebrew woman, Queen Akosua still had to contend with the conceptions of body
type, desirability, and proximity relationship to the Divine (both Yah (God) and members of God’s chosen leadership of the Hebrew Israelites).

In the Hebrew community, women who were not small, slim, or skinny are often described by Hebrew men as “unhealthy.” Scholarship documents that “women across the spectrum of race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation display symptoms of a troubled relationship to their own bodies and consequently to food. Many eat to suppress emotions, particularly the post-traumatic stress of incest and sexual assault, as well as the ongoing frustrations of life in a white-supremacist, heterosexist, capitalist patriarchy (Witt 1999, 188) and that “the presumption of strength and deviance may push Black women to develop eating problems—particularly compulsive overeating—that they and others are unable or unwilling to name as such” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003, 112). For Akosua, given that the oil-less diet was a request made by one of the community’s most esteemed male leaders and had the potential to provide her with a form of physical desirability—transforming her into the ideal “woman” (i.e. heterosexual, married woman who bore children to her husband)—her experiences also brought into greater focus for me the hierarchies and gendered inequalities embedded in these health policies and commitments. Thus, even though Akosua was successful with her oil less diet, the community leader still rejected her (apparently, she was still not attractive to him), which caused her much pain and prompted her relocation to the United States. In this moment, Akosua reflects Witt’s engagement with Thompson’s “interrogat[ion] of what she
redesignates as ‘eating problems’ among African American, Latina, Jewish, and
lesbian women. It is no surprise, Thompson points out, that appetites and food
take on metaphorical significance in a society in which women typically are
responsible for food preparation and yet are taught to deny themselves ample
appetites” (Witt 1999, 188). For Queen Akosua, her daily tasks and earning
money for herself was built around responding to the appetites of others, while
seeking to deny her own through a commitment to an oil-less diet and justifying
such denials in terms of her adherence to the Hebrew community’s narrative.

Through Queen Akosua’s story, I would like to examine “how the
widespread association of black women with food in U.S. culture has coexisted
with a seeming paucity of discourses about what African American women eat”
(Witt 1999:185) Specifically, I engage the ways the image of the mammy frames
discourses around weight, attractiveness, and obesity that structure Black
women’s relationship to food and their bodies. I seek to “examine how the
construction of [B]lack female appetite in the post-World War II United States is
inflected by, and in turn inflects, debates over the boundaries and ontological
status of the ‘embodied’ subject” (Witt 1999:185). Specifically, I am interested in
how the embodiment of racialization of the Black woman’s body is discursively
imbued with post-Moynihan Report narratives that portray her as “the matriarch,
fat, loud, and emasculating” (Foster 1973, 433). Moreover, I conduct this
examination through these policy-generated narratives that reinforce a
“perceived loss of patriarchal authority” by “[B]lack men have been complicit in
helping maintain such impossible-to-satisfy double standards [of internalized cultural norms of about the body] (Witt 1999, 190).

As a woman who made a connection to the community as a late adolescent, Queen Akosua’s loyalty seemed almost unquestioned and unfailing, even when it did not appear from the outside to benefit her. For her the dominance of the Hebrew policy surpassed her own bodily and dietary commitments. She never voiced a concern about body dissatisfaction, a new urgent health complication, or other reasons why she lost the weight or embarked upon the oil-less diet. Instead she talks about her obedience to the diet, which was “inspired,” encouraged, or possibly enforced by another powerful member of the community. While her own discourses are focused on her obedience to the Creator and divine inspiration, she omits the social pressures and perhaps collective spiritual pressures that comes from community members. During our time together, Akosua continued to express her alignment with a larger Hebrew goal and her desire to be help the planet through demonstrating the benefits of her lifestyle. She often would discuss her desire to want to share her worldview with the wider public, who would consume programs like the *Steve Harvey Show* or *Dr. Oz Show*. Queen Akosua imagined that on shows like these she could demonstrate the possibility of transformative health for racialized Black bodies, especially through what she had done through the oil-less diet.

For her and members of the Hebrew community, their “secrets,” or ability to master aspects of health, like veganism and the oil-less diet, were a way of
creating difference and distance from the overweight/obese Black woman trope. Here, I think about the connections between culture, belief, and the body to attempt to tease apart the ways in which the understanding of purity, taboo, and sin around eating (Douglas 1966) contextualizes Queen Akosua efforts. Again I turn to Doris Witt’s discussion of on Black women’s eating, weight, and dietary practices to make sense of Akosua’s experience. Witt details how one woman “writes about her obsession with the “dirty, sinful act” of eating and details her struggles to stop the self-destructive cycle of dieting, bingeing, purging, and laxative abuse. She questions the assumptions of various people who told her over the years not to worry about her dietary habits because, in their words, “fat is more acceptable in the Black community” (Witt 1999, 189). Witt describes how this Black woman’s struggle with weight illustrates how fat has been normalized as a process by which racialized Black bodies are imagined and discursively understood, as well as the religious undertones that structure an “obsession with eating” as sinful. I utilize this theme of sin to demonstrate how the possession of the Black body through the sin of gluttony, vis-à-vis fat, and, more clinically, in overweight and obese Black bodies, particularly the Black female body, must be excised through the implementation of Hebrew policy to re-indigenize the body, that through a set of practices returns the body to a “normal” health body weight.

“The Science”
Akosua’s story also leads to the complicated ways Hebrew indigeneity emerges, reproduces, and also refutes how biomedicine deals and treats disease and death (which is constructed as “mortality” and “morbidity” in the health literature) in Black bodies. Specifically, the etiology of Black subjects’ mirrors disease and, perhaps, death, as Sharon Patricia Holland in *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* suggests. She writes that the “the white cultural dependence on the nonhuman status of its black subjects ...rested on the status of the black as an nonentity; and that the transmutation from enslaved to freed subject never quite occurred at the level of the imagination” (Holland, 2000:15). Her work is essential to the argument I make as she advances the position that life, disease, and death form a technical and conceptual trinity that puts “the emphasis on the body as a location of historic markings, [which] is central to Foucault’s theory how power works discursively” (ibid, 32). She writes that Foucault's intangible tangible power surfaces through the power of images of Blackness, which are visible to everyone when the populace is called on to solve a national problem—like “the end of welfare as we know it, for example.” It is these images of Blackness, which emerge in the conversation on nutrition-related chronic disease, that become a foundation for other bodies to balance their experiences on an existential phenomenon that is not solely experiential, but connected to the racialization process. From this we can better understand that an imposed racialized Black identity nourishes whiteness by promoting its being constructed in an othered status to the
whiteness. This historicity of nutritional inadequacies then animates the Hebrew case for policy implementation, which frames the historical narrative of a large number of Blacks in the Americas and their consumption practices, dietary patterns, nutritional profile.

The current biomedical literature only corroborates the fictitious narratives about disease, death, and race that is centuries old. The biomedical research on diet-related chronic disease predicated on racial differences as well as race-specific etiological explanations for disproportionate rates of diseases, comes to light in new ways as a result of this research. The central thesis of the formation of the relationship between an imposition of Black racialization and nutrition-related chronic disease, dietary patterns, and consumption practices is, as Sharon Patricia Holland describes in *The Erotic Life of Racism*, that analyses of race have failed to understand and capture the profound yet quotidian nature of racism that is so pervasive. Therefore, there is a failure in this biomedical research which grounds Blackness as a risk factor or a genetic factor for nutrition-related chronic disease instead of attending to the production of disease as a result of the history of nutritional discrimination in the Americas. Ultimately, this history is genesis of a Hebrew indigeneity that encourages Queen Akosua to work towards such radical approaches in her diet.

In this way, we can understand “policy” in the Hebrew community as a method of racial exorcism imposed by their beliefs around the health and well-being of the racialized Black subject. This also helps us frame the efforts of Queen
Akosua as a West African woman who is socialized into the narratives about the Black body that conscribes her rhetoric and dietary practices full of Hebrew beliefs. The role of diet and nutrition in the formation of the processes of racialization of Blackness can be traced through history. Therefore, the current trend of increased obesity among the poor and among those identified politically, socially and racially Black indexes a re-calibration of the nodes of power in their situatedness to diet-related diseases. A visitation of history demonstrates how discourses of malnutrition, imaged by the presence of the underweight and stunted growth persons as an image of conjecture to the represent starvation across the continent of Africa, oppose the current images of overweight and obese persons who currently bear the burden diet-related disease that reifies the role of nutritional discrimination in the creation and fortification of a racialized Black identity in the Americas.

The Hebrews attribute their residence outside of and/or exile from Israel as a consequence of their disobedience to God. Subsequently, the rhetoric that undergirds their health policy implementation strategies follows a similar logic. For example, while spending time among the Hebrews, many suggested that their abstention from meat was not a personal choice that reflected a personal, communal, or cultural value, but rather a mandate from God. Subsequently, these perspectives contextualize Queen Akosua’s extreme efforts to radically transform her diet and body, which is a data point for understanding how policy gets into the body and how policy serves to exorcise the processes of racialization
on the body. This belief about a violation of God intensifies the stakes for adhering to the Hebrew cultural practices. Furthermore, the Hebrews work to embed the localized narratives that normalize a monolithic view around what racialized Black people eat and its embodied outcomes as represented in their health. The Hebrews wield “Hebrew culture” grounded in personal responsibility and work as an answer to dramatic increases in the incidence, prevalence, and morbidity rates of non-communicable chronic diseases, such as obesity, hypertension, and diabetes.

I am specifically addressing the vacuum created in the literature by profiling ethnic and even racial distinctions in relationship to the creation of food cultures and the maintenance of a dynamic relationship to the symbolic meaning of food and even ideologies which surround the production of food, but elide critical discourses on race and the relationship that food has to constructing, producing, and solidifying racialized identities and existential possibilities as a result of the project to fortify, undergird, and promote the erection of the Americas and adjacent individual nation-state projects within the region. I argue that if we critically examine the processes of racialization of food cultures and aligning health outcomes a richer and more accurate analytic framework by which to understand and tease out the relationship to these cultures, profiles, and nutrition-related chronic diseases becomes apparent.

For Queen Akosua, her story as a member of the Hebrew community demonstrates what I refer to as the intra-communal promotion of impossible
standards. For the Hebrew Israelites that I studied among, her story is indicative of the community taking on centuries of nutrient regimes through the everyday extraordinary, often extra-human, efforts of members who want to be seen, belong, and be Hebrew. Queen Akosua’s oil-less diet sought to bring her closer to a form of normativity that is achieved through dietary practice that directly engages with narratives of the racialized Black female body.

Bodies in the Hebrew community are test subjects for advancing notions of Hebrew difference, which is central to the Hebrew evolution process from Black subjects to indigenous beings. Moreover, Queen Akosua’s oil-less diet is a reflection of the entanglement of the complex nutritional legacies situated alongside particular forms of racialized Black identity that are predicated on their indigenous ways of knowing. Queen Akosua’s diet, like many in the community, becomes a form of leverage or a showcase for demonstrating the larger goals of the Hebrew community. Moreover, given Hebrew history, I think about the implementation of Hebrew health policy as an added layer to “how African American women have been caught up in, and how they have attempted to destabilize, the binary through which these discourses construct their appetites as either natural or pathological, as resistant to interrogation while subject to constant surveillance” (Witt 1999, 185).

Even though Queen Akosua was born in Ghana, the health literature claims to know how the processes of racialization work on her body once she resides in the U.S. In Unnatural Causes, a film that explores racial health
disparities, the filmmakers detail the staggering statistics about low birth weight babies among native Black women in the U.S. even among health-conscious, well-educated, professionals. They present evidence that among African immigrant women to the U.S., it takes only one generation for them to experience low birth weights and the poor health outcomes that is common among native Black women (California Newsreel, 2008). The bodies of African women, within one generation, are racialized into the health outcomes of Black women in the United States. Therefore, I utilize Queen Akosua as a useful example for this research. The ways in which racism and processes of racialization are embodied, combined with the narratives of conjecture about the “fat Black woman”, presented through the trope of the mammy works to demonstrate how images combined with discourses about the body and health often fuel policy development and implementation. Through the example of Queen Akosua, I illustrate how these health narratives and data are utilized by Hebrews as a target for their exorcism.

This compounds narratives of the “culture of disease” trope that functions to re-inscribe and fortify discourses of Black inferiority are predicated on a racist foundation that manifests in the corporeality or very bodily essence of the created Black subject, and the case for the indigenous cultural identity. As it relates to food and nutrition, there is a multi-layered context of hazard in which the body, which is the source of disease and is continually re-infected through and by patterns of consumptions that fall victim to the same concerns as the Black body.
Therefore, the careful and calculated methods utilized to deploy race on the body not only permeate discourses about individual’s behaviors, but collectively are marshaled to attempt to decimate work that was done re-valorize food cultures, consumption practices, and to create cultural practices that emerge as a result of the experiences related to the imposition of a racialized Black identity and bodily experience.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the inextricable links between Hebrew policy and its connections to the development of an indigenous set of beliefs and practices and its opposition to imposition of pathological understandings of Black culture to structure the body and health. Utilizing the intersection of culture and policy, specifically how Black culture was pathologized through the Moynihan report, I look at how the culture of disease trope works to racialize the Black body through normalizing the fat (overweight/obese) Black body as having high rates of diet related NCDs (specifically, diabetes and hypertension). Drawing on Davis’ (2004) notion of the conjecture of image, as well as policy, and culture, I work to establish a basis for the processes of racialization to understand how policy can get into the body. Through a clear approach of how policy and culture have worked, I make the argument that given the relationship between policy and culture established specifically in the United States, Hebrews implement health
policies globally to exorcise the processes of racialization that have been embodied.

Drawing on ethnographic data from South Africa and the United States and grounding the chapter on an experience in Israel/Palestine, I demonstrate how the Hebrews responded to the embodiment of racialization through obesity and diabetes. In South Africa, I build on Comaroff’s (1993) argument that there is a specific history between colonialism, medicine, and the Black body, especially the Black female body, by which colonial medicine was utilized to produce knowledge about the Black body. In the contemporary moment, given the high rates of diabetes disproportionately affecting Black South African women, I describe how Ma Dikela utilizes the Hebrew cultural practice of sugarless week to guide a lifestyle practice cultivated to eliminate her participation in traditional demographic narratives about the Black female South African body and disease. By reducing her intake of added sugars to virtually none, she re-writes the script about dietary practices of racialized Black South African communities. Through her participation in cultural practices as a Hebrew, she illustrates how policy is a form of racial exorcism, given how racialization is embodied.

Similarly, I focus on how Queen Akosua’s efforts to maintain an oil-less diet to secure weight loss and an idealized body weight engages the stereotypes about the racialized Black woman’s body as fat as culturally undesirable yet expected. I describe how Queen Akosua’s pursuit of an oil-less diet takes Hebrew health policy to another level by attempting to take great care her cultivation of a
plant-based lifestyle, the kinds of oils and fats one ingests, and efforts to “clean” one’s diet to the extreme. Here, I examine how Black women’s bodies as large and deviant are the groundwork for how this translation of Hebrew policy seeks to disemboby the processes of racialization that have made pathologically large Black women’s bodies as culturally excepted. Through this racial exorcism, Hebrews are able to use cultural practice to undo the violence of racialization to the body and restore normal healthy body weights as a standard.

Specifically, I have focused on understanding how members of the African Hebrew Israelite of Jerusalem utilize their identity formation in contrast to and aligning with overarching cultural practices to generate a global set of health policies. I have argued throughout this chapter that the processes of racialization which attempt to embed a “culture of disease” within Black communities and bodies have led to my argument for policy as racial exorcism. This is further illustrated by the marked and defining nature of discrimination, and the obliteration of indigenous modalities of food traditions to protect, preserve, and promote nutritional health and well-being. Proposals for explaining racial differences in rates of chronic disease ignore the history of nutritional discrimination, the legacy and the current role of governmentality in the formation of consumption practices, dietary habits, and nutritional profiles, and the literature that connects the rise of biomedicine and embedding disease within the Black body. These proposals also ignore more current culturalist frameworks that pathologize Black families, placing them within what I have termed a
“culture of disease” framework that is insidiously deployed within a variety of settings (clinical, research, and the public sphere), which illustrates the everyday craftiness of racism that is under-theorized and not accurately captured by the literature.

Dorothy Roberts notes that “to this day, the delusion that race is a biological inheritance rather than a political relationship leads plenty of intelligent people to make the most ludicrous statements about black biological traits” (Roberts 2011:25). Throughout the course of this chapter, I have illustrated how this has occurred with the current public health debates concerning nutrition-related chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, in which researchers attempt to contort Blackness into a risk factor and or biological risk factor which ignores and/or maligns what I have referred to as the historiographical nutritional imposition of processes of racialization. It is these narratives that underlie the gravity and urgency in which Ma Dikela, Queen Akosua, and various other community members pursue such radical efforts to regain, structure, or drastically improve their health.
During my first trip to Dimona, I was placed with the Ben Israel family who had spent almost half of their lives in the United States. The husband and the wife were in their seventies and were well-known in the community for their prominent leadership roles and their relationships to food and diet in the community. I was told that I was placed with the family so that I could observe one of the community’s head “nutritionists,” which I found out after my arrival was a person who prepares food for their family, most often a woman. Indeed, I would come to learn that Yaliela Ben Israel was one of the women who was also professionally responsible for food preparation in the community for guests, Hebrew women who had just given birth, or those who were ill. Primarily through observation, then through conversation, I discovered that she understood it as her responsibility to prepare a specialized diet that would serve for what I learned was her husband’s prominence in the global community as a reference point for the ability of Hebrew health practices to transform the body. For this husband and wife, their relationship connected them in many ways and, in fact, supported their collective identity in the community. As it related to his diet, the wife was the producer and the husband was the consumer of a “live food” plan, which was I told was developed over the course of two decades.

In addition to my specific aim in observing food preparation and consumption rituals while in their house, I noticed that the husband, Azriel only
ate food that I was sold on the live side of the Hebrew restaurant in Chicago. During one of my first days in the house, I finally sat down with Yaliela, one of the few times in those early days that I saw her off of her feet, I asked her some preliminary questions about her husband’s specialized diet. We began by discussing the work of preparing special food for him and then “regular” food for the rest of the family, which she said had become easier over time and was something that she was used to given the multiple decades that she had done it. Moreover, she shared how this work was an extension of her love for her husband, her desire to have him healthy, and to be able to live into forever with him.

Later during my first stay with the community, I spoke to her husband, who shared information about his diagnosis with ocular disease in his fifties. As we discussed it, he disclosed that his diagnosis was of major concern to him, a shock to his wife, but also made him more committed to the Hebrew lifestyle. During this time, Prince Azriel, also shared with me how he made sense of his diagnosis of disease and of his health more broadly. He told me that in order to tell the story about glaucoma, he would have start where was born in Tennessee.

Now, according to him, his life in Dimona was barely recognizable from the one he lived during his early childhood in the U.S. South and then later in the industrial and post-industrial Midwestern state of Ohio. By the time that I met the Prince and his wife, the Crowned Sister Yaliela (the highest ranking a woman in the community could achieve), it had been more than thirty years after their
move. Nevertheless, his work with the community, in overseeing the Mid-Atlantic region of the Hebrew jurisdictions in the United States, allowed him to return to the United States on a semi-regular basis. On one of his trips, he went for an annual eye examination. He narrates that he was already perceived to be at risk as an “African American over the age of 40” and was eventually diagnosed. He said that his doctor, “didn’t know about any of the Hebrew stuff.” After receiving his diagnosis, he took it back to the community’s team of healers to create a plan to support his health. Immediately, the community’s doctors worked to develop a dietary regime that would support his ability to treat and manage his ocular disease. The standard recommendations for a diet to address glaucoma were foods high in carotenoids, fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as Brewer’s yeast. Although he said that he did not discuss it with his health care provider in the U.S., that the Hebrews had already developed the High Holy and Sacred Diet which incorporated most of these recommendations. However, because of his diagnosis, a dietary regimen to focus on these specific foods was developed and he had made a decision to only consume uncooked foods. Since then, Prince Azriel claims that he was been able to maintain his vision and prevent the progression of disease to permanent blindness.

Prince Azriel talked to me about how he attributed his ability to treat and manage his chronic ocular disease and to prevent other chronic diseases for which he was “at risk for as an African American over the age of 40” to his raw-food dietary regimen and, thus, he has served as a central model for the
community’s ability to transform and regenerate health. His all-live food diet has been a prototype for community to continue to “evolve” their diets and lifestyle practices. The prince’s ability to transform his ocular health and as the community legend goes, to reverse the disease, has been a theme that has generated much acclaim for the ability of the Hebrew cultural practices to establish and solidify their identity as an indigenous community specifically in conversation with the discourses on disease risk predicated on race constructed in the United States.

When I spoke with Prince Azriel, he discussed how he navigated these two worlds as Black in the United States and as an indigenous Hebrew in Dimona. While he wholeheartedly embraced the Hebrew lifestyle, his experiences living outside of Dimona for more than half of his life informed his perspective on health. He discussed the fact that he was committed to being healthy and reversing the disease he experienced, which is why he maintained a certain lifestyle. Nevertheless, as a result of his position in the Hebrew community, he was able to travel in and out of Dimona on official community business and often into the United States. Recounting his experiences there, he shared with me, “I don’t feel healthy when I am in the U.S., being there makes me feel sick.” Here, he recounts the environmental limits he experiences on his ability to maintain his well-being. However, contrary to this position that the United States impinges on his health, when he travels there, he accesses the country’s medical care. When he is in the U.S., he goes to be tested by Western biomedical systems to determine
the status of his health. This meant that when he traveled to the United States “on assignment” for the community, he went to see Western bio-medically trained health care providers, rather than the community’s internal cadre of physicians or healers. Through these assessments, he told me that he was able to have another source of information to understand, analyze, and to assess his health and his “changing” disease risk. As we talked more, he was honest and really candid about how the U.S. impacted his ability to be healthy given his experiences of racism, discrimination, and marginalization. Prince Azriel spoke to me about his personal everyday experiences of racism and discrimination in places like schools, stores, restaurants and the more generalized experiences that he, friends, family and other Hebrews experienced trying to access healthcare, housing, employment, and when interacting with agents of the state.

For him, working to live beyond the experiences of racism, discrimination, and marginalization and the process of transforming his body and aligning with the ideologies of an indigenous Hebrew identity took years and was a daily effort to support what would be considered a high maintenance lifestyle. As we talked that summer and in different locations around the world over the next five years, he walked me through how the careful prescription of his dietary regime and, most importantly, the transformation of his identity through the cultivation of his “true Hebrew culture” is fundamental to his ability to create contrast between his health profile and that of others who were racialized as Black by their environment in the United States which they never escaped. As he stated, “It’s
difficult [to maintain the diet] especially when traveling but critical for my health and my survival."

Although the threat of deportation, inadequate housing, limited employment opportunities, linguistic differences, and other factors were a regular part of his life in Dimona, Prince Azriel felt uneasy in the country of his birth. This uneasiness is why he relocated with his wife and their two children to the Israeli/Palestinian desert to live out his life as a Hebrew. By the time I met them, the husband and wife were married for over fifty years and were able to find refuge in Dimona after difficult childhoods and early adulthoods in the Jane & Jim Crow South of the late 1930s, 40s, and 50s. They, like many of the community members, carried the trauma of exclusion and of, what was according to his account, “discrimination based on your color that determine every part of your life.” For them, health, in that sense, was not the ultimate priority. For them as Black people living in the United States, they said that health did not have the priority that it does in their lives and cultural practices as Hebrews. Azriel speaks about his life prior to the Hebrew community as being structured around an existence as Black in the United States. He talks to me about the structure of surveillance, the unrelenting discrimination and inequity at every turn, and the sense that things would never change. I was able to understand the difference between the external surveillance, the panopticon-like (Bentham 1791) experience of surveillance of one’s body and health and its effects versus the embodied or internally produced health practiced.
By the time I was interacting with the Prince and Yaliela, he was an expert in the casualness with which he came to rely on his ability to grab carrot supreme prepared by his wife, (a classic Hebrew dish made from the shredded remains of juiced carrots, combined with vegan mayonnaise, and raisins), to move between the homes of his multiple wives and family, and to take on his responsibilities as a high-ranking leader in a community of what many may understand as expatriates. For him, the process of transforming his body and aligning with the ideologies of an indigenous Hebrew identity took years and was a daily effort to support what would be considered a high maintenance lifestyle. For him, being a Hebrew was about establishing an identity that was unavailable to him in his country of birth. Prince Azriel described the process of cultivating an identity that allowed him to identify beyond the racial restriction of being racialized as Black to transition into being identified and living as a Hebrew. Becoming and living as a Hebrew had many aspects, but most prominent of those are the Hebrew cultural and lifestyle practices that are related to health and wellbeing. Similarly, as he described establishing an identity grounded in health and a culture of well-being was a part of what it means to be a Hebrew which allowed him to move from the previous processes of racialization to the cultural practices of identity formation. For him, a majority of the community (even those who are “unable” or who have yet to move), living outside of the spaces where the major racial traumas were incurred is as critical to one’s health as the Hebrew spiritual practices of health promotion. He said, “At first, we were trying to get out of the
South, then when were Hebrews, we knew we had to get out of the country completely.” Therefore, almost forty years since his personal exodus from the United States, he felt and continues to feel unsettled and discomforted when traveling to the United States, even though his work with and for the community continues to take him there on a semi-regular basis and he occasionally utilizes the biomedical services when he is there. As someone who claimed to have reversed his chronic disease through adherence to a new way of being ideologically and through accompanying culturally-based health behavior practices, he is a model for community members worldwide. Although many of the community members were able to craft the identity in the United States or other locations outside of Dimona, it has been the example of those like him that have helped to propel the motivation and discipline of others. For his children and grandchildren who were born in a mix of different places around the globe, it has been his example and ability to transform the psyche, the body, and biology which has galvanized the transmission of the Hebrew message across generations and geographical divides. Prince Azriel, within his family and in the larger context of the global community, utilizes his identity as a transitioned racialized Black man from the United States to a Hebrew man living in Dimona who was able to change the standard course of disease through creating a new relationship between identity and health, from one reliant on race as a primary mechanism to draw connections to disease to a spiritual identity as a Hebrew with the accompanying cultural practices. Through ethnographic engagement with Prince
Azriel, I observed how biological citizenship is being utilized to demonstrate and ground claims to indigeneity that are often leveraged in arguments for other nation-state based citizenship claims.

**Hebrew Biological Citizenship**

Biological citizenship is a useful conceptual framework to think through how the Hebrews deploy their new identities relative to health and how these identities are contextualized by national and global history, politics, and connections. Petryna’s field-defining concept is utilized for understanding the relationship between the state and the forms of citizenship that are created in response to illness. Petryna details that “the damaged biology of a population has become the grounds for social membership and the basis for staking citizenship claims” (2003, 5). Similarly, Rose and Novas (2005) build on Petryna’s concept and discuss the “individualizing and collectivizing aspects” of biological citizenship that often stand in contradistinction to normative ways of constructing citizenship that can draw from cultural, religious, and ethnic forms of citizenship: “An attention to biological citizenship opens a space to think about the emergence of illness as a new political cleavage, as an identity through which citizens frame their demands on the state and civil society. This identity is linked to how we relate to our biological bodies” (Orisini 2006, 5). Ultimately, examining Prince Azriel’s construction of a Hebrew biological citizenship—one that is the basis of claiming a form of indigeneity that might undo the more traditional biological citizenship claims predicated on the racial and biological
citizenship of Blackness as a proxy for illness, disease, and early death—allows us to see how the Hebrews are engaged with the discourse on racial health disparities.

For Hebrews members such Prince Azriel, how he established a biological citizenship among members of the Hebrew community is very much connected to his personal history in the United States, as well as to the greater context of transnational instantiations of Blackness, in which disease is a fundamental component of the identity and identity formation of racializing Blackness biomedically. Scholarship has demonstrated how the transnational project of the Americas utilized biomedicine to construct and consolidate ideas of Blackness, which embed disease in Black bodies and furthers global white supremacy (Hogarth 2017). Through the health disparities literature and, specifically, the work on the global epidemic of NCDs, Prince Azriel’s personal history and story of transformation is rhetorically effective in the discursive battle for Hebrew communities globally who are racialized into the biological citizenship of Blackness that is grounded specifically in disease. I leverage the work in the discipline that utilizes diasporic models of racialized Blackness and NCDs (Luke et.al. 2001) that continue to reify outdated constructions of Blackness in the Americas. These presentations promote anthropological formations of African survivals on a spectrum in which the urban United States is characterized as being the least African (and, subsequently, with the least culture) and similarly having the highest rates of disease, and the continent of Africa as being the
“authentic source of Blackness” and culture and having the least amount of disease. While that is not the case (Pierre 2012) these ideas prevail. These constructions serve to promote inaccurate understandings of Blackness and damning portraits of Black bodies.

Through these models of identity and culture that seek to create biological citizenship, I demonstrate how Prince Azriel has been able to advance a form of Hebrew biological citizenship that relies on an indigenous future of health and well-being that is in contradistinction to a biological citizenship that has been produced through transnational connections between the ways race and biology have been constructed. Hebrew biological citizenship challenges the conventions that illness is the dependent condition that formulates and creates the bonds between citizens. Through Azriel’s life, the formation of Hebrew biological citizenship does not focus on making its claims to the U.S. or other governments, but rather in the reclamation of “damaged biologies” to create new forms of citizenship (Hebrew citizens) and aligning claims on the basis of being able to transform these bodies and biologies. These citizenship claims are based on belonging to a global community of Hebrew Israelites, which works to undergird their claims of indigeneity that are produced by their ability to re-indigenize racialized Black bodies back to their indigenous state. Hebrew biological citizenship is created from claims to indigeneity that rely on health and are inherently grounded in the discursive and socio-biological separation from the
processes of racialization and the cultural production of indigenous identity through health and wellness.

Rose and Novas (2005) have theorized biological citizenship, dictating that it is a form of citizenship that is being resituated on different grounds than previous forms of citizenship have been delineated, based on national bounds. Rose and Novas define “biological citizenship’ descriptively, to encompass all those citizenship projects that have linked their conceptions of citizens to beliefs about the biological existence of human beings, as individuals, as families and lineages, as communities, as population and races, and as a species. And like other dimensions of citizenship, biological citizenship is undergoing transformation and re-territorializing itself along national, local and transnational dimensions” (Rose & Novas, 2005). Similarly, the concept of a Hebrew biological citizenship follows this same course. What I demonstrate is the way that the body is utilized to define a form of citizenship that is dependent on the form of migrant indigeneity I have theorized to ground this dissertation. For Prince Azriel and members of the community, biological citizenship signifies to the relationship what the community tried to articulate as health, as well as the relationship between health and state. Through a belief in Hebrew indigeneity that literally is able to produce different biological outcomes and construct different health profiles among community members, this form of biological citizenship is not cordoned off by the national or local lines, but is deterritorialized like the form of indigeneity from which it is drawn. Therefore,
given the transnational structure of the community, albeit with national
discourses that have framed the dominant discourses, their indigeneity and
subsequent indigenous cultural productions, is not grounded in or restricted by
any one nation.

As demonstrated by the construction of biological citizenship,
conceptualizations of citizens are connected to beliefs about biological existence.
As illustrated by Prince Azriel, members of the Hebrew nation, in their process of
aligning themselves with the dominant Hebrew ideologies that privilege
spirituality instead of race, they also recalibrate their beliefs about biological
existence. Hebrews as illustrated through Prince Azriel’s example, dictate how
they can treat, reverse, and prevent NCDs but, furthermore, they believe that they
can defy death. Prince Azriel was able to treat and reverse his glaucoma and
based on his account and community circulated narratives prevent other chronic
diseases which would have certainly been a part of his health trajectory as a
racialized Black subject.

Physical immortality has become an important, yet controversial,
cOMPONENT of the community’s understandings about how Hebrew biological
citizens have a different biological existence compared to others. Immortality is a
frame within their indigenous repertoire of what constitutes Hebrew identity.
The possibility of existing outside of the context of what is believed to be humanly
possible defines their indigenous identity and creates separation between Hebrew
and others. For Hebrews, Prince Azriel’s story is a way to demonstrate
difference—specifically indigenous difference. Through his example, he demonstrates what is possible for Hebrews and, therefore, the belief in the possibility of everlasting life.

Moreover, authorities in the Hebrew community create biological citizens. The Hebrew leadership dictates the terms of being within the community, which are then implemented through the various jurisdictions. For Prince Azriel, as one of the highest ranking among the general membership (second only to the Messiah and supreme leader, Ben Ammi), he was involved in creating notions of Hebrew biological citizenship and demonstrating to others how to be a Hebrew. Through the creation of this new form of citizenship under which the leaders create and structure identity, an individual and collective set of identities emerge that are built from new modes of citizenship. Furthermore, his example illustrates how the community is able to ‘make up’ a group of biological citizens who reverse, treat, and defy disease—and potentially avert death.

Ethnographic notions of biological citizenship have been focused on the variety of ways in which actors try to make claims and relate to agencies and institutions. For Hebrews, the health identities that emerge from this new biological citizenship allow the community to further establish their claims of indigeneity to the nation-state, vis-à-vis state based citizenship. For example, while the Israeli government largely views the community as Black (Americans, Brits, and Caribbean) vis-à-vis citizenship, Hebrew biological citizenship relies on

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6 The Hebrew community does not have framework for explaining and making meaning out of death; therefore, death was not publicly narrativized.
the narratives about Black health in these nations to demonstrate cultural difference. Therefore, biological citizenship is being utilized to demonstrate and ground claims to indigeneity that are often leveraged in arguments for other nation-state based citizenship claims. Similarly, in nations like the United States where Prince Azriel and Yaliela were born, Hebrew biological citizenship allows the community to push back on the biological citizenship produced by racialized Black identity which embeds high rates of NCDs as a defining marker for identity. Hebrew community members utilize their biological citizenship to confirm “truths” about their identity that demonstrates the distance between the processes of racialization and the cultural production of indigeneity. For example, the Hebrews utilize narratives like that of Prince Azriel to validate and promote their citizenship globally.

In thinking about how the embodiment of race impacts the biology of racially marginalized groups, it is important to understand how and why the Hebrew Israelites focus on the establishment of a new identity in their quest for health. Although the ways the Hebrews discuss the development of their identity moves are somewhat indirect, their message about the connections between racial categories of identity and health are clear. The Hebrews talk often about the cultural practices of outsiders which have led to a destruction in their cultural values, practices, behaviors. Often these groups point to the cultural practices of white European and white United States cultural values, but the Hebrews often include all of American values. What Prince Azriel demonstrates is that the road
to Hebrew identity is fortified by the process of dislodging embedded notions of American racial hierarchies in their socio-cultural systems that countless research studies and Prince Azriel himself demonstrate directly impact their health. By rejecting the categories that emphasize race as one of the most important variables to predict their health outcomes, then Hebrews are one step closer to claiming a health legacy of well-being that is not stymied by the connections made by scientists, researchers, health practitioners, and policy makers between race and biology—which are often inaccurate or misinterpreted. The counterintuitive nature of this claim is that in order to make these claims, they must re-engage with the very systems (Western biomedical metrics), social construction of race (which would read them as Black) and Black pathology (the Black body as diseased) to achieve these claims. Nevertheless, Prince Azriel is an example and reference for their success in achieving their goal of transforming identity (the self), the body, and biology. Through this living example, they are able to disseminate their pioneering efforts in indigeneity for a community with their history. More importantly, they report their ability to undo the health consequences of U.S. Blackness. As discussed in the previous chapter about how policy is racial exorcism, pathological iterations of Blackness, primarily generated from the United States, are a touchpoint for building a case for cultural difference. While these past experiences in the United States and other countries may seek to unfurl their indigeneity as traditionally defined, the deterritorialized indigeneity that takes into account migration is not undone by this experience; in
fact, it reinforces the notion of engaging their diasporic past to reach their indigenous future. They celebrate their history of “reversing disease” in their community and tout their ability to do the same for others.

Prince Azriel illustrates that one of the most important steps given that he was able to take for his health was reclaiming his identity as a Hebrew. It is from here that everything else aligned—dietary change, environmental change, physical activity, prioritizing health and well-being as central to identity—that he needed to prevent, address, and manage any disease that he encountered. His admonition that the United States is a place that he could not find or be at peace or in health, much of that has to do with his experiences with racism and processes of racialization. Hebrew identity or the opportunity to apply this particular form of migrant indigeneity is critical to the formation of a Hebrew biological citizenship. This form of spiritual healing engages Csordas’ work on embodiment and spirituality, which helps us consider phenomenological aspects of the process of identity formation as the most critical aspect of the relationship between health and identity (Csordas 1990, 2002; Bourdieu 1977).

Throughout the chapter, I focus on identity and its relationship to health. Specifically, I focus on the connection that Hebrews make between their intentionality in crafting a specific identity and its relationship to producing particular outcomes in health. Given the flaws with using race as a biological construct to define differences in health on an a national and international level, I instead focus on how Hebrews engage with “race [as] a distraction” (Jackson
and delve into their efforts to transform the import of the processes of racialization of Blackness to the relationship between identity and health through the cultural production of Hebrew indigeneity. Doing so provides an ethnographic understanding of how this community makes meaning of the social determinants of health (of which the phenomenon of race has been one of the most prominent factors for explaining how health is determined and constructed) and how they can produce differential health outcomes. To connect this to one of the larger themes of the dissertation, I analyze how Hebrews, through engaging their diasporic past to reach their indigenous future, connect with racial health disparities discourse and literature that racializes them as Black to demonstrate or assert their alternative indigenous identity through their departure from the norms. Similarly, they attempt to redirect the race and embodiment literature by highlighting a transformation of disease risk and status through the practice, performance, and embodiment of an alternative indigeneity. I show how Hebrews engage in the complicated practice of reconstituting identity beyond externalized constructions, which racialized them as Black as the primary factor understanding the relationship between identity and health. In doing so, I engage with the literature in medical anthropology that examines racial health disparities by focusing on structural violence, affliction, and the embodiment of inequality. I also address the complicity of the field in replicating biomedical discourse by providing an understanding of how this community engages with racial health disparities. I intervene on the medical anthropology literature focused on health
disparities and offer a new paradigm that departs from comparative assessments of health that utilize whiteness as a referent, recognizes the role of biomedicine in advancing construction of racial hierarchy, and that epistemologically resitutates conceptualizations of identity that reflect individual and community-based understandings. This argument draws from works within anthropology that are in conversation with Foucauldian (1977) conceptions of biopower and Agamben’s (1998) states of exception in medicine, which frames how race is constructed through science, technology, and biopolitics. From here, I place the Hebrew understandings and participation in Blackness as pathological and a denigrated formulation of identity and their move to restructure identity, returning to cultural practice, and the production of different health outcomes as an understudied approach to racial health disparities of NCDs. I ask three related questions: first, how do the Hebrew Israelites challenge us to understand the relationships between identity and health for Hebrews broadly? Second, how do Hebrew transformations in identity impact health? Third, how is the relationship between identity and health connected to systems of belief?

In this chapter, I build on the previous chapters’ engagement with the relationship among policy, pathology, and power. Through a survey of the discourses about race in the social sciences, I illustrated how the notion of Black pathology emerged and what its effects are on the implementation of Hebrew health policy. Hebrews utilize their collective understandings and approaches to their indigenous identity to create and implement their own health policy that
projects Hebrew culture as the antithesis to pathology culture and the embodiment of racialization. In contradistinction to pathology and the processes of racialization, which conceptually link race with poor dietary health behaviors and high rates of non-communicable chronic diseases (NCDs), Hebrews work to present, perform, and cultivate an indigenous cultural identity where these forms of pathology are not present and maintain this as a core feature of the community’s beliefs and practices.

Given the identity formations that arise as diametrically opposed to Black pathology, I am interested in what kinds of relationships these identities evince and how they complicate our understanding of identity and health. Although medical discourses and scientific literature generally utilize race as the primary factor (and, to a certain extent, gender) for making between-group comparisons, the literature demonstrates that poorly understood constructions of race are often conflated with biology (Gravlee 2009). For NCDs, which are confounded by behaviors and lifestyle, understanding the relationship between culture, race, and health are critically important. Therefore, I explore how Hebrews perform their cultural identity, vis-à-vis Hebrew indigeneity, as a counter to the rigid and impinging racialization processes of Blackness in order to foster new narratives on the relationship between indigenous identity and health. Throughout the chapter, I focus on identity and its relationship to health. I examine how Hebrews frame their subject and identity formation through indigeneity to understand the potential, the possibilities, and the evidence of their ability to transform the
racialized Black body and “biology.” In an attempt to understand “local biologies” in the context of global health, the politics of social inequity and disease, and the diverse ways the Hebrews are attempting to narrate their bodies and “biologies” into larger discourses, I interrogate their systems of belief (that is their theological and racial frameworks, conceptualization of identity, and approaches to health) that shape the continuous and ongoing development and implementation of health policy in the community (Brotherton and Nguyen 2013).

**Anthropology, Race, and Health**

Prince Azriel named how in his experiences in the United States the social construction of race has the power to shape every aspect of identity, including health. I think through this idea through the triangulation of three data points: the embodiment literature (Gravlee 2009; Krieger and Smith 2004; Kreiger 1999) that has compelled us to understand how race becomes biology in the United States, the epidemiological literature on identity and health in the United States, and ethnographic data from the Hebrew community. Research demonstrates the literal embodiment of racial inequalities in the biological well-being of racialized groups and individuals (Gravlee 2009). Often among biomedical researchers this has translated into the belief that there are biological and genetic differences between racial groups. Although anthropologists have destabilized the biological constructions of race and popularized the social
constructivist approach to understanding race, health research, clinical practice, and scientific discourse on genetic explanations for patterns of disease continue to deploy unscientific conceptualizations of race that reproduces narratives of racial difference (Hunt et.al. 2013; Dressler, Oths, & Gravlee, 2005; Roberts 2011). In the current era of the proliferation of genomic research which co-occurs with the drastic increase in rates of nutrition-related diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity, racialized bodies are being re-incorporated into debates that advance an argument about one’s genetic predisposition to disease is based on race. Within the literature on genetic differences, Black bodies have been the preeminent case study for illustrating biological differences (read: deficits) based on race, and the burden of rates of disease. Roberts (2011) explores how the construction of race as biological has translated to into a set of beliefs and practices regarding “Black biological traits” which allows “a majority of Americans to live in perfect comfort with a host of barbaric practices and conditions that befall blacks primarily…and still view their country as a bastion of freedom and equality for all” (Roberts 2011, 25). Therefore, the Hebrew process of transforming identity, is one of, if not the most important, processes for reconstructing the health of its community members.

As noted by Margaret Lock, anthropologists have abandoned the study of the body, mostly because of a “discomfort with the equation of biological difference and race” (Brotherton and Nguygen 2016, 288). This oversight has placed the field in a position that has limited our knowledge about “how social
and political processes produce biological difference and by extension how biomedical interventions may unwittingly perpetuate or enact further inequalities if they are not mindful of these local biologies” (Brotherton and Nguyen 2013, 288; Lock 2013). Given the recent engagement of anthropologists in the debate around health disparities and racial differences in health outcomes, race and biology have become an important terrain for anthropology. To that end, medical anthropologist Clarence Gravlee makes multiple important distinctions that are relevant to this ethnographic examination of the Hebrew Israelite cultural processes of re-indigenizing the body and cultivating the Hebrew body through practice. Gravlee (2009) dismisses what he refers to as un-nuanced perspectives of race as a social construct without accounting for or exploring how race has biological consequences. He identifies that race and racism, albeit socially constructed, do have biological consequences—ones that are differentiated across racial groups. Historically, for marginalized racial groups the differences in health outcomes have been understood as a result of the difference in biology between racial groups. Similarly, he cites how popularized epidemiological studies of racial inequalities in health reinforce the construct of race as biology. He attempts to interrupt the misinterpretation that is guided by the “vicious cycle: social inequalities shape the biology of racialized groups, and embodied inequalities perpetuate a racialized view of human biology” (Gravlee 2009, 48).

Anthropologists have mostly foregone a participation in the nature-nurture debates (Lock 2013; Ortner 1974), leaving the study of the body to
biologists because of an apprehension with equating biological difference and race. As a result, there have not been many studies on the social and political production of difference. While there has been attention from biologists, biomedical health practitioners, and even public health practitioners and researchers to the relationship between race and biology, anthropology has been slower to document and examine the ways in which the production of specific racial subjectivities impacts biology. Therefore, the bulk of literature in anthropology, specifically medical anthropology, has documented the structural violence that has produced social inequity in health between racial groups (Farmer et.al. 2004; Farmer 2005; Lane et.al. 2008). Similarly, Nguyen and Peschard (2003) produced a groundbreaking article that advances affliction as the “embodiment of social hierarchy, a form of violence that for modern bodies is increasingly sublimated into differential disease rates and can be measured in terms of variances in morbidity and mortality between social groups” (447). Each of these works is important for scaffolding the health of communities who have been racialized as Black in the Americas, for understanding the health inequities in non-communicable chronic diseases, and for providing a lens for analyzing ethnographic research in a “neoliberal global health economy” (Nguyen and Peschard 2003, 447).

What these works do not provide, however, are any theoretical tools or analytical technologies that can richen our understanding of communities, like the Hebrew Israelites, who address racial health disparities by reconfiguring
identity outside of inherited racial categories and aligning health outcomes. I offer that while the research on the embodiment of social hierarchy, race, and even stigmatized biologies (Horton and Barker 2010), which demonstrates how health care systems reproduce social inequalities in the body, are incredibly useful, they only demonstrate that inequities and injustices based on race show up on and in the body and impact one’s quality, access to, and ability to be healthy. What we do not know is what happens when people who are aggressively targeted by these forms of structural violence experience this kind of affliction, and whether the embodiment of racial inequities in health changes the terms of engagement that predicate this suffering. While works like Holmes’ *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States* (2013) detail the embodied experience of racism and racialization on the body, what we do not know is what happens when the processes of racialization, which result in subjectification, deviate and disjuncture from the cultural production of identity formation and how it impacts health. So, for example, with the Hebrews, what happens to the question of racial health disparities when race is not a significant category of inquiry when examining the relationship between identity and health? What metrics can be used to assess empowered, resistant, or racially-transcended bodies? As indigenous and other marginalized communities globally begin to re-indigenize their diets and transform their health, what ways will there be to measure this progress? It is the same ethic that Montoya advances with his question, “what forms of knowledge are embodied, produced, and exchanged that
counter the predictable tropes of deficits and human suffering?” (Montoya 2013, S53). It is these bounded set of questions that frame my ethnographic explorations with the Hebrew community.

**Raising Vegan Children: The Production of the Indigenous Hebrew Baby**

“Our Hebrew babies are smarter, healthier, more alert, and more active.” I heard this first when I was in Israel. It was later, while in South Africa, that another young mother said it to me while I was spending time with her and her baby boy who would be celebrating his first birthday. They continued on to present the benefits of veganism for transforming and distinguishing their babies from “other” babies. In the absence of witnessing every stage of child development to have a comparison for the difference in their babies, I struggled initially to “see” the difference. Nevertheless, I listened intently to the mothers who recounted the pronounced differences they experienced in their children from the others. I would come to realize how the differences in Hebrew babies were an example of Hebrew bioethnic (re)conscription.

In the Hebrew community, there is a hierarchy that states that there is God, men, women, and then children. In the idealized structure, Hebrew men have desired but have not always been able to afford, to have their wives to stay at home to raise and nurture the children. Nevertheless, for them, a woman’s work
was in the kitchen, the laundry room, and every other room of the home. In turn, many women have structured their identity around and found great pride in what they prepared in the kitchen, the kinds of clothes they could sew, the condition of their house, and, especially, their children. For women in the community, the ability to reproduce the children and to have control over the children was a source of power in a hierarchy that put them below God and the men. Therefore, the careful production of good Hebrew citizens was the predominant concern for women especially in managing the relationship with their husbands, particularly for men who had lived a life outside of the Hebrew community and had placed a heightened importance on “making indigenous Hebrew children.”

While in Dimona, I attended a “Youth Day” event with a family that I had gotten close to during my fieldwork time. Youth Day was one of the community’s end of the summer celebrations that allowed members of the Hebrew family who might be visiting from abroad in the other jurisdictions outside of Dimona to take part in community life. The different youth organizations had their own shows in which they would dance, sing, recite poetry, model their fashions, and vend their crafts, and other products for the entire village and surrounding community. I spent the afternoon with one young family which was comprised of three young children who were all under six years of age, were born of a mother who was born and raised in Dimona as a life-long Hebrew, and a father who joined the community in his late adolescence/early adulthood, after a life between the Caribbean and the United States. Although it was clear after observing the
family’s daily life for months that the mother bore most of the weight of the daily
tasks of parenting, the Youth Day event signaled the degree to which some
members of the community were driven to demonstrate, through the careful
cultivation of their children’s bodies, the ability of the Hebrew lifestyle to have
the desired effect of creating indigenous Hebrew bodies that were not at an
increased risk for non-communicable chronic diseases like obesity, hypertension,
and diabetes. Ethnographically, I examine how the Williams’ family work
towards disciplining the bodies of children in order to produce and reinforce
claims about Hebrew identity and health.

In the heat of the summer’s day, I watched as the mother found herself
having to contend with what other Hebrews described as “an overzealous
husband” who was consumed by a desire to follow the Hebrew law to the letter.
His role as a priest in the community confounded this pursuit of the Hebrew
customs and practices to a degree that surpassed most people’s in the
community. Nonetheless, on the day that was specially crafted to celebrate those
with the lowest status in community, children, fun could and would not happen
without attention to the ongoing effort to shape these growing Hebrew bodies.
We were assembled at row tables out on the King’s Court (the open multi-
purpose space when you approach the village from the main street) for those who
could afford to participate in this grand celebration. The event was catered by a
leading family in Dimona who was known for their delectable culinary creations.
There was, in good Hebrew fashion, copious amounts of food for all (who could
afford to pay) to consume. On this particular day, there were barbecue twists, broccoli salad, a “cheesy” carbohydrate dish, and salad. While the two older children in the family were able to walk around, eat some, play and, as children do, run around, the youngest child was still in the lap of the mother, making it more difficult to chase the other children. The children stayed fairly close to the table because they were mostly waiting for what was in their minds, the main event, dessert, sugar, and a Hebrew community favorite, gleedah (ice cream). There was also pie and cake for others who were interested. I found that in this moment of what could be seen as immense joy for children (and adults alike), the radiant ravishing heat of summer balanced with the cool, soothing, sweetness of ice cream to be insightful about the generational difference, the life differences, and commitment to the production of cultural difference emerge between this husband and wife. The mother, who had grown up in the community, was more lenient in her approach to cultivating dietary preferences among her children. Her priority in a community, where there was so much sacrifice for the greater good of the community, was for her children to have as much as they could, which allows us to see the social and affective qualities of food. She was concerned about her children’s happiness, their normalcy in some sense, and her efforts towards them having a childhood that they would look back and be very fond of in years to come. This is not to suggest that she provided her children with a non-vegan diet. She fed her children oats and grains for breakfast, vegetables, protein (often beans and other legumes), and a mix of the vegan food
groups. She did however, allow them to occasionally indulge in ice cream, vegan pizza, or other treats when she had the money to provide it.

Her sense of trying to create dietary balance for the children led to the emergence of a conflict. The father did not want the children to have ice cream and during this encounter told the mother (because given the structure of the community and in adherence with its values, it was her job to enforce his views relative to the children’s diet) was not allow the children to have “so much sugar.” In this moment he told her that the baby who was in her arms and who had begun his experimentation with table food was not to have any of the ice cream or other desserts, under no uncertain terms. While making this argument, he grounded his perspective in the evidence of the differences in the two oldest children. Over the loud music, children running, and servers working on Hebrew time, he went on to discuss that their very careful and diligent approach with their first child in the limited amount of sugar that she was allowed to consume resulted in a set of dietary habits, patterns, and preferences which were reflective of the kind of child/children that he wanted to raise and produce in the world. This was countered with their second child who had a more voracious appetite even at a young age and could not resist sweets and who often found favor with her mother, which allowed her obtain the sweets that her father detested. He went on to share that, “between the first two children, you know that there was a difference in the amount of sweets we allowed the two of them to have” and, subsequently, a difference in their preference and desire for sweets, as well as a
difference in the behavior between the two children. He continued on with this
treatise on sweets and children's behavior and developing preferences early in
life. Throughout this period, the mother was mostly quiet, understanding as she
told me later that refutation to this argument was not utilitarian at this place and
time. Although the father did not do any of the food preparation in the
household, nor did he factor in birth order, natural preferences, experiences in
the household, or other differences, it was upon the mother of three young
children to respect and respond to his desires for the children's diet.

For the father who had “given up” his life between the Caribbean and the
U.S., his devotion (at least rhetorically) to the development of Hebrew children
was a guiding force in his parenting style. He demanded that the house respect
the rules of the community around diet, but required even more of his wife and of
the dietary habits of his children. After almost a decade in the Israeli/Palestinian
desert and all of its hardships, he was a model citizen in what many in the
community described as the Kingdom. For him, he was committed to the Hebrew
belief that it was possible to transform the racialized Black body through a
regimen of cultural practices that could lead back to full health. That did not
mean that there was not a life full of conflict between members of the community,
like his wife who grew up in the community and lived the Hebrew ways with a
kind of ease that comes with years of practice, compared to the husband who
brought the pressure and stress what he aimed to accomplish in one generation.
Moreover, given the structure of family life and parenting in the community, most of the responsibilities fell upon the mother. I witnessed this first-hand on a walk with the mother to the market. One day, when all three children, the mother, and I went for a walk to the market, the difficulties of balancing a very strict vegan diet that the father desired came to light in the heat of the sun. On our walk, the children ran, played, got dirty in the desert sand despite their mother’s failed attempts to redirect their behavior. The children knew that in the absence of their father and in their mother’s fatigue of managing three children, mentally balancing a budget, and keeping a note of what she was to purchase in the market, and also while talking to me, they could take advantage of this opportunity. So, the children took their chance. They puckered their angelic faces and in what seemed like a perfect harmony and made their plea to their mother, “Emah (Hebrew for mother), can we have chips and nuts?” They wanted potato chips (which were vegan but said to be outside of the lifestyle because they were processed and often contained additives) and roasted nuts (their father preferred them to consume only raw nuts which were closest to their natural form). So on our walk, the children quite aware of their mother’s vulnerability during a heatwave they were able to convince her to get the potato chips and roasted nuts outside of the watchful eye of their father. The joy for foods that they would not normally eat, but were permitted by their mother for this time away from the community and their father’s dietary rigidity, was evident. Moreover, their mother was more concerned about appeasing the
children and ensuring that of all the things that they lived among and through (marginalization, constant bombing, social and economic disenfranchisement, and the overall austerity and asceticism within the community), they could sneak and find pleasure in the saltiness of potato chips, roasted nuts, and the sweetness of vegan ice cream. This is conversant with Lauren Berlant’s (2007) theory of “slow death,” which shows how neoliberal structures that impose certain appropriate dietary behaviors and understand deviation from these scripts as irresponsible behaviors when, in fact, people are overtaxed by the conditions of subjugation. Therefore, a “lateral agency” in the form of dietary “indiscretion” results as it does here. While the mother’s engagement in pleasure created some lateral agency, the father and the broader community’s efforts seek to normalize the cultivation of practices to conscript the body.

Bioethnic (Re)Conscription

I utilize and build on Montoya’s concept of bioethnic conscription to theorize the construction of Hebrew children. Montoya’s (2011) *Making the Mexican Diabetic: Race, Science & the Genetics of Inequality* examines the ways in which geneticists deploy understandings of race and ethnicity in biomedical research and development. Through work on diabetes, he establishes how NCD research is a “racial project that sustains social inequalities through the circulation of racialized genetic material through the representations of ethnic populations” (2007, 118). This concept is important for furthering the argument
that there is a separation between race, genetics, and disease, as well as the relationship between how disease continues to be racialized. I draw on Montoya’s work that focuses on the framing of certain NCDs, like hypertension and diabetes, as “ethnoracial diseases” promulgated by the literature and media, which distort specific statistics by mischaracterizing the raw data that leaves certain ethnic and racial groups at greater risk for these diseases by virtue of race/ethnicity. Furthermore, while his work has focused on ethnic identity and disease “the more challenging task is to explain how the biological and social registers of race and ethnicity are intertwined or conscripted in biomedical sciences of complex disease” (Montoya 2007, 99), I examine how members of this community create their own system of engaging with the biomedical science that nativize high rates of NCDs among racialized Black communities as “ethnoracial diseases” through constructing their own relationship to biomedical discourses that connect race and disease.

Whereas Montoya defines bioethnic conscription as “a practice wherein the social conditions—past and present—of Mexicana/o and other groups’ lives are folded into the biomedical registers of diabetes knowledge,” (2007, 102), I examine how the current health disparities literature and the historical efforts of biomedicine have worked to incorporate Blackness into not only diabetes, but also hypertension and obesity (NCDs) knowledge. I examine the ways in which Montoya argues that “bioethnicity can be conscripted in both productive and reproductive ways” among Hebrews (Montoya 2007, 118). Specifically, I consider
the forging of a biological citizenship among Hebrews transnationally through
the transformation of the bodies and biologies that is the grounds for performing,
articulating, and establishing Hebrew indigeneity. I argue that Hebrews, through
their efforts to assert Hebrew identity, eschew racialized Blackness and
bioethnically (re)conscript themselves through cultural practices, as
demonstrated through the Williams’ family work to construct their children.
Furthermore, bioethnic conscription, so conceived, extends what Rabinow (1991)
calls biosociality. Biosociality is a phenomenon whereby biological and genetic
discourse becomes part of a person’s identity, at times intentionally so (Taussig,
Heath, and Rapp 2003).

Building on this work that specifically targets racialized Black
communities in the bioethnic conscription of chronic disease in relationship to
hypertension, obesity, and, often, diabetes, I argue for how Hebrews work to
bioethnically rescript narratives about NCDs. Although that is a present feature
of the Hebrew community, vis-à-vis the renaissance of genetics and genomics
research which seeks to genetically narrativize relationships between race and
disease, I examine the ways that Hebrews bioethnically (re)conscript their health
identities through the assertion of an identity outside of the purview of the
dominant narratives produced by the biomedical research and practice
community about how racial identity constructs health. Through participation in
a specific form of Hebrew biological citizenship and biosociality that will be
explained through the next example, the process of being and becoming Hebrews becomes more apparent over the course of a lifetime.

Montoya further defines bioethnic conscription as “sociopolitical registers of race and ethnicity [that] are conscripted into the production and consumption of biomedical knowledge about disease at multiple stages of the research process” (2007, 101). I argue that the Hebrews are able to bioethnically re(conscript) themselves by rejecting the racial categories used to determine identity and instead privileging their indigenous identity to create aligning narratives about disease. Hebrews rescript the narratives of racialized Blackness produced, consumed, and transmitted through biomedical knowledge to culturally produce notions of indigeneity. In the above vignette, I discuss how the Hebrew child and the body are the grounds by which parents seeks to embody different discourses than accepted racialized narratives. Through the careful cultivation of the Hebrew child body, parents believe they are able to change the narratives at an individual level, which will then join with the collective community efforts to change the co-constitutive conscription of biology and culture. For Mr. Williams, who was not born into the Hebrew lifestyle, his subsequent practices of reconscriptioning his life bioethnically include his passion for ensuring that the children were disciplined into the bodily techniques (Mauss, 1973) that would thereby ensure Hebrew identity, as seen through their health profiles, which they hoped would be eventually registered into the biomedical literature.
The Hebrews worked diligently in many locations around the globe to create scientific evidence for the effectiveness of their health programs. For example, in Ghana they referenced their work with the government to implement a regenerative health program, an iteration of the Hebrew health policies distilled into health behavior change principles. Likewise, in the United States, the Hebrew community worked with different public health departments and officials was cast to help with health behavior change among African Americans. Although there has not been scientific evidence to support the efficacy of bioethnic (re)conscription, it was one of the initial aims of my dissertation research to document to the indigenous Hebrew biomarkers. There has only been one epidemiological study conducted by researchers at Meharry Medical College and Vanderbilt University. The study was never published in a scientific journal. There was one newspaper article where the findings are reported. The researchers at Meharry Medical College and Vanderbilt University that tested the effectiveness of the Hebrew community model focused on preventive health on the rates of hypertension and obesity among the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem. Conducted in the late 1990s, it found that six percent of Hebrews had high blood pressure and five percent were identified as obese, in comparison to 30 percent and 32 percent respectively of Black Americans (McConnaughey, 1998). Nevertheless, the researchers and, subsequently, the Hebrews were skillful in their deployment of Blacks in the United States as their reference group in the study’s results. Although Hebrews have not begun to discuss the epigenetic
possibilities of their work of bioethnic (re)conscription, it appeared to be a natural next step, but it was not brought up, much like the Hebrews position that argues against “the current preoccupation with using genetic tests to prove authenticity of African Jews” (Jackson, 2013a). It is the Hebrew paradox of being engaged with science, biomedicine, and genetics, but often not allowing it to be an arbitrator of identity; rather always retaining the community’s “power to define” (Ben Israel, 1990).

For the father of the Hebrew “designer babies,” bioethnic (re)conscription, which relies on definitions of bioethnic conscription, states that it is a “practice where social conditions—past and present—become folded into the biomedical registers of disease status” (Montoya 2007, 102). In his efforts to rescript identity, he demonstrated the dimensions of the overarching process of Hebrew self-making and the stages of becoming that inform the future, which I will discuss in the following section, work with children. For this father, not having the “Hebrew knowledge” as a child meant he was consumed by trying to do everything in his power to create Hebrews and further the individual and collective sets of identity as an adult.

Only after years of hearing this message about their children did I realize the rhetorical work involved in producing an indigenous new generation for the parents who ascribed to the narratives about the difference of the Hebrew children. For members of the Hebrew community, children are a prime opportunity to begin creating new “clean slates” that are not mired by or in the
biomedical projections of identity that connect race and health. Through their children they could construct a relationship between identity and health that allows for the manifestation of indigenous health and well-being vis-à-vis a Hebrew indigeneity. Children were considered pure, unspoiled by the dietary horrors that most of their parents, grandparents, and others had been and forced to endure. While this was a great opportunity, it also produced significant anxieties for many of the parents who wanted to further the community’s argument about their children being different.

**Coming from America: Health, Transformation, and the ‘I might not get there with you’ Part of the Dream**

During another summer in the desert, I spent time with another one of the esteemed princes whose journey through and out of America, into Liberia, and to Dimona leads him to a different place in health and well-being journey. Prince Caleb was a pioneer Hebrew whose participation in community life extends over six decades. When I met him, he told me that he spent number of his formative years in “the Northern South,” as he would describe the city of Chicago.

What struck me about Prince Caleb was the strength of his spirit. For example, he survived the death of not one, not two, but three of his children – each on a different continent and in a different way. First, there was the accidental stove fire that left his little girl with burns all over her body and in
excruciating pain for forty days before she died at the tender age of six. Years later, after his family were Hebrews and living in Liberia, their four-year-old child fell in the well during a drought and died. This would be the second accidental death. And, finally, a son who was performing with one of the Hebrew bands as entertainment for a Bar mitzvah was shot to his death as the event was attacked in retaliation to the ongoing violence in the region. Although each or any of three deaths could have caused Prince Caleb to lose hope, or in the final two cases, walk away from the community, his resilience as a figure in the community and his commitment to another way of life glimmered in the radiant sun that lit his face during our interview. His resilience is a proxy for his commitment to living life as a Hebrew. It was the same determination and defiance of the odds that would animate his response to his chronic illness, when I met him in his mid-seventies.

In order to understand the man I encountered in his mid-seventies, he narrated the journey from his childhood to adolescence, through this commitment to the Hebrew faith and community, and his life now. He breezed through most of his childhood, which placed his parents in the first wave of the Great Migration, as he was born on the island, in 1930s Chicago. I struggled through the gaps in the narrative that led him to leave the United States and move to another country. He talked to me about graduating high school, a trade school, which he saw as a dead end because, “the whites, they used to always laugh at me when I would go to a place looking for a job. They wouldn’t give no
black people jobs. Not in Chicago, anyway.” From there, he served six years in the United States military (which he was very grateful was complete before the Vietnam War) then pursued higher education after returning. He struggled through the stories of great disillusionment with his bank teller job, which he said, “wasn’t no real money.” He moved in and out of detail as he recounted his life with his wife as a young man in Chicago. He spoke about the possessions he had, “a really nice car, a place to live, and a steadily growing savings account for a home.” It was now the 1960s and Chicago was a hotbed of political action like many cities around the country. After his skin-blistering red hot tears of rage and fury from his experience of the Jim Crow U.S. South while in the U.S. Army, he talked about “not joining King ‘cause I just couldn’t sit there while they spit on me, you know that kind of stuff. At that time, 21, 22 years old, it lowered my spirit.” So instead, it would happen that his wife’s brother, who was a Hebrew (although he mistook him for “a brother in the Nation” of Islam, initially), would offer him another route. He talked about being impressed with his brother-in-law’s library and the joy in being able to go through his books. He encountered more Hebrews and was really struck by their study, their argumentation skills, and their answers to his questions about identity. He said, “I realized nobody knew where we came from. You know, I said you come from the South...yeah, my mother was born in the South, yeah my father was born in the South. But where did we come from?” Prince Caleb’s life on what I theorize as the island, Black
Chicago, as part of the larger waves of migrants who would come to define the city, left him with limited options for understanding his history and his identity.

This group of Hebrews and their brand of Hebrewism, is a part of long trajectory of religious and spiritual communities that developed or created roots in Chicago that advocated for an identity beyond normative U.S. racial logics that racialized them as Black and, instead, proffered categories like Hebrew as a primary frame for identity. These spiritual communities offered what these communities had been longing for, an identity, a knowledge of a determined past, and a defined sense of culture (Scott 1991). His fascination, appreciation, and respect for the Hebrew community, in terms of what they offered to him, would develop into a lifetime devotion to the community and its efforts, despite the toll it would take on him. His connection to the community motivated Prince Caleb and his wife to sell everything he owned and did not need for Liberia. Prince Caleb, his wife, and his children bought plane tickets and would be among the pioneers who would move from the United States “back to Africa.” Collectively, the community attests to the Liberia years as being among the most difficult, in which he acknowledged that they benefited from the strength of the women who were present in greater number than the men and who lived through and with daily challenges that came with a transnational relocation to an unfamiliar continent, environment, lifestyle, and with people with whom they had never lived prior to the move.
Nevertheless, they survived and made it to the land they understood as Israel. Eventually, years into their journey, the community would establish Dimona as its headquarters and would be the place where he would live the majority of the previous decades prior to our meeting. It is here where he transitioned to veganism permanently and is where he would have to make a number of countless other changes to adjust to the chronic disease that would consume the remainder of his life. Although the Hebrew community attributes the chronic diseases of kidney failure, hypertension, and diabetes that Prince Caleb had to his initial experiences in the U.S., he asserts that illness is a result of his neglect of himself and the incredibly high stress levels he endured while working hard to build the kingdom/community. Although his diagnosis only came after living life as Hebrew in Dimona, it was during his travels, experiences with the United States, Israeli government, and a number of Western African governments that he was forced to deal with the community’s future, security, and welfare. He discussed the failure of his health relative to “his ignorance” and neglect of self as he prioritized the needs of the community. What is ironic is that it would be his former offering of self and his children that would diagnose and provide access to care later in life, although it would not be enough to restore or reverse the effects. As he describes, it was through the VA (United States Veteran’s Administration), which he was able to access because of his military service as a young man, that would give him the diagnosis of hypertension and diabetes and preliminary care during one of his business trips to the United
States. Subsequently, it would be the Israeli government’s attempt to compensate the bereaved parents who lost a child, by providing the citizenship, housing, and medical benefits that the community had been fighting for, for a number of generations. These benefits provided him with dialysis and the other medical care he needed to care for chronic comorbidities, which were being addressed where he was living in Dimona.

What he ignored in his fight for the community’s welfare would be would be his primary daily task at this stage in his life. Prince Caleb was forced to engage in a daily battle to combat kidney failure, high blood pressure, and diabetes, which was a major challenge as a vegan because he had to avoid even the simplest foods like bananas, “because of the potassium,” or to reduce and avoid other high sugar fruits or carbohydrate dense plant-based nutrition because of the diabetes. Even as a Hebrew who had worked years to embrace and adapt to this lifestyle, he had to make drastic changes at the end of his life to accommodate his new work of caring for the body that had not achieved what the Hebrew indigenous lifestyle aims for: everlasting life.

Therefore, the adjustment and the learning continued as he, his wife, and those around him who were actively involved in his food preparation had to augment their knowledge in order to support the well-being of Prince Caleb. Their health literacy in general health and nutrition acquired in the community was not sufficient to support him through particular part of his journey. His community had to find recipes and other strategies to promote his health and
alleviate the stress on his body. Despite their efforts and his, as I am writing this, with great sadness, I learned that Prince Caleb breathed his final breath for this lifetime in that same Israeli/Palestinian desert where I met him.

Although Prince Caleb’s health profile fits in the Hebrew community’s general explanation that bodies like his were exposed to the effects of the standard American diet, because he did not have access to the health knowledge or “health literacy” that the Hebrews pride themselves on, his story still remains a blemish on their record in the way that they construct identity. For them, their effort to achieve health has often times created unhealthiness in the community. For Prince Caleb, his recount of living under extremely stressful conditions and ignoring his health and his diet, and not prioritizing his health or healthcare resulted in this outcome. Anthropologists Merrill Singer and Arachu Castro edited an entire volume entitled *Unhealthy Health Policy: A Critical Anthropological Examination*, which “critically review[s] the intended or unintended negative impact of policy on the lives and well-being of people targeted by social policies” (Singer and Castro 2004, xiii). To my knowledge, the Hebrews have not formally identified the intended or unintended negative impact of their community policies or protocols on the well-being of its members. However, the lives of people like Prince Caleb indicate that the levels of stress and the demands on the body and the spirit required to participate in community life are part of an unhealthy health policy. Singer, who conducted doctoral research with the Hebrews, writes in his description of disease etiology beliefs among the Hebrews, writes in his description of disease etiology beliefs among the
community, “when illness does develop, it is prima facie evidence that the patient has been guilty of a lack of care” of the body and self (Singer 1981). For Hebrews, care of the body is one’s responsibility maintain and an opportunity to reflect their indigenous culture, but failure to do so compromises their identity as a Hebrew and their ability to live up to and into the narratives about the Hebrew body.

Moreover, I think about the incompleteness of the mission of those like Prince Caleb. Although he sacrificed his life for the Hebrew community and worked tirelessly to wholeheartedly embrace a cultural disassociation with United States Blackness as a way to reclaim and transform their biology, he was never able to meet the community goal. Thinking with Biehl and Locke (2010), I consider the anthropology of becoming as a framework for Hebrew cultural rituals that helps to interpret the cultural change. I reflect on Prince Caleb’s account of navigating social and cultural change that accompanied his transition to Hebrew identity through this state of becoming as the transition of being Hebrew occurred and his health failed. What the members of the Hebrew community demonstrate is how the process of racial transcendence and transformation places them in a precarious position. For the men who are leaders in the community in Dimona, their continued position as non-citizens in the modern nation-state of Israel, who are understood as Black from the United States, places them in a prolonged space of becoming in their process. Their
engagement and movement towards other parts of the process of being and becoming Hebrews is often incomplete, unfinished, and always in progress.

What Prince Caleb’s story establishes is the process of becoming that emerges from the efforts to exist as an indigenous Hebrew after years of being racialized as Black in the United States. If we consider Biehl and Locke (2010), who discuss Deleuze and becoming, they describe, “in becoming, as Deleuze saw it, one can achieve an ultimate existential stage in which life is simply immanent and open to new relations—camaraderie—and trajectories” (317). Although Hebrews work to move away from what Prince Caleb’s body represented, it was the ultimate existential stage, as Biehl and Locke suggest, that he was in forging new relations and trajectories for the entire community. Looking at the life of Prince Caleb’s and theorizing his body, it “grounds ethnographic ethics and gives us a sense of becoming that dominant health models would render impossible” (Biehl and Locke 2010, 319). Although dominant health models and the members of the biomedical care system that were responsible for Prince Caleb’s health might not recognize his process of becoming through every moment of his journey as Hebrew, and how that did not exactly equate to the health profile that the community had hoped for, his potential to become was always a core aspect of his inner life. The work that Prince Caleb was doing and risked his health for was critical to the efforts of pushing the community’s message forward and advocating for a highly contested form of becoming. As Biehl and Locke note, “It is a potentiality for becoming, for breaking free of forms, for sublimating the
violence of forces both everyday and world historical. This potential for sublimation needs social (even political) recognition” (Biehl and Locke 2010, 332). While Prince Caleb’s potentiality for becoming was effective in many ways, he never received the kind of recognition needed. This left, as Delueze theorized, the “question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived…. becoming “always has an element of flight that escapes its own formalization” (Delueze 1997, 1, cf. Biehl and Locke 2010, 326). In some ways, Prince Caleb was left on the margins, in the incompletion that made many Hebrews uncomfortable, especially those who were invested in the outcome of the experience everlasting life more than the process of becoming and existing. While he had some major successes in the relocation of his family and the erection of a community and a life outside of the United States, it was his status as one of the community’s pioneers that made him responsible for a demonstration of cultural difference, health, diet, and the body, that functioned as his greatest vulnerability and a community liability.

Hebrew Local Biology in the Context of Global Health

As anthropologists begin to revisit the concept of local biology in the age of molecular manipulation, they have worked to understand how these analyses are
reconfigured, given the impact of the local and global (Brotherton & Nyugen, 2013). I ask questions about the racialized Black body and non-communicable disease risk for obesity, hypertension, and diabetes and the impact of the cultural production of indigeneity on biology. Margaret Lock who conceptualized “local biology” centers the core of the argument that cultural beliefs influence biological processes. Lock writes, “not only that cultural beliefs influence the construction, experience and interpretation of aging and other biological processes but that biological difference... molds and contains the subjective experience of individuals and the creation of cultural interpretations” (Lock 1993, 39).

Similarly, as it relates to the processes of racialization, Gravlee argues that not only is race embedded in the local biology of biomedicine, it has also become biology (Gravlee 2009). Though his argument is predicated on embodiment, Gaines (2005) discusses race as a local biology in the United States has framed biomedicine as a local biology, which he suggests, “has embedded within its theory and practice local biologized notions of gender and ‘race’” (Fausto-Sterling 1992, 2000; Gaines 1995, 2005a, b, 2011; Harding 1993). His theories extend further to include the forms of hierarchy that are included in biomedicine, specifically age, class, and sexual orientation. Moreover, he emphasizes the fact that race is its own local biology, especially in a place like the United States where the social stratification is predicated on “notions of race [that] greatly impacts life chances” (Gaines 277, 2005). Although Gaines discusses the centrality of race to an understanding the context of dominant constructions of local biologies in the
United States, what his analysis generates is attention to the ways race permeates the framing of biology in mechanisms that are seemingly out of the control of those who have been racialized. Faye Harrison (1994) argued in the context of racial and gender inequalities in health and health care over two decades ago that the “full ethnicization of [Black] Americans as a group is contingent upon the demise of the U.S. racial order and the concomitant realization of social equality” (91).

As I seek to frame this research within the anthropological research on local biologies, in the context of global health and global health epidemics like NCDs, it is imperative to understand how local biologies are inherently formed by outside systems, structures and forces, which direct narratives about identity, which then impacts health. For those who are racialized as Black, there is centuries of substantive evidence about how the processes of racialization create established claims about the difference in Black biology that places it in a marginalized category. Through the ethnographic research with these two princes and a young Hebrew family, I make an argument that looks at how communities who have been racialized as Black have spent years advocating for a local biology, vis-à-vis the cultural practices of indigeneity predicated on spirituality, religion, and belief for generations work, to contend with the local biology of race.

Secondly, I look at how the Hebrew Israelites, very specifically, challenge us to think about local biologies in the context of global health, as they implement a transnational health policy system that seeks to re-craft the bodies and the
biologies of those who have been racialized as Black by the systems to
demonstrate the impact of the cultural production of indigeneity on biology. By
focusing on Prince Caleb, we see how the Hebrews mourn the loss of one man
who was not able to successfully transform his biology. Here a conflict emerges
between an older embedded local biology of race, i.e. Blackness, and the
Hebrews’ construct of local biology through the cultural production of indigeneity
grounded in spiritual practice.

While the notion of local biologies is a useful analytic for understanding
and working in global health settings worldwide, what the Hebrews demonstrate
is the convergence of the local with the global in working with transnational
communities, and the power of transnational concepts, like racialization and
social inequality, to construct identity and determine health. As we utilize these
concepts, it remains true, as evinced in Prince Caleb’s example, that an
investigation of local biology in the context of global health presents evidence for
the residual effects of social inequality. As Brotherton and Nguyen (2013)
suggest, through a critical understanding of the relationship between biology and
health we are able to come to “a reading of the biological not as ‘cultural
representation’ or as ‘ideology’ but rather as a site where difference registers”
(Brotherton and Nguyen 2013, 290). Collectively, biomedicine, health disparities
literature and discourse, and often medical anthropology reproduce racial
differences in health as reflection of historic conceptualizations of racial
ordering/hierarchy consistent with racial logics and frameworks that undergird the project of the nation.

Furthermore, I look at the ways in which biosociality, as articulated by Rainbow (1996) produces knowledge about how science, in terms of biology, is able to construct bases for sociality. Nevertheless, through an engagement with Rayna Rapp’s work on biosociality, I look further to examine the ways in which Hebrew claims to an indigenous identity “do not go uncontested, nor are these new categories of identity used untransformed” (Rapp 1999, 302). I use the concept of becoming to demonstrate how standard forms of biosociality and resulting local biologies constructed by race in the United States are challenged and transformed as the Hebrews work to transition from race to spirituality as their primary identity. Through Prince Caleb’s example, I contend that the process of becoming biologically a Hebrew is not detached from the histories of former modes of biosociality and previous local biologies that were drawn from these processes of racialization, which help to illustrate the work of fully embodying the cultural production of indigeneity.

Prince Caleb’s example helps us to examine Margaret Lock’s concept of local biology, whose line of argumentation concludes to suggest that “the coproduction of biologies and cultures contributes to embodied experience, which, in turn, shapes discourse about the body” (Lock 2001, 478). I worked to demonstrate, through these ethnographic examples, how Hebrew embodied experiences illustrate the coproduction of the biological and cultural, which has
shaped discourses about the body. Although they would like to hide narratives like Prince Caleb’s in the Hebrew community, or simply describe as Singer (1981) did, among the Hebrews “illness is seen as punishment for deviance,” they, nevertheless, utilize local biology to describe the ideal type and the limited “stains on their record.” For those who have followed a trajectory like Prince Caleb, their health has been relegated to being a result of their experiences in the United States and the inability to transition his identity from the local biology of race to reflect his true identity as a Hebrew through a Hebrew local biology. Gaines (2005) has worked to demonstrate how race is a local biology in the United States and is an argument which the Hebrews unknowingly employ to further their argument about the ways in which the socio-cultural and biological result in embodied experiences for those who are unable to fully become Hebrews vis-à-vis their health profile. Working with the concept of becoming, I leverage Prince Caleb’s story to detail the ways in which the spiritual synchronism process, transitioning from a primary identity of race to spirituality, is difficult and requires a great deal of effort. For many, even the community’s messiah, Ben Ammi, there are the ones who are not able to get there with the membership of the community, in terms of their ability to defy death, treat, reverse, and prevent disease and achieve physical everlasting life.

What is important to note is that all is not lost in the experience of death for Hebrews who are not able to get there, as it demonstrates the powerful work of marking the body that the local biologies have created. For as much as
community members like Prince Caleb or even Ben Ammi tried, their efforts to deracinate their bodies from the discourses and health profile that have sought to define racialized Blacks in the United States, they were unsuccessful with their own bodies. What remains is the work of understanding how the socio-cultural experience of being indigenous looks like from beginning to end. And is it possible to understand the work that Prince Caleb did with this body to become indigenous, even if he did not defy death. The Hebrews still have yet to develop a theological acceptance and inclusion criteria for Hebrew death, other than off-loading death to the experiences of living in “captivity in Babylon” (i.e., in the United States or other places in the Western Hemisphere) as Black, and the effects of that lived experience on the body. Although group leaders and community pioneers like Prince Caleb are recognized as Hebrew, their struggle to fully live into Hebrew conceptions of identity and citizenship remain a question. Does his ability to be awarded citizenship as a result of his son’s death, to undergo dialysis treatment in Israel/Palestine, and to presumably consume a plant-based diet to maintain his health and live his last days in a place he considered home bear all the signs of an indigenous victory? I think they crystalize the work of becoming and the indigenous self-making process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I narrated the lives of two Hebrew princes and one family to illuminate three points about the Hebrew community medical anthropology and public health: the creation of a Hebrew biological citizenship, the process of
bioethnic (re)conscription, and the assertion of local biology in the context of
global health. The Hebrews showcase the distance between the processes of
racialization and the cultural production of identity and its impact on health. I
argue that by examining the Hebrew Israelites, we can understand and expand
future examinations of racialized Black health by looking critically at the
processes of identity formation that take place through acculturation and
assimilation in response to efforts to combat, mitigate, or address social inequity
in health. Moreover, this chapter seeks to nuance examinations of Blackness and
identity in the health literature and develop more sophisticated social theory that
not only helps us to understand the working of social inequality, structural
violence, and racism on the body, but also how to better understand the
theoretical perspectives of communities who refute United States-based racial
logics to construct identity, the body, and, subsequently, biology.

Ethnographically, I venture with Prince Azriel as he treats, manages, and
prevents disease aiming to defy death as a core aspect of Hebrew identity. I detail
how his life and the global circulation of his example of health and well-being
works to instantiate a Hebrew biological citizenship. This form of biological
citizenship is in direct opposition to processes of racialization that construct a
biological citizenship based on Blackness in the United States. Here, I illustrate
how citizenships are re-made through the re-indigenization of the body through
Hebrew cultural practices. Similarly, with the Williams Family, I describe how
one family works to create indigenous Hebrew children, through the process of
bioethnic re-conscription. Utilizing Montoya’s concept of bioethnic conscription, I characterize the process by which Hebrews work to try to produce claims and an identity different than the one conscripted into the scientific literature, research, and data about the relationship between race and health.

Finally, I engage with Prince Caleb, whose multiple chronic illnesses at the end of his life represent the process of becoming in the quest to transition from a local biology of race in the United States to a Hebrew local biology. Through these three examples, I illustrate how Hebrews engage with racial health disparities discourses and literature to produce narratives outside the spectrum of privileging race as foundational to understanding the relationship between identity and health. In lieu of this perspective, the Hebrews focus on the production of Hebrew cultural identity to represent the most important factor to determine and understand health, well-being, as well as disease and disease risk.
Conclusion
The Pursuit of Everlasting Life

*Migrant Indigeneity* provides a new conceptual framework for racial health disparities research. Drawn from research with the Hebrew Israelites, it presents a critique and a new mode of analysis for communities who are substantively the crux of this research, in this specific case, those who are racialized as Black. Migrant indigeneity, challenges our limited understanding of primary category of analysis that frames how research has documented racial health disparities: race. Given the documentation of how the dialectical nature of race that is built on how other groups are defined that is foundational built on racial hierarchy and the inequality that is analyzed in the studies that have created the evidence for the error in genetic arguments for differences in health outcomes. Therefore, classic health disparities research is analysis of how social inequities are reproduced in health that provides detail on the scale of problem without commitment to a challenging the model and methods of the field. Migrant indigeneity, as a mechanism to understand the cultural production of indigeneity among the Hebrew Israelites, allows us to understand how even social constructionist understandings of race participate in the historic categorizations of people that are often reproduced in health outcomes and evidenced in the comparisons of all groups to whites as a reference.

*Migrant Indigeneity* seeks to challenge health disparities research frameworks in the following ways: 1) moving away from zero-sum game of
comparatively evaluating population health in comparison to whites as a useful analytic without structural adjusting all of systems and infrastructure to support an equity-based approach to health, 2) clarity around the fact that culture is not simply factor which can be controlled for in analyses (by proxy of race) or just a measure in which one can gain competence to deliver care but rather one of the most important indicators of understanding the meaning and significance of health to a person, the health behavior practices that support and facilitate health, and often the larger community-based knowledge of health promotion and disease prevention, and 3) the conflation of race and culture has led to a reductionist approach of further marginalizing the ability of communities within a particular racial group who are experiencing drastic disparities in health to be center for the development and promotion of solutions to reduce risk and rates of disease.

Throughout the dissertation, I have engaged with health disparities and health inequities research to focus on how the Hebrew Israelites work to structure identity beyond grounding racial logics to build frameworks that position their arguments for historic models of health and wellness in opposition to racializing paradigms of health behavior and prescriptive of health outcomes. Furthermore, as a dissertation in medical anthropology, it built on Kleinman, Eisenberg, & Good's (1978) seminal work that demonstrated the importance of culture in health and healthcare. Although this point has been one that has been well-taken and lead to cultural competency being a central focal point in the field,
the interstices of race and culture have continued to confound researchers and practitioners. Specifically, racial groups are often reduced into statistical and clinical monoliths who can navigated through a careful understanding of the data and the documented health behavior patterns. Through the data presented in the dissertation, health disparities and health equities researchers and health care providers can begin to through more clearly and deeply about the origin, utility, and appropriateness in racial categories in health and learn more from anthropologist to think with culture and identity to understand how to best achieved better health for all.

This dissertation through its intervention in medical anthropology has focused on a core theoretical question that plagues the social sciences: how do we theorize through ethnographic engagement with communities' ideas about a historic past, distinct identity, and unique culture of those racialized as Black in the United States? And what relationship does this question have to the development of strategies and policies to prevent NCDs and promote health? Through a transnational engagement with the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, I found that identity is critical to implementation of health policies but not in ways traditionally understood by a public health audience. For Hebrews, the processes that racialized them as Black is not how they approach the relationship between identity and health; rather their cultural production of indigeneity binds together their multi-continent project of uniting disparate
groups of people under a system of ‘spirituality in practice’ or what I refer to throughout the dissertation as Hebrew health policies.

This is not to suggest that the Hebrews are not actively engaged with the discourse on racial health disparities as a benchmark and source of information that informs their practice and articulation of cultural difference. The difference with the Hebrews is how they work to be perceived as culturally visible beyond racially reductive frameworks of Blackness that are limiting in their ability to capture their indigeneity. Furthermore, these racial health disparities frameworks inherently situate whiteness as the referent and benchmark for determining health and wellness. This specific biomedicalized perpetuation of racial hierarchy, global white supremacy, and the normativity of whiteness is taken on through the theoretical framework of migrant indigeneity. Migrant indigeneity seeks to re-frame the construction of indigeneity by decentering European spatial and temporal markers as grounds for determining who is indigenous. Moreover, within anthropology, it attempts to unfurl the trajectory that created two dialectically generated categories of identity that continue to be constructed as opposing in efforts to decolonize the discipline. Through the constructions of indigeneity that have been built from a diasporic past and notion of how identity has been prescribed for this community, there is need for more scholarship on Blackness in the Americas that is not seeking to be validated by its connections to an African past or berated for its failures to imitate and comply with local iterations of whiteness that are often at odds with indigeneity but
rather theorize its own cultural productions on its own terms. This is of course to add to contemporary works in the field that have previously responded to the need for this kind of scholarship.

Within in public health and biomedicine, race is a factor that is central to discussions of the social determinants of health and in health disparities research. In that system, there is no critique of the established categories of race, which Fassin (2011) has demonstrated, when externally generated especially in incongruence with how communities understand themselves, can be perceived as a form of symbolic violence. Medical anthropologists have theoretically attended to other forms of violence and how they are enacted on marginalized communities through structural violence (Farmer et.al., 2004) as a primary explanatory model for understanding disparities and inequities in health. Although structural violence gives a name to the forces, structures, and their effects, what medical anthropology has not done is created a space for understanding how ethnography can produce counter-narratives about how communities engage with racial health disparities and larger global health inequities. Through research with the Hebrews, I detail how the foundation of these discourses are reified in contemporary health issues, like disproportionate rates of NCDs, and are drawn from a longer history of the relationship between race and medicine or are built on racist epistemological frameworks. The Hebrews demonstrate how whiteness as the standard for health makes the potential for health while Black, a literal ontological impossibility or at best a
numerical anomaly given the evidence that documents the ways in which race structures the body. Therefore, the Hebrews build on historical legacies which have been largely missing or silenced by scholars, that present evidence for the development of an identity outside the racial logics of the state, i.e., which negotiate, embody, and perform identity to self, community, and to the world. It is of great consequence that often these communities were also spiritual groups that provided members with clarity about their historic past, identity, and culture. I contextualize these claims within the larger New Negro Movement that Treva B. Lindsey’s (2017) *Colored No More: Re-inventing Black Womanhood in Washington, D.C.* illustrates was a period and process of transformation and redefinition of cultural identity. This period from post-Reconstruction to the end of the Great Migration signaled great cultural change and attempts to identify and re-narrate the self individually, communally, and globally. These pronouncements of identity also reflected the concurrent and underlying migrations that reflect the constitutions of identity.

Research with the Hebrews and reflection with these communities has produced the concept of migrant indigeneity as a way to theorize the indigeneity of racialized Black communities in the United States who are not “Black Indians.” This research has been supported by the examination of the indigeneity of racialized Black communities in the Caribbean and Latin America. I utilize these works as a foundation to think through the paradigmatic frames by which the articulation of this identity has been impossible previously. Although engagement
with these works has been invaluable, migrant indigeneity takes a risk by making a claim to indigeneity that does not anchor its claims to land yet situates its proposal through Americanist landscapes and literature.

Migrant indigeneity draws on the development of this Hebrew community’s experiences of migration and the impact of successive migrations on the emergence of a set of indigenous spiritual practices. Specifically, I propose this deterritorialized form of indigeneity that builds on the experiences of being racialized as Black in Chicago (primarily, although also in other places in the U.S. and Caribbean) as a framework for the elaboration of a theologically grounded and spiritually-based identity. Engaging with the historical literature, I seek to demonstrate how the Great Migration is one of many integral migrations to explore in theorizing and analyzing this transnational Hebrew community. The scholarship that works to situate the Great Migration as a core formation in Black transnational identity-making and specifically Black transnational religious life shows that “during and after the Great Migration, African American religious persons and institutions as a whole—whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim—increasingly expressed their identity in transnational terms. Works like Sernett’s (1997) *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* demonstrated the significance of the Great Migration on the formation of religion although it has been critiqued for its focus on mainly mainline Christian communities without attention to the marginalized communities referred to during this period as “cults and sects.” Similarly, I employ criticism
like that of Sylvester A. Johnson, which “advances a postcolonial critique of African American religious studies that indicts previous scholarship for its marginalization of [B]lack [non-Christian spiritual and religious] members” (2009, 10). Johnson’s critique is one that is historic and harkens back to Arthur’s Fauset (1944) work in *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, which worked to write into the canon the academic study of religious communities who were not Black Christian and other less normative religious communities.

Although Fauset conducts research in Philadelphia, as literature that demonstrates the relationship between the Great Migration and a “transnational sense of Blackness [that] constitutes an important and sometimes ignored element of Black identity—namely, the creation of [B]lack ethnicity ... As several authors point out, the absolute emphasis on the “racial” identity of [B]lacks in some scholarship has robbed African Americans of their diverse and vibrant ethnic identities” (Curtis IV and Sigler, 2009, 9). Through works like these, I mine data from the scholarship within religious history combined with ethnographic material to further the argument about migrant indigeneity. I offer migrant indigeneity as a way to understand the cultural production of identity arising from this community given the history of underexplored or unexplored identities of spiritual and religious communities that have been overly racialized to the point that their unique cultural identity was either ignored, neglected, or perceived as irrelevant. I work to demonstrate how the Hebrew Israelites address this history of being racialized as a primary configuration of identity and then
explicitly produce details that demonstrate how they ‘spiritually synchronize’ into Hebrew as a primary identification for self and community.

Moreover, I rely on M. Jacqui Alexander’s (2005) work, which primes discussions about spirituality as an indigenous epistemic framework by which to ground the construction of a proposal for an emergent form of indigeneity in the Americas, migrant indigeneity. Through an interrogation of Hebrew spirituality in the second chapter, I theorize and analyze how spirituality broadens our horizons for a conversation about how to understand indigeneity in the contemporary moment. In addition to works like Alexander’s that ground conversations of indigenous spirituality in the Americas (produced by communities read as Black), I draw from the scholarship of Thomas (2011) and Scott (2017), who both examine the indigenous claims of the Rastafari, to enrich this discussion on spirituality as an indigenous epistemology. This dissertation adds the Hebrews to the discourse on indigeneity and seeks to build the intellectual discourse on indigenous spiritualties in the Americas as epistemic grounds to frame inquiries on indigeneity. It is ethnographically harvested from the youngest generation of Hebrews like Liorah, who is in her twenties and who experiences being Hebrew as no less natural than any other form of indigenous personhood. I ethnographically engage the experiences of Liorah, a community member born and raised in Israel/Palestine, whose entire life and identity have been framed through understandings of herself as a Hebrew. Nevertheless, she recounts an experience of her body being racialized on the streets of Dimona and
her accompanying surprise, discontent, and frustration with how these external understandings of who she is as a person are incompatible with knowledge of self and community highlights how the community is producing indigenous epistemic framings for not only her life and identity but moreover for understandings of Hebrewism more broadly.

Race continues to be a factor that presents itself in discussions of identity for Hebrews. Utilizing DuBois’ (1903) widely cited idea of double consciousness, I utilize the concept in the dissertation to think about how Hebrews must balance the processes of racialization, which categorizes them as solely Black, as well as the cultural production of indigenous identity that frames what they believe to be their authentic selves. Although I do not focus on the psychological experiences of duality, I illustrate how the Hebrew community uses the body to demonstrate how the impact of this duality lingers and structures the community’s efforts to spiritually synchronize. Double consciousness structures health, specifically citing the historic role that biomedicine has had in the processes of racialization, particularly in medicalizing Blackness in the Americas (Hogarth, 2017). Although the health of traditionally defined indigenous people has similarly been devastated by colonialism like those racialized as Black in the Americas, there have been different analytic frameworks applied to the mutual exclusively constituted communities. For example, Valeggia and Snodgrass (2015) argue in their “Health of Indigenous Peoples” article that “the possible determinants and correlates of the health of indigenous peoples can be properly understood only
within an analytical framework that combines both biological and sociocultural perspectives [and specifically,] anthropology is extremely well suited to address the interplay among social, economic, and political forces that shape the local experiences of illness” (Valeggia & Snodgrass, 2015,128). Through the dissertation, I work to argue this point about migrant indigeneity as an analytical framework that can adequately represent the Hebrew Israelites in order to understand, evaluate, and assess the health of this group of indigenous people. Similarly, in the body of text, I discuss the relationship that is produced between the biological and social by the Hebrews’ articulation of indigeneity. Current works within anthropology that make this point are important, but migrant indigeneity traces how the study of indigeneity specifically in the Americas has traditionally excluded racialized Black communities and works to extend this critique by engaging with some difficult questions. How do we approach the health of indigenous communities who are racialized as Black? How can we even address the complexity of this inquiry in a nation-state that operates on the rule of hypodescent, which means that being labeled as Black most often forecloses on the possibilities of being understood in a way that reflects one’s underlying culture? Therefore, Hebrews illustrate how they are actively working against the narratives, stereotypes, images, beliefs, and biomedical norms and health outcomes that accompany Blackness. Given that Valeggia and Snodgrass suggest that anthropologists are well-suited to address the local experiences of illness in order to better understand the determinants of indigenous health, how do
anthropologists attend to the health of community who claim indigeneity yet who are racialized as Black in the United States? How can racial health disparities frameworks attend to this issue? Throughout the body of manuscript, I argue that the constructed separateness of the two categories of Blackness and indigeneity not only impacts analyses of health that rely on the cultural production of identity but also demonstrates how racial health disparities are built on unstable frameworks and mostly reproduce ideas about racial ordering. For Hebrews, engagement with health disparities is useful to think about biomarkers of the past while pursuing the cultural production of indigeneity as central to defining, constituting, and maintaining their indigenous (future) health in this metaphorical and yet very tangible pursuit of everlasting life. This transforms how we think about health disparities research and literature and how we approach inequitable rates of disease and the utility of health interventions.

This research places biomedicine and public health in conversation with critical race theory. Through a meditation of race, racism, and the mechanics of race and health research, we can better understand how race has reappeared in discussions on genetics, the human genome, and population genetics without nuanced or even empirical understandings of race. In the United States, for example, popularized and often scientific understandings of race can dominate and affect how race shows up in science. Scholar Natalia Molina (2014) argues in *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* that “racial scripts make it both possible and permissible
to consider racist ideas as simply common sense” (8). Through the consolidation of racial scripts, scientific research, health disparities data, and the embodiment of race literature leads us to revisit works that overlook a major component of the racial health disparities discourse: are the racial logics that govern the nation even appropriate or empirically sound, and do they reflect the ways in which community members understand themselves? And how does this interact with the reproduction of dominant and often symbolically violent theorizations of non-white bodies? While several ethnographic works focused on Blackness across the Americas have demonstrated how violence is a part of the work of producing Blackness (Smith, 2016; Allen, 2011; Alves, 2017; Vargas, 2010), there has been less work to declare how racializing people and bodies is violent especially if those communities do not identify as such. Overall, this dissertation participates in discussions in critical medical anthropology of how the body, through engagement with discourses on NCDs, is a medium for challenging our understandings of race. Throughout the dissertation, I consider the processes of racialization that are recycled through health disparities discourses and draw from both national and global circulating externalized processes of racialization. I work to argue that the external processes of racialization often do not reflect the emic cultural production of identity that structure Hebrew identities, bodies, and beliefs.

I presented migrant indigeneity as the central thrust of the dissertation. Migrant indigeneity builds on the legacy of territorial disenfranchisement, and
the histories of migration that are particular to the Hebrews. Migrant indigeneity attends to the identity formation processes that frame the brand of indigeneity that the Hebrews produce to represent themselves. It is subsequently this formation of identity that connects Hebrew populations globally and makes the health policy implementation process possible. Migrant indigeneity also considers and is in dialogue with the double consciousness that the Hebrews confront from being racialized as Black while arguing for their indigeneity as Hebrews. Through migrant indigeneity, I consider how their diasporic past in terms of identity radically shapes the indigenous futures that the Hebrews have to confront through their advocacy to be perceived as they believe themselves to be. Migrant indigeneity engages the decolonialist efforts within anthropology to think about how traditionally, studies of what is now referred to as indigeneity, have not include a focus on communities read as Black. Through an understanding of the development of migrant indigeneity, it becomes clear how the engagement of biomedical sciences and public health seek to build on the legacy of identity that our government imposed. As the work of many social scientists demonstrates, there is a relationship between research, policy, and practice. Therefore, the research produced through this dissertation on migrant indigeneity is helpful for thinking through health policy and practices that are grounded in understandings of population-based health that are often inconsistent with the ways in which communities are framing their own identity. Migrant indigeneity is sensitive to the impact of the framing of the nation on the
structure of identity and how transnational orientations to the self are also most appropriate for understanding the broader links between communities and global systems and processes.

Migrant indigeneity comes alive and is supported through the ethnographic data with members of the community like Prince Azriel, whose life is a reflection of all the possibilities of what this form of indigeneity can be. As a young man born in Tennessee, he was part of the Great Migration, which led him to the Midwest, where he met the community that forever transformed his life. The consolidation of his successive migrations to live a life in Dimona overlap with the implementation of practices to reverse his chronic illness, prevent disease, and promote health. Data drawn from encounters with Prince Azriel illustrated how this form of indigeneity is produced. Prince Azriel worked to embody migrant indigeneity in his health, which allowed him to participate in what he believed were the cultural practices of his ancestors as well as to embrace an identity and relish in the recovery of this authentic past. This past would answer questions about the present health challenges that confront him as someone whose body was structured through the biopower of the United States but, through adherence to what he believes as his indigenous practices, was restructured.

Likewise, as I write this conclusion, the modern nation-state of Israel has just celebrated seventy years of existence as some might add within and against the nation of Palestine. As the nation-state of Israel continues to establish its
history, there is an increased ability of scholarly analyses to investigate the
makings of indigeneity, both against and alongside the structures of this nation-
state. This research was conducted in three settler-colonial nations, which all
have in, particular ways, emulated a formation of immigrant nativity—the
process by which settler colonists seek to produce narratives, discourses, and
systems to undergird and support their claims to local belonging, which are
naturalized through interactions with broader white supremacist frames
including erasure of local populations, histories, and cultures. I demonstrate how
these instantiations of immigrant nativity makes alternative proposals like
migrant indigeneity more difficult to accept compared to more normative
proposals of indigeneity within the context of colonialism.

Within the body of the dissertation, I introduced spiritual synchronism as
a term to explore the process by which Hebrews seek to transition from race as a
primary identifier to spirituality. This process is an undergirding component of
migrant indigeneity, that illustrates the process by which Hebrews produce
cultural identity from their spiritual beliefs about the self and community. I
engage with the Hebrew’s youngest generation of adults, who illustrate how
community efforts to spiritually synchronize to a migrant indigeneity are
challenged by outsiders who racialize them as Black and foreign. Nevertheless,
spirituality is an integral epistemic framing for migrant indigeneity and draws on
larger, more enduring histories of this practice. I draw on historical data that
frames the community as a part of a larger movement to religious and spiritual
communities who have reconstructed and reconstituted their identity through spirituality as opposed to race and often these same communities’ production of an identity that emphasizes health and well-being focused on food.

In pushing the dissertation research to the next level, there is opportunity to engage with the historical archives to draw on data that focuses explicitly on the Hebrews’ historic self-identification beyond American racial logics. I imagine that there is a richer historical narrative that exists in terms of the process of spiritual synchronism that I detail in chapter two. Given my focus on the Great Migration, Professor Jacqueline Goldsby’s *Mapping the Stacks*, which is a guide to Black Chicago’s Hidden Archives seems like natural place to begin doing further research as it seeks to uncover data on Black Chicago, or what I refer to as the island, from 1930s to the 1970s. Also, due to the ways by which the community has been shaped, an examination of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) National Archives seems important, especially given its surveillance of the community over the years. Although, in the dissertation, I build an argument for migrant indigeneity that is grounded in the Americas, the data that emerged from this chapter signaled the importance of transnational engagement with the processes of racialization that instantiate and undergird the process of spiritual synchronism. Through Hebrew efforts to engage with external processes of racialization, it seems important to engage with more literature in the Middle East on race, racism, and racialization that situates modern social constructions of Blackness.
Diaspora is an important concept for the dissertation, holding together spiritual, theological, as well as homeland conceptualizations of identity. Throughout the dissertation, the notion of diasporic pasts and indigenous futures is a theme for thinking about the ways in which Hebrews utilized the diasporic paths that were forged for them as a guide for accessing their indigenous future. I detail how migrant indigeneity is informed by the Hebrew’s diasporic past, which leads them to their indigenous future through the making and remaking of diaspora. I illustrate how Hebrews engage in diaspora remaking in Dimona by indigenizing the social construction of Blackness in the region through the forging of relationships with groups of Afro-Palestinians, Afro-Israelis, and Sudanese migrants in the desert. Through these diasporas of Blackness, they create a collective historical narrative that makes migrant indigeneity seem plausible through a broader historic arc of a racialized Black presence in the region and its indigeneity that is not unfurled by historic or recent migrations.

For example, the Hebrews followed a Pan-Africanist/Black Nationalist model of Back to Africa in their exodus to Liberia, which led them to an indigenous future of creating a community in Dimona. Moreover, these paths that were ideologically and physically open to them gave way to broader and more diverse notions of thinking that blended with theories of indigenous belonging across spaces and that would solidify into more contemporary understandings of race and identity. Moreover, indigenous diaspora has been a helpful way to frame and engage with conversations of settler colonialism and the
meanings of being indigenous in lands where other communities are also indigenous.

The dissertation is grounded in and on food, diet, and the resulting health outcomes that emerge. I think with and through food to understand the Hebrew cultural production of indigeneity. Building on an understanding of the relationship between food and culture, which is inherently raced, I work to show how the community has to puree, whip, mix, chop, and even pulverize racial scripts about dietary consumption, which they then overwrite with an indigenous approach to food. I contextualize these efforts within the larger setting of global indigenous efforts to decolonize diets through a return to the practices of their ancestors. In the fourth chapter, I chronicled ethnographic experiences in South Africa with MaKarabou, mother to Levi and mother-in-law to Sofiyah, and their gastronomic adventures in indigenous self-making. The family demonstrates how food is an important indicator for Hebrews, as it often severs socially constructed racial and even biological ties given that consumption of food is a ritualized practice that derives meaning from the Hebrews’ cultural production of identity. While food is a hallmark for negotiating and showcasing Hebrew indigeneity and demonstrating cultural difference, it also produces data about how racialization is critical to our knowledge about food (Slocum, 2011). Moreover, further engagement with how indigeneity is being racialized and or deracialized in the global discussions of decolonializing diets is rich terrain for future research directions.
As the Hebrew seek to build an indigenous future, they seem to never be too far from their past. In this dissertation, I thought about stereotypes and narratives of pathology that often structure social and health policy. As the dissertation is a critique of some of the frameworks often used in public health and biomedicine to understand the relationship between identity and health, I also narrate how the community is not exempt from an intimate engagement of these discourses and narratives. Specifically, I seek to narrate the process of racial exorcism through which Hebrews seek to deracialize the body and re-fortify it through an engagement of indigenous Hebrew practices. Thinking with the “culture of disease” trope, that I name as an extension of the “culture of poverty” trope, I examine how policy is a reflection of a larger set of values that are then iterated, enforced, and thus materialized by leaders of that particular society. For Hebrews, their health policies are a reflection of their engagement with their diasporic past that constructs Black pathology as a narrative that seeks to identify cultural identity, the structure of family, and behaviors. Nevertheless, Hebrew are indigenous and through the implementation of their policies they are able to create counter-narratives to distance themselves from pathology and strengthen their connection to their identity. Throughout the dissertation, I illustrate how migrant indigeneity is advanced through the ways in which Hebrew bodies are conceptualized and ultimately materialize difference through health behavior change. Thus, as MaDikela addresses her diabetes diagnosis through an advancement of sugarless week to a general practice of no added sugar in her diet
and as Queen Akosua advances from the careful prescription of the kinds of oils in one’s diet to an oil-less diet, I demonstrate how these women challenge health statistics that frame them as Black and pathologize their health outcomes and, in so doing, re-write existing scripts about the relationship between race, diet, and health. They defy convention through the narration of a reversal of diabetes and obesity as an indicator of the effects of a particular kind of indigeneity, i.e., migrant indigeneity’s impact on health.

In future research with the Hebrews, there is room to consider how body positivity and specifically fat positivity can produce more rich discussions of fat, the body, and particularly the indigenous body. Drawing from the authors in the edited volume Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality (2010), I think about the ways in which health is moralized even by and especially by a spiritual community like the Hebrew Israelites. What does it mean to draw a system of health policies that are built on the moral assessment of health of communities that are their counterparts (specifically Blacks in the United States)? Can disease and health exist in the same body? Can a Hebrew be fat and healthy?

I continue to hold MaDikela and Queen Akosua as thinking partners for understanding how Hebrew health policy is implemented globally and how its implementation reifies their diasporic past of pathology. Although these Hebrew women sought to forcibly disassociate with disease through the transformation of their behaviors, how does the chronicity of these NCDs challenge a more long-
term consideration of the process of exorcism? More clearly, what happens if the
demons (disease) comes back? And what happens when pathology is no longer
the framework to understand chronic health conditions? I imagine a world where
specifically, in Queen Akosua’s case, critiques of narratives of body size could be
re-positioned to embrace one’s body when one is consuming the prescribed
acceptable portions, combinations, and exercising; it begs the question, what do
healthy bodies look like? How are they built and maintained? What is the role of
self-acceptance? Similarly, for MaDikela and her diabetes, I think about what
lengths must be pursued to achieve health. Is disease actually defeat or an
opportunity to make better decisions about diet that are not so severe that they
eliminate all of the sweetness of life?

Identity and health is centerpiece for the dissertation. Through the
chapters of the dissertation, I examine how biomedical discourses on health
disparities and public health discussions of social determinants of health use a
priori definitions of race that define identity for communities in ways that are
often incompatible with local or community-based understandings. With the
Hebrews, I discuss how they argue for an indigeneity that reflects their
cosmological and ontological understandings about the world and the self in the
body. Through these processes, a biological citizenship is formed that is
generated by how Hebrews re-invest in a set of cultural practices, i.e. indigenous
Hebrew ways of being, to move beyond how biological citizenships have been
constituted through race and nation. As it relates to NCDs, the Hebrews believe
that they can prevent, treat, reverse, and manage disease as opposed to being
defined by it. Furthermore, I discuss how Montoya’s (2007) concept of bioethnic
conscription is used by Hebrews to re-conscribe the self and community
bioethnically. Drawing from ethnographic data, I focus on how Hebrews
challenge biomedical discourse about the body and disease risk. Similarly, the
critiques implicate medical anthropology’s focus on structural violence, affliction,
and the embodiment of inequality as a way to understand racial inequalities in
health. This research with the Hebrews argues for a consideration of racial health
disparities that begin to thoroughly engage with how communities understand
race and identity. Specifically, through this work, the symbolic violence of
externally racializing Black people is done through trying to understand
disparities. Moreover, local biologies was a central concept to this work. It
demonstrates the work and efforts that Hebrews engaged in to challenge the local
biology of race in the United States and argue for and align with a local Hebrew
biology.

This dissertation began as a single site investigation of NCD prevention
and health promotion to reduce disease risk and the rates of NCDs. It blossomed
into a multi-site project that interrogated the implementation of Hebrew health
policies to address these diseases, which are developed in Dimona and then
disseminated to communities globally through electronic, in-person, and
embodied mechanisms. The foundation to the success of a universal approach
and narrative to drive Hebrew cultural practices that are similar to public health

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advice is a belief in indigeneity, specifically a migrant indigeneity, that is flexible, dynamic, yet durable enough to encompass the possibilities of a transnational spiritual community living on five different continents and arguing for their claims as descendants of ancient Hebrews while being racialized as Black.

Some might ask, isn't diaspora a sufficient organizing logic and mechanism to examine this community? Indeed, although diaspora has been an incredibly pragmatic logic for studying the community and one that I rely on heavily, I argue in this research that the processes of racialization combined with the histories and legacy of scientific inquiry with Hebrew communities require specific frameworks for analysis. More clearly, the legacies of anti-Black violence that are salient in an analysis of this Hebrew community in three settler-colonial nations are requisite of an additional framework to register the specificities that have been overlooked due to the ways in which the processes of racialization and the questions around their historic past, defined culture, and distinctive identity combine to flatten our understandings of the specific and layered identities of these communities. Specifically, as it relates to health and as health practitioners attempt to develop culturally appropriate and culturally consistent interventions, understanding the breadth and complexity that has consolidated in the umbrella category of Blackness is imperative. While there is still work to be done in understanding the processes of racialization that frame Blackness transnationally, this research illustrates the importance of considering how external processes of racialization are seared onto the body as an act of violence.
prohibiting the emergence of identities that reflect systems of belief and local frameworks by which individuals and communities understand the self, community, and the world. It begs us to consider the possibilities for the boundaries of Blackness and for an indigenous futurity beyond and potentially within neo-constructions of Blackness. Therefore, asks, what happens once you go B(l)ack?

This discourse segues into an engagement with the necropolitical and biopolitical dimensions of this work. Specifically, how Blackness can facilitate one’s understanding of life and death and the biopolitical dimensions in between those moments. In this conversation, Foucault’s theory of biopower (1977) can be used to understand how the health disparities research complex is an extension of the nation-state as it defines, organizes, and predicts the vulnerabilities and the disproportionate rates of health (read: disease) in certain populations (non-whites) in a biopolitical way. Therefore, the biopoliticized ways in which bodies are oriented and constructed occurs along the axes of race. It is these strategic subjugations that outline racial subjectivities on and in the body and are clearly seen through what Mbembe (2003) describes as government endorsements and enforcements of necropolitical expressions which, in this situation, is NCD based mortality. Taken together, Foucault and Mbembe prompt a wider discussion of how power and the politics of the state impact and impinge on the lives and the health of racialized Black communities in the United States and beyond. In keeping with Joy James and João Costa Vargas’ (2012) provocative suggestion,
what happens when we refuse understand Blackness as victimization and “understand Black death as predictable and constitutive of democracy?” For Hebrews, what is the utility of refusing Blackness (as a primary identity frame) and its victimization? One might argue that the refusal of Blackness in the democratic nations of Israel/Palestine, South Africa, and the United States positions Hebrews to have better health outcomes and move closer to the possibility of achieving everlasting life, something that has previously been ideologically and ontologically impossible.

For community members like Prince Caleb, who appeared in chapter six, sometimes the work to subvert the processes of racialization and return to the diet of one’s ancestors comes too late. As I collected data, I learned of what James and Vargas (2012) would name as Prince Caleb’s predictable death, indexing the biopolitical consequences of being born Black in the United States. His life and the lives of those who died within several months of him, namely that of community leader Ben Ammi Ben Israel and innovator of the High Holy & Sacred Diet and Emah Karaliah Eshet Prince Gavriel HaGadol, who is said to have died from diabetes complications, illustrate what works in anthropology theorize as the process of becoming. Their lives represent their sacrifice to the development and implementation of the lifestyle as well as the work that often does not occur in one lifetime to successfully have the body align with social, spiritual, and metaphysical change. And while the Hebrews had already discursively prepared for the deaths of their elders who, like these three named, grew up on what I
theorize as the island (i.e., the racially isolated geographies of Chicago), the work of becoming is sobering and grief producing. The Hebrews are incredibly adaptive and have demonstrated their ability to navigate a number of environments successfully. Nevertheless, they have yet to develop a model for death, for the (in)completion of one lifetime, or for the ongoing processes of structuring the body, identity, and belief that are reflected in one’s ability to defy disease and achieve everlasting life as indigenes. This does not dismiss the structures they have created that model the process of self-making and rhetorically and discursively illustrate migrant indigeneity, even if the body cannot reproduce the depth of the claims they purport.

Life outside of Babylon (the West) is not without challenges, as the United States and Israel share militaristic strategies, intelligence, methods of surveillance, and regimes of violence (and plausibly anti-Black violence). The Hebrews who imagine ontological possibilities of indigeneity against the backdrop of Israel must do so with a mask, and not necessarily ones that Fanon (1952) or DuBois (1903) designed but ones to combat the toxicity of the nuclear reactors in that are in very town and asbestos in the walls of the very homes where they claim to have found peace in the desert (Jackson, 2013b). These biopolitical and necropolitical consequences of the pursuit of everlasting life and indigeneity are important questions to consider and ones that will continue to come up as Hebrews work to live forever and challenge the health inequities
embedded in the experience that the world imposes on them through its understanding of the relationship between identity and health.
Appendix
United Nations Definition of Indigenous Communities

“Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.

“This historical continuity may consist of the continuation, for an extended period reaching into the present of one or more of the following factors:

a) Occupation of ancestral lands, or at least of part of them;

b) Common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands;

c) Culture in general, or in specific manifestations (such as religion, living under a tribal system, membership of an indigenous community, dress, means of livelihood, lifestyle, etc.);

d) Language (whether used as the only language, as mother-tongue, as the habitual means of communication at home or in the family, or as the main, preferred, habitual, general or normal language);

e) Residence on certain parts of the country, or in certain regions of the world;
f) Other relevant factors.

“On an individual basis, an indigenous person is one who belongs to these indigenous populations through self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by these populations as one of its members (acceptance by the group).
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