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DNA, Israel and the Ancestors— Substantiating Connections through Christianity in Papua New Guinea

Alison Dundon

This paper critically evaluates the ‘transformative engagement’ between expatriate missionaries and the Gogodala of Western Province, PNG, in light of a recent claim for Jewish ancestry and Israeli nationality. This claim is based on the contention that the original Gogodala ancestors, whose migration to the area is detailed in formal ancestral narratives or iniwa olagi, were members of the Lost Tribes of Israel. In July 2003 this culminated in a visit by Professor Tudor Parfitt, Director of Jewish Studies at the University of London, to investigate. This paper examines the extent to which this claim for identification with Israel represents ongoing dialogue about the origins and nature of Gogodala Christianity, and outlines the extent to which Gogodala communities are substantially connected to places and people beyond their village, province and even country, blurring the boundaries between local and global through their engagement with Christianity.

Keywords: Christianity; Ancestors; Lost Tribes of Israel; Papua New Guinea; DNA; Global and Local

Gogodala speakers of Western Province of Papua New Guinea (PNG) have made a claim for affiliation with Israel and its Jewish population. This paper examines this claim as an instance of what Scott (2006, p. 301) has referred to as ethno-theologies of Melanesian Christians—‘local schemes of original constructive Christian theology’. Scott (2005, p. 102) argues that ethno-theologies ‘evaluate indigenous ideas and practices in relation to those of Christianity and situate ancestral identities and history within biblical history’. He suggests that we look at the ways in which Melanesians come to understand or ‘make sense’ of Christianity—arguing that a

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‘non-essentialising treatment of Christianity can demonstrate how Christians engage simultaneously with multiple interlocking macro and micro Christian logics’ (Scott 2005, p. 102). Scott’s (2005, p. 102) emphasis on religious traditions, not as ‘static, bounded entities comprising monolithic worldviews’ parallels my own understanding of the dynamics of Christianity in PNG and the multiple discursive, ceremonial and mundane ways in which it is lived and experienced. Such a perspective may allow us to encompass some of the complexities of the disparate experiences of globalisation, and explore the blurred boundaries between ‘global’ and ‘local’ in Melanesian Christianity. For, as Foster (2005, p. 173) suggests, ‘[t]o talk about the relationship between the global and local as an external one between separate, independent realities is, in a word, wrong’.¹

I try to ‘make sense’ of Gogodala understandings of their Christianity through events that took place primarily between 2003 and 2005, particularly the collection of Gogodala DNA by a multinational and multidisciplinary ‘team’ led by Professor Tudor Parfitt, Director of the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of London, an academic concerned with the global narrative or ‘myth’ of the Lost Tribes of Israel. I do not want to overstate or sensationalise the significance of this event, as claims for Jewish heritage and ancestry are not new, either in PNG or elsewhere. Indeed, Parfitt (2003, p. 1) argues that the ‘quest for the Lost Tribes of Israel ... is one of the enduring motifs underlying Western views of the wider world’. In Melanesia Israel is often a referent for the ‘birthplace’ of Christianity, the basis of its spiritual and eschatological significance for Christians, and one that underlies many claims to an ‘inherent’ and/or indigenous Christianity (cf. Jacka 2005, Jorgensen 2006, Stritecky 2001; Tomlinson 2009). Parfitt (2003, p. 175) notes in *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* that:

[i]dentification with the State of Israel is remarkably strong in Papua New Guinea to the point that in May 2003, four thousand people marched through the streets of the capital, Port Moresby, carrying Israeli flags. I found Israeli flags in absolutely the most remote corners of Papua New Guinea, and the overall identification of different tribes with the idea of Israelite ancestry appears to be the most vivid and deeply felt consequence of the colonial legacy.

For the Gogodala, the connection with Israel is based on the idea that Gogodala ancestors—*iniwa luma*—were descendents of the Lost Tribes. Formal ancestral narratives or *iniwa olagi*, the source of contemporary moiety and clan groupings and customary land tenure, relate that the ancestors migrated to the Gogodala area in large, powerful canoes sometime in the distant past. Although connections between the original homeland of these ancestors and Israel have been drawn in various contexts before this time, this particular claim culminated in a visit by Professor Parfitt in July 2003 (cf. Parfitt 2003, p. 175). Parfitt and a party of thirteen arrived in Balimo, a peri-urban centre in the Western Province. They were accompanied by the Gogodala man who initiated a dialogue with Parfitt—who I shall refer to as Henry—and a representative from Olim Aid International, a Christian NGO based

in Queensland, Australia. This organisation is concerned with the return 'home' of Christians and Jews to Israel in preparation for the 'end times'.²

The appearance of Parfitt and his team at Henry's instigation was certainly a momentous event for the Gogodala, who live in a relatively isolated area of PNG. There was a rousing reception for Parfitt and his companions in Balimo in 2003 with thousands of people waving Israeli flags lining the road from the airstrip to the football oval where Parfitt, Henry and others addressed the crowd (cf. Dundon in press). In his book Parfitt (2003, p. 175) wrote:

In July 2003 I visited the Gogodala tribe, the Middle Fly Electorate, Fly River, Western Province in Papua New Guinea in response to an invitation to 'prove' their Israelite ancestry through DNA testing. In their case the idea had been put to them by missionaries from Australia that they were of Jewish origin. The missionaries had remarked upon their Jewish noses, their Semitic looks and upon the similarity of their Gogodala language to Hebrew ... According to them the Ark of the Covenant and the Rod of Aaron were to be found in the two boats buried in the lagoon which had brought them from Palestine three thousand years before. They are convinced that Gogodala is in fact Hebrew in its purest form.

A member of the group travelling with Parfitt then collected samples of DNA from Gogodala and non-Gogodala volunteers, primarily swabs of inner mouth but also hair samples and blood, and agreed to return with the results when tests were completed.

Writing about these events on the Olim Aid International website as Olim Aid representative in Port Moresby, Henry recalled the return of Parfitt to Balimo in 2005.

On the 10th of February 2005 the Olim Team made its third visit to Balimo accompanying Professor Tudor on his courtesy visit to the people of the Gogodala. The visit indeed has made a very big impact on the tribe and the country as a whole. More DNA has been taken from local and neighbouring tribes for comparison purposes and we expect the results to be disclosed soon. The visit was very fruitful (www.olimaid.org.au).

Results of the DNA analysis have been inconclusive, but the claim that Gogodala are one of the disparate peoples of Israel, and thus potential citizens of that nation, has much salience. Many Gogodala, both urban and rural, are convinced that test results will confirm what has already been substantiated by ancestral narratives that detail the migratory route of the ancestral beings. In this paper, I develop Jorgensen's (2006, p. 445) important analytical point that, although as anthropologists we might assume such ethno-histories or narratives are evidence of the triumph of the local over the global in terms of Christianity, what they might actually represent is pervasive global Christian discourses and 'strong evidence of how well-connected' Melanesians are with the world beyond their region or village. Indeed, I propose that Gogodala are 'well connected' beyond their region, both in PNG and beyond its national borders, and that there are various contexts in which they articulate these connections. Like others in the Pacific, the Gogodala have 'long sought to establish a range of relationships with agents and agencies deemed foreign'. Using Foster's (2005,

p. 167) notion of ‘transformative engagement’, which he argues is ‘above all oriented towards generating a productive and reciprocal relationship’, I suggest that Gogodala concerns with Israel and the substantiation of ancestral connections with ancient Jewish populations are one of many ways in which they not simply articulate their connectedness but actually constitute it through links already well established. Thus they potentially generate different forms of ‘productive and reciprocal relationships’. This is a common enough goal in Christian Melanesia, and has formed the basis for many different forms of millennial movements and so-called cargo cults aimed at the transformation (or regeneration) of an imagined and highly idealised world into the actual or real (cf. Burrige 1960, 1971, Lattas 1992). I have analysed the extent to which these connections and relationships intersect with a variety of both everyday and more formal practices and contexts for the Gogodala (Dundon in press); however, in this paper I explore how they seek to do this through linking the Ark of the Covenant and the Rod of Aaron with the two canoes that brought the original ancestors to the area; and through tracing ancient, embodied connections between the ancestors (and by extension contemporary Gogodala) and members of the Lost Tribes of Israel. In doing so, they utilise increasingly available telecommunication and internet networks as well as both academic and more popular sources for establishing these historical and biogenetic connections and posit potentially new and exciting possibilities.

The Ark, the Rod and Two Canoes

Gogodala ancestral stories detail the migration of the ‘old people’ or ancestors in formal oral narratives that were related in specific, particularly male, domains in the past. Today they have a more common forum and audience: from claims for land ownership to dances and plays acted out at Independence Day celebrations. When I first began my field research amongst the Gogodala in 1995, I was taken to several elderly men and women to hear and ‘record’ these narratives as it was explained that such stories established contemporary Gogodala practice and *ela gi*—‘way of life/doing’. Most men and women, even young ones, have at least a general understanding of the coming of the first ancestors in their two powerful canoes, whether or not they know the details of the ancestor’s actions or movements. And most come to understand their connections to these ancestral beings through their daily interactions and movements across the spaces of their lives—from travelling by canoe to gardens, houses, sago swamps or other villages for Christian conventions or conferences. People come ‘to know’ through the engagement of their lives and experiences (cf. Dundon 2005, in press).

The *iniwa olagi*—‘old people’s stories’—detail various versions of the journey of a number of the sons and daughters of Iballi and Gaguli, the mother (*agi*) and father (*wawa*) of the Gogodala and the ‘first people’ who lived in a place called Wabila or Yaebi Saba—‘the first place’—often now equated with ‘heaven’. The primary narrative relates the giving of each male ancestor a clan affiliation and name by Iballi, who then

told his children to take their wives/sisters and travel to a magical and/or powerful village called Dogono, in the Balimo region. Although there are many different stories or narratives that relate the specific travels and activities of each ancestor, the main and most commonly cited *iniwa olagi* detail the subsequent migration of these primary ancestors in two powerful and large canoes.

Busali, an elderly man and reputable *kanaba* (leader) from Dogono village, gave his story about this migration:

We don't know the name of the place from where the ancestors came; just [that the] big father, some God maybe, sent them. The canoe's name was Madulabali [from the Wabadala clan]. All of the red people [those in the red moiety] were in that canoe—they came and stopped at Daru [current Provincial headquarters of Western Province]. These red people came first [in Madalubali canoe] and the white people [those in the white moiety] came by Suliki canoe—Paiya people's canoe (recorded at Dogono village 1995).

In their two canoes, the two groups of Gogodala ancestors travelled a great distance from Wabila, the home of Ibali and Gaguli, to Dogono. They passed and often stopped at many places like Daru and Iyasa on Kiwai Island as they went, until, at last, the ancestors in Suliki canoe came into the mouth of the Fly River. Travelling a short distance, they found a relatively small opening on the north side of the Fly River, a narrow tributary called Pedaeya Creek, a long and winding stream that led the ancestors to Masanawa canoe place (*gawa saba*). At this swampy pond, the ancestors left Suliki and completed the rest of their journey on foot. At this point, Suliki sank into the waters of Masanawa canoe-place and has never been seen again despite repeated reports of strange events and noises at Masanawa and more recent attempts to raise the canoe from the waters of the swamp.³

The ancestors in the other canoe, Madulabali, also travelled to Pedaeya but were distracted and went around to Kenewa village on the Aramia River (which runs parallel to the Fly to the north) and then Sisi. They came towards Dogono from the north-west while the white people, after leaving Suliki at the canoe place, travelled from the south of Dogono. On the way to Dogono, at a place that became known as Litamawama, several male ancestors from both the red and white moieties disobeyed explicit instructions from Ibali about sexual activities and, after watching their wives bathing, initiated sex with them. At that moment, Dogono, formerly a magical and 'alive' place, 'died' and fell silent. When the ancestors finally reached Dogono it was too late and, soon after arriving, they left again to build villages and gardens in surrounding areas and raise their children.

While the story of the migration of the original ancestors in Suliki and Madulabali canoes is common knowledge, in recent debates about possible and substantial connections to Israel the two canoes have become a primary focus; particularly in terms of validating and/or verifying this version of events. The recent investigations into the origins of the Gogodala ancestors with which I began this paper, began largely in Port Moresby amongst a group of Gogodala expatriates employed as

soldiers, engineers, technicians, teachers and university students. During regular Christian meetings, ideas were raised and discussed about interactions with other cultural groups and their oral histories. One man present at these gatherings, who I shall refer to as Debema, recalled that they discussed the significance of Gogodala naming practices, the similarities between the Gogodala language and Hebrew, as well as the ancestral stories.

And of course the two canoes came into play. All along we were told there are two canoes that our ancestors came in: we (plenty of us) sat down and started working the generations out [and came to] about thirteen or fourteen generations, approximately the average age they said it would be. That is not a long time compared to other tribes who came here. And then people who studied the Bible, pastors who were studying the Bible, they kept referring back to the Bible. So the Bible part started coming in to play. And then we [found] this link and it all started rolling from there (recorded in Balimo town 2004).

Finding and raising Suliki canoe from Masanawa canoe place where it was abandoned by the original ancestors is one of the ways in which this group seeks to substantiate claims of common ancestry between Gogodala and ancient Jews. Masanawa is cited in the ancestral narratives as the resting place of Suliki, one of the most powerful canoes—capable of empowering and propelling itself through the water. When Parfitt's team came to Balimo, image-sensing machines were briefly set up at Masanawa canoe place in an attempt to locate and carbon-date Suliki. Many people, even those not explicitly involved in the debate, believe that the team of scientists located Suliki under the floating grass and swamp but could not send the divers in because the owners of the land at Dogono demanded compensation for disturbing the site (although this was not corroborated by the landowners). Consequently, the team took it no further. Members of what became known as the 'Ground Committee', however, took it upon themselves to continue looking for the canoe after Parfitt left the area. Debema said:

We put our boys there [at Masanawa]. The water is very cold! We are diving down about three-and-a-half to four metres of water, trying to pull the weeds out [or] the roots—anything in there. [The] strange thing is nobody seems to really know where the canoe is. There is some general idea where it is because some people have come forward and said 'Oh, I saw it in this year'; and when you take them back again, they scratch their head [and say] 'I can't remember if it was this point [of land] or the other point [of land] that I stood on [when I saw Suliki]'. [But] if we can grab hold of a wood sample, scientists can do carbon dating for us and find out what type of wood was used and then if we can clear it up. And if we get the best pro and the shape [and] how it was made, the Rabbinic people might come up with the type of ship [that was] built then [at the time of the Lost Tribes [and] historians might help us. This is the whole point we are trying to do (Balimo October 2004).

While the group stayed at Masanawa intermittently for some time, at least a period of 6 months collecting money from workers in Balimo town on payday to finance the continued surveillance and activities at the canoe place, nothing was found of Suliki

canoe. But this has only been one part of the claim for common ancestry with the ancient Jews; in the next section, I explore the ways in which language and DNA have been also drawn into the debate about substantial and embodied ties between the Gogodala ancestors, Jewish populations and expatriate missionaries.

Coming to Dogono: Ancestors and Missionaries

Connections between the ancestors and the Unevangelised Fields Mission (UFM) staff who first entered the Gogodala area in the 1930s have been drawn in the close, residential relationship between mission representatives and Gogodala villages. The mission was originally situated at Madiri Copra and Rubber Plantation on the south bank of the Fly River. Missionary Albert Drysdale moved to the north bank of the Fly, closer to Gogodala settlements within a year of arriving at Madiri. In December 1932, Drysdale and Theo Berger travelled with Gogodala plantation labourers, with whom they had formed a close bond.

[I]n their outrigger canoes for an uneventful crossing of the Fly River. They skirted Dumori Island and, entering Pedaeya Creek, proceeded to Kelesa village at its head . . . from Kelesa the Gogodalas led him overland to the heartland of the tribe, where four villages clustered around a vast lagoon which took its name from the large village of Balimo (Prince & Prince 1981, pp. 14–5).

Within 2 years, Drysdale had persuaded the UFM leadership in Melbourne that the Gogodala offered an excellent ‘pathway’ to the upper reaches of the Fly River as well as to more closely neighbouring groups (Prince & Prince 1981, p. 17). By 1934, a mission station was established at Wasua on the north bank of the Fly as well as one in Balimo, and another at Awaba on the Aramia River shortly after. From that time, the UFM (later Asia Pacific Christian Mission and then, in 1997, the Pioneers) maintained a constant presence in the Gogodala area until 2003, when remaining Pioneer staff formally withdrew and handed mission facilities and buildings to the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG) in Balimo.⁴ One of the results of this relationship between mission and Gogodala was that the latter were the first group in their region to have the Old Testament translated into their own language, unlike the neighbouring Kamula (Wood 2011), and had mission schools and teachers readily available from early in the colonial relationship. A Bible college, community schools, a hospital and a high school (at Awaba) were established relatively quickly for the Gogodala, and their language has regional currency even today (cf. Dundon 2010).

For their part, the missionaries were concerned with evangelising entire villages through teachings based on the Bible. Translating the Bible into Gogodala was a central concern, as the Bible was the ‘centre of all preaching and teaching’ (Weymouth 1988, p. 180).⁵ With this focus on the Bible, particularly the New Testament, Israel as the home of both Jesus and the Jewish community out of which Christianity arose (and would eventually return) was central to understandings of evangelical

Christianity. As Parfitt (2003, p. 6) notes, Christians have often ‘imagined Jews’ of which ‘the Lost Tribes form a part and who usually provoked more admiration and interest’ than their actual counterparts. This image and understanding of Jews and Israel, as what Jorgensen (2006, p. 456) refers to as ‘a sacred site of global Christianity’, continues to play a major role in imaginings of a wider Christian community for Gogodala Christians. Those living in the villages in Western Province, in particular, do not have access to contemporary media reports and images of Israel and many have little concrete understanding of the actual location or political realities of Israel as a modern nation-state (cf. Jacka 2005).

For Gogodala, Israel and Christianity have also been conflated through the relationship between expatriate missionaries and Gogodala, which has often been expressed in terms of both literal and ancestral kinship. In the early days of contact between Gogodala and the UFM, for example, the term for white people was *gubali* or ghost, as it was believed, based on one particular ancestral narrative that when Gogodala died they were cleansed and their skins sloughed off in a boiling bath or body of water, becoming white-skinned before they continued on to the land of the dead (Wabila and/or Yaebi Saba). Many European missionaries, then, were given Gogodala names for recently deceased relatives by their Gogodala neighbours.⁶

In the 1960s, schoolchildren at Awaba high School came across the name of Bani, a Gogodala ancestor of great capabilities and powers, listed under the families of the tribe of Benjamin—one of the Lost Tribes of Israel in the Old Testament. As a result, there was a brief but intense spiritual revival during which Israel was publicly named as the original home of the ancestors, and therefore the Gogodala. This speculative discussion became more public during and after a ‘cultural revival’ that the Gogodala experienced in the 1970s and 1980s (Crawford 1981; Dundon 2007). During this time, direct correlations were drawn between ancestral figures and Biblical ones. In one Church at least, a blackboard was used to plot the similarities between biblical and ancestral characters, whose names were written on the blackboard and those gathered quite literally drew lines between them, connecting them through physiological characteristics as well as capacities, movements and activities (Dundon 2007, p. 138).

In this context, ancestral stories provide a reference point for explanations for how and why white-skinned missionaries chose the Gogodala area. It is often speculated that the missionaries had foreknowledge of the existence of Gogodala villages: that the first missionaries like Drysdale, not only followed the route of the original ancestors in their migration to Dogono (and Balimo) but also knew where to find Gogodala longhouses: ‘How did they know we were here? Why did they come?’ asked one man in Balimo town in 1996. One suggestion has been that they had contact with the Gogodala ancestors before they left Israel, and thereby knew which route to take to reach their final destination of Dogono.

So while ancestral stories are significant in various contexts, and are the basis of contemporary land tenure, these narratives also represent an account of the past that many Gogodala examine to try to ‘make sense’ of their experiences of evangelical

Christianity, and their relationships with white missionaries from Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States. In this context it has been suggested by many Gogodala, certainly the great majority of people I have spoken with and interviewed since 1995, that both the ancestral stories and Biblical narratives point to the same conclusion: that Gogodala and white Christians share a common point (or points) of origin. In the next section, I explore the new dialogue about the embodied connections between global (particularly white) Christians, the Gogodala ancestors, and one of the Lost Tribes of Israel through the ethno-theologies of Henry and others in his Ground Committee in Balimo.

The Star of David: 'Being Jewish'

Henry is a man of relative influence in the Gogodala region as well as in Port Moresby amongst Gogodala expatriates. He is the son of a prominent and well-educated Christian family. While a student of anthropology and archaeology at the UPNG, he found some early anthropological and historical accounts that characterised some Gogodala as 'Jewish' in appearance. He was encouraged by a group of like-minded Gogodala living in Moresby to explore further potential links between the ancestral stories and a possible migration from Israel. Said one friend of that time:

So all these other things [language and the canoes], we started looking in to it. And of course the two canoes came in to play. All along we were told there are two canoes that our ancestors came in. [So] plenty of us sat down and started working out the generations [from the original ancestral migration to the present] ... And then people who had studied the Bible, they kept referring back to the Bible—so the Bible part started coming in to play. And then we faced this link [between Gogodala and the Lost Tribes] and it all started rolling from there (Balimo 2004).

Contact with Olim Aid International encouraged Henry to contact Parfitt who he had seen a TV program about his work amongst the Lemba of southern Africa. Henry had become aware of the significance of DNA identification when he saw the programs *Journey to a Vanished City* (2000, based on Parfitt's book by the same name) and the television documentary screened on NOVA on the internet around the time.⁷ Parfitt (2005, p. 1) writes:

In spring 2005 I was informed that a Gogodala, Mr[Henry], was prepared to fly down to see me in urgent business. Through the internet he had learned about my work with the Lemba tribe of South Africa, whose traditions claiming Jewish origin had been 'supported' by DNA analysis. He was convinced that his tribe, too, were Jewish and he had written a long account of the tribe's history and traditions in support of this view. He wanted me to go with him to Papua New Guinea and to test the hypothesis via DNA. This would provide the proof that they were truly biological Jews, he thought. In the event that I could not go, he had already taken hair samples from a large number of his tribe.

Parfitt (2003, p. 4) points out that it is not simply communities like the Gogodala that find meaning in what he refers to as the ‘imagined community’ of the Lost Tribes of Israel: the myth of the Lost Tribes, he suggests, was a ‘vital feature of colonial discourse throughout the long periods of European overseas empires’; and ‘[t]he exploration and colonisation of the Pacific was attended by lively speculation about long-lost Jewish communities and the likely existence of the Lost tribes in these remote islands (Parfitt 2003, p. 163). Certainly, speculations about the ‘Jewish’ appearance of Gogodala in the early accounts has been part of the connections that Henry and those interested in exploring links between Israel and Gogodala ancestors are drawing on in their recent narratives.

These have found purchase in Christian narratives and understandings of the connection between Israel, as the spiritual and ancient home of the chosen people of God, and contemporary Christians throughout the world. In recent times, Henry has formed a substantial link to Olim AID International through his contact with Oscar Micari, its founder and Executive Director.⁸ The organisation was founded in 1998 after ‘the Lord spoke to me [Micari] about establishing a ministry for Jews and Gentiles and as He did, he also gave me the name—OLIM, which means “going home”’ (www.olimaid.org). It has a poverty reduction program and an evangelical Christian outreach program, with ‘feeding programs’ established in various countries including in Port Moresby.⁹ The website claims that Olim AID seeks to ‘feed the hungry, clothe the naked and preach the gospel’ in preparation for the ‘coming home’ of the ‘end times’. Debema, one of the Ground Committee in Balimo, an informal committee established to deal with matters raised by the claim for Israeli identification, recalls that Olim Aid pastors talked about ‘the end times’ and represented themselves as the ‘fishermen’ involved in a ‘regathering process’ associated with ‘when Jesus Christ is coming back’. ‘So they came here and they talked about it with a few other things—so our historical bits and pieces we put together’. Henry has been the Port Moresby for some years, and runs the feeding program there.

Since Parfitt’s initial visit to Balimo, there have been several interpretations about the significance of these claims to Jewish identity. In 2003–4, he wrote ‘Is there anything to their claim? Probably not in strict historical terms, but what I did discover in PNG was that there is a remarkable and widespread sympathy for and identification with Israel’ (Parfitt 2003, p. 5). In a personal communication in 2004, Parfitt suggested that the initial sense of the analysis of the DNA was that although it appeared that Gogodala were ‘distinct from other populations in the area’, there did not seem to be any ‘particular link with any Middle East population’ (personal communication). Yet this is not the impression that many Gogodala present at the meeting that Parfitt and his ‘team’ attended in 2003 came away with: one woman, Debelato, attended the meeting while in Balimo attending the hospital with her son who had broken his collarbone. She recalls that the crowd was told that Tudor Parfitt confirmed the claims of Henry and others that the Gogodala were the Lost Tribe of Benjamin. Those gathered were informed that ‘these people [Parfitt and his team] are

looking for the Lost Tribe of Benjamin': subsequently, after taking samples from the people the team had confirmed that 'yes, you are that tribe'.

At that meeting they were also informed by Henry and members of the Ground Committee that 'Israelis' would come to Balimo within a couple of years (between 6 months to 2 years) to reclaim Gogodala members of this 'lost tribe' and take them to Israel. Debelato and her family were told that all Gogodala were Jewish and could choose to 'return' to Israel, while neighbouring groups were not and were being referred to as 'gentiles'. The idea was that if a Jewish (Gogodala) man or woman was married to a gentile (non-Gogodala) then they could choose to remain in Western Province or travel to Israel with the rest. In Debalato's home village, on the Aramia River, and those immediately surrounding it (some 30 km from Balimo) a list of names had been collated of those interested in moving to Israel. She said that her family had 'filled in the forms' and provided information about their names, dates of birth, school matriculation levels, number of children and other personal details.

How such a large population was to be moved en masse to Israel was the source of much speculation. The recent construction of a large 'Star of David' in Balimo at Buila Station opposite Bani's footstep or *aeiwa saba*, was understood to be one of the ways in which Gogodala would communicate with the Israelis when readying themselves for departure. The star was constructed from compacted dirt raised 1 m from the ground and held in place by corrugated iron roofing. In the middle of the design, there is a hollow square of perhaps 1 m by 1 m, which I was told was space for the 'light' or lamp that would be lit when the planes came. Village people like Debelato and her family registering their names were also told to bring a lamp with them when they came to Balimo, which once lit would signal to Israeli planes to land at the Balimo airstrip. Once in Israel, another man involved in the Ground Committee explained to me in late 2004, Olim AID officials had confirmed that the Gogodala would be taken to a place where one thousand houses had been built, each furnished with a television set and a car for each family.

Conclusions: Anthropology, DNA and Making Connections

In this paper, I have explored the ways in which ethno-theologies that focus on a common origin between the Gogodala ancestors and the Lost Tribes of Israel articulate significant and quite literally substantive connections between the Gogodala and Israel as the ancient home of Christianity. But I want to take it further and argue that being a Christian in PNG is a process of making sense of not only biblical narratives, but also wider scientific and social scientific forms of knowledge encountered by those who go to university and travel to other areas of PNG. Increasingly, through access to the internet, television and mobile phones, people in the so-called 'remote' areas of PNG make claims to knowledge and 'evidence' to substantiate links with global and Christian others: whether white, Australian anthropologists like myself, members of international NGOs like Olim AID International, or experts in Jewish Studies like Professor Parfitt in the United Kingdom. To explore the range and power

of ethno-theologies in contemporary PNG, then, I suggest that we need to take these other kinds of resources into consideration as important sources of knowledge and engagement with global people and places.

When explaining to me in an interview the significance of recent claims to Jewish heritage through the original ancestors, Debema explicitly drew on the similarities between my own research and that conducted into the origins of the Gogodala by Henry. Pointing out that although that interaction with Olim AID had encouraged Henry to declare his affiliation with Israel and explore these ancestral connections in detail, he had been involved in investigating potential connections for some years. Debema said:

We call it [the group formed around the claim for Jewish ancestry] a research foundation—mainly to look for our ancestral [origins], where we came from. We know how we came, but where did we come from? So they [Henry and others working on this issue] couldn't [have] any way of coordinating it here [in Balimo and surrounding villages], so I offered to help. So I quit my job with Telikom [in Port Moresby] . . . so I offered to come here and help. And so Olim AID International became our link – so they coordinated our work with experts. They have a professor, Professor Parfitt, he's British Jew—he's a genetic anthropologist. He collected our saliva, did tests on it on Gogodala and also surrounding tribes. And then, on my part, I went to brief the Governor [of Western Province] himself; then he could understand what we are doing. So like you, it's very hard to explain when you do research work. So speaking in Gogodala we tell him [the Governor] we are looking for *iwala gi* ['the truth'/evidence/research] information, to piece it all together (Balimo, October 2004).

Social scientific and scientific research has played a major role in drawing and substantiating connections between the ancestors and the lost tribes of Israel. Henry first learnt of Parfitt's work amongst the Lemba of South Africa through the internet and was encouraged to contact him by members of Olim AID International.

Debema and Henry's research foundation, though justified in terms of providing evidence to substantiate their understandings of ancient histories and movements of the Lost Tribes and the Gogodala ancestors, is understood by others in the area to also constitute another kind of significance. So, although there has been considerable popular support for the claim of Jewish ancestry in Gogodala villages, it is linked particularly to the leadership of a particular evangelical Church called the Christian Evangelical Fellowship (CEF) that came into existence amongst expatriate Gogodala living in Port Moresby and other centres in PNG. Indeed, Debema acknowledged this in a comment that he made in the interview referred to above in which he noted 'they [many people] are thinking 'Oh, they are starting a new Church [the CEF with this claim for Jewish ancestry]'. In 1997, the CEF declared itself the 'true' Gogodala church, distinct from the ECPNG, which was a trust of the former mission (Dundon 2002). With the departure of the Pioneer mission from the Balimo district in 2003, the CEF has been considerably strengthened and, although there is general interest in and support for the idea of Israel as the original ancestral homeland, the leadership of

this movement is dominated by those affiliated with the CEF. Henry is a CEF member as are the majority of the Ground Committee. Its chairperson is a prominent engineer employed on various natural resource projects in the province.

In his book, Parfitt suggests that in Judaism, the term 'Jew' or 'Israelite' has 'always implied someone of the family of Israel, as well as someone who performs certain rituals ... so that 'the area of ambiguity has already lent itself to association: confusion and ambiguity are Velcro-strips to those seeking a new identity' (Parfitt 2003, p. 3). For the Gogodala, it is not so much that they seek a new identity—rather it is that they want to understand the kinds of relations in which they live. As Featherstone (1995, p. 97) cogently notes 'notions of global and local cultures are relational'. The possibility of claiming substantive and embodied relationships with Israel is attractive on many levels: it validates the importance of their particular contemporary evangelical Christianity in Western Province—which they refer to as Christian country. DNA evidence may well 'prove' the ongoing claims that the Gogodala are distinct from their neighbours and co-nationals, and hence should be literally 'set apart' from them. This in turn justifies the choice of the original missionaries to settle in their territory and also explains the significance of the ancestral narratives about the original migration to Dogono. It is also part of the 'reterritorialising' of Christianity in places like Heaven and Israel and their conflation with ancestral spaces like Wabila/Yaebi Saba (cf. Jacka 2005). While the recent claim for Jewish ancestry is associated to an extent with the leadership of CEF, and membership within this Church, there has been a great deal of wide-ranging support and interest in it. Reterritorialising Christian spaces has been a feature of Gogodala Christianity for a long time, as I suggest above and elsewhere (cf. Dundon 2007, in press). But making Heaven a place becomes even more significant if Gogodala can substantiate 'real', biogenetic links between ancient Jewish populations and Gogodala ancestors, as Israel—and Heaven—become much more accessible than ever before.

Notes

- [1] He argues that such categories are primarily historical articulations and an analytical focus on relationships and agency renders such distinctions problematic (Foster 2005, p. 176).
- [2] Olim Aid International is an evangelical Christian outreach organisation based in Queensland, Australia. Although not explicitly stated in their Mission Statement, Olim Aid International is founded on the proposition that 'God has never abandoned Israel' and that Israel is the 'prerequisite of Christ's return'. This is 'part and parcel of pre-millennialist dispensationalism', which forms a basis for a continuing emphasis on Israel in certain forms of Christian worship and practice (Gifford 2001, p. 74).
- [3] Masanawa continues to be a place of some power and ancestral activity, represented in the noises that sometimes emerge from the swamps. These are often described by witnesses as like that of a conch shell, sounds sometimes accompanied by strange movements in the opaque waters, likened to small tidal waves associated with something large moving beneath the surface. Such descriptions and witness accounts correlate with those of other places accorded ancestral significance in the local landscape.

- [4] The ECPNG was the indigenous church that originally emerged out of the relationship between the UFM/APCM and the Gogodala in the 1960s; it was originally only referred to as the Evangelical Church of Papua (ECP) but later became the ECPNG.
- [5] The Gospel of Mark was the first book translated into Gogodala, sixty copies of which were hastily unveiled and presented to local converts in 1941 before the missionaries were evacuated following the outbreak of war in the Pacific (Weymouth 1988, p. 184).
- [6] This is still in practice today—my own name, Samakiyato, came from my adopted family's deceased eldest daughter.
- [7] Parfitt's book *Journey to the Vanished City* (1992) was based on research amongst the Lemba of South Africa, a Bantu-speaking group that approached Parfitt at a conference in South Africa and told him that they were Jews (Johnston 2003, p. 1). Although Parfitt did not confirm a Jewish ancestry for the Lemba, the book did give 'some support to the Lemba's claim to Jewish ancestry and it sparked a popular interest in the Lemba worldwide' (Johnston 2003, p. 2). His book also led to an interest amongst genetic anthropologists, who took DNA samples of 136 Lemba and compared them with DNA from neighbouring groups and some Jewish populations. 'The study's results were suggestive of a genetic history that is not incompatible with the Lemba's oral tradition' (Johnston 2003, p. 2). Johnston (2003, p. 3) writes that the book and the genetic study 'apparently had a profound effect, not just on how many Lemba see themselves, but on how they are perceived by others'.
- [8] I was not made aware of how Henry came into contact with Olim Aid or Micari, although they have had some presence in Moresby over the years.
- [9] The mandate for Olim Aid International reads: 'Our mandate is a three prong ministry for the total man—body, soul and spirit. Our call is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and preach the gospel—to the oppressed, orphans, widows and refugees, Jews and Gentiles—fulfilling God's Word for the end times, as according to Matthew 25:31–46 and Mark 16:15' (Olim Aid n.d.).

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