ABSTRACT
The paper explores the contemporary dissentious debate on the Remba discourse. The debate has cursorily pitted Ephraim Chikakano Mandivenga against Tudor Parfitt; but as Mandivenga has been tending towards the Hammond Tooke-Beach axis and Parfitt towards the Junod-Mativha positions, the study has shown that the two scholars are only the visible faces of an intransigent deep rooted discourse. The study locates the root cause of the said debate in the antiquarian tendency to liberally employ the Judeo-Christian template to African cultures. The protagonists found themselves willing, though not necessarily deliberate, participants in the divergent antiquarian views. Parfitt has gone beyond the general tendency of arguing within the social sciences to exploit the benefits of biological sciences in the form of genetic linkage. The study does not question the factuality of the genetic similarity advanced by Parfitt, but interrogates the consequences of its factuality. Employing a comparative approach to the debate, the study has allowed the two scholars to exhaust themselves before locating the debate within its historiography.

KEYWORDS: Ngomalungundu, Re-Islamisation, Remba, Sena, Senzi

INTRODUCTION
Tudor Parfitt, a passionate anthropologist armed with the theory of Jewish multiracial world-wide dispersion, has presented the Remba as a Jewish Diaspora tribe. Ephraim Chikakano Mandivenga, a Gutu born scholar of Islamic Studies, on the other hand submits that the Remba are ‘renegade’ Muslims in need of re-Islamisation. The debate has in recent years been complicated by the genetic theory which however has not managed to close the gap as both sides have dug in declaring themselves beneficiaries of the theory. As the debate graduates from simple antiquarianism into science its ‘simple pimples graduate into intransigent ulcers.’

Methodology
The study utilizes the phenomenological method. The term ‘phenomenology’ comes from the Greek term ‘phainomenon’ referring to that which manifests itself (Allen, 1987, p. 273). The method embraces comparative aspects through its classification of different types of
phenomena. It is important in this study to put the Remba, Jewish and Muslim practices into a comparative perspective. Eric Sharpe notes however that the term phenomenology eludes any precise definition, and Chitando (1998, p. 101) is of the view that it owes its multiplicity of definitions to the various orientations of its adherents, who include historians of religion. It is Edmund Husserl who ties it down to basics by maintaining that it deals with descriptive accuracy by excluding reductionism, and it is this aspect which is quite handy to the current study dealing with the history of the Remba religion.

In doing that it employs epoche which refers to the bracketing out of pre-conceived ideas (Cox, 1996, p.19). All commitments accumulated a priori must be overcome in order to allow the phenomenon to speak for itself. Bettis (1969, p.1) concurs by asserting that epoche eliminates “abstract a priori standards of academic disciplines.” The principle is not without its own challenges, but the attempt in itself is a great leap-forward; and thus Kristensen (cited by Bettis, 1969, p.49), insists that “there is no religious reality other than the faith of the believers” and therefore at the end of any research the researcher must always acknowledge that, “the believers were completely right.” Chitando, however, questions the efficacy of this conviction due to shear ignorance of some believers, who are wont to say under probe, “It has always been so.”

The principle of epoche is greatly aided by “performing empathetic interpolation” (Cox, 1992, p.38). This entails putting oneself in the believer’s place and describing the phenomena from within, rather than imposing conclusions from without. The researcher walks a mile in the shoes of the believer, which according to Cox (1996, 19f) has the problem of conversion. It may also lead to mediocre results as it is difficult to question the one you empathize with. One generally tends to defend rather than quiz the one one empathizes with.

The performance of eidetic vision (Husserl, cited in E. Sharpe, 1986, p.224) follows this stage of empathetic interpolation. Eidetic vision comes from eidos meaning ‘form,’ ‘idea,’ or ‘essence.’ According to Husserl, this vision accounts for the observer’s ability to deduce the real essence of the phenomena independent of preconceptions, or popular declarations. Accordingly, one’s conclusion must always be based on the phenomena and the believers’ understanding of it.

Though the research utilized this method the researcher was aware of the limitations of this broadly open method. The researcher was however pleased with the effort, for although it was not possible to say that the conclusions were purely objective, the very endeavor to be objective rather than relying on earlier conclusions was a step in the positive direction. As
demonstrated later it actually became necessary to vary some of the early conclusions made some researchers.

The Beach factor within the Mandivenga Thesis
Beach leaves no space for the autonomous existence of the Remba apart from the Muslims. Under the subject index he states categorically, “Lemba see Muslims” (1980, p.417). He notes that in the Zambezi valley settlements imported pottery from Islamic Asia was ubiquitous. Housing in the settlements followed the Asian model. “In this culture, Islam became a dominant religion, and spread from the Arabs to the African people along with some Arabic” (1980, p.25). The Shona Muslims acted as middlemen buying gold at a cheaper price on the Plateau and selling it at a comfortable price at the coast (p.40).

The Portuguese used the term Mouros to refer generically to the Muslims. Mouros has been translated variously as ‘Arabs’ or ‘Swahili.’ “In fact, for the Portuguese of that time mouro simply meant a Muslim, of whatever colour and language, who was distinguished by a Muslim name, a turban, and some degree of Islamic religion” (p. 107). Beach quotes Barbosa as saying, “These of Sofala are black men, some olive, and use the tongue of the land which is that of Gentiles … [though they] speak some Arabic” (p. 107). Beach postulates that the Gentile language within the Plateau must have been Shona since the Swahili were long Islamised. He doubted that the Arabs or Swahili ever made errands to the Plateau, and if they did, no evidence had yet been established. Just as some coastal Shona trading with the Portuguese adopted Christianity quite early, so should the interior Shona doing business with the Muslims.

The rest of the Shona must have taken Mouros as torwa (foreigners), “since even today the Shona-speaking Lemba, who have only vestigial traits of Islam, are lumped together with Muslim Indians under the general classification of mwenyे” (p108). Within in the Zambezi trading zone there were some 20 Muslim ruler-cum-traders and 800 Islamised Africans. The Muslim mwenyе traders retreated before the Portuguese advance (p166). There were mwenyе rulers around Sena and the Luabo mouth of the Zambezi, who were tributary to the Mutapa by the late sixteenth century (p. 173). The seventeenth century saw the eclipse of the “mwenyе” in areas controlled by the Portuguese. They retreated to the areas controlled by the Maungwe and Torwa people where they emerged as manipulators of Shona policy (p. 200). They were elbowed out of Torwa due to alignment in royal factionalism in 1644 (p.213). “The Muslim community was gradually becoming more and more absorbed into the Shona
world, to become the Lemba groups scattered across the Plateau, groups that retained little more than fragments of the Islamic faith and culture” (p.213).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, finally a group of Lemba from Zoutpansberg had come to the area South of Belingwe peak not long before the fall of the Changamire State. Although the Mfecane caused the ruling Mposi Zhou dynasty to flee back to the Venda for a while, enough Lemba remained to establish the claim of the Lemba to the Belingwe peak area as a whole (Beach, 1980, pp.306f)

The Thesis of Mandivenga’s Argument
Mandivenga argues that the Arabs penetrated Zimbabwe from the East African coast before 1500 CE (1983, 1). Some of their trading posts in the, then, Mutapa Empire were located at the mouth of the Sabi River and upwards to the mouth of the Zambezi River. This presence is acknowledged by Alpers (2000, p.303) who notes that “…[though] a small community of Muslims existed in the Zambezi valley during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Islam did not begin to take root in the interior of East Central Africa until the nineteenth century.” The Arab Muslims offered cloth and beads in exchange for ivory and gold from the interior. Signs of this exotic presence are clear; for “in this gold-bearing area, numbers of non-indigenous plants, fruits, and trees of Asian habitat are found, and there may have been an Asian …supremacy here as there was in Java in the centuries preceding Muslim conquest of the island” (Brelvi, 1969, p.319).

These Arabs intermarried with the coastal and interior people. As a result Islam spread through this direct contact with the Arabs. The Muslim activities in the vast Mutapa Empire were gradually affected by the Portuguese establishment of Sofala in 1505 (Mandivenga, 1992, p.99). Muslims had monopolized trade with the interior before the coming of the Portuguese. Mafamede, a Muslim from the Mozambique Island, labelled Fr.Goncalo da Silveira, a Jesuit priest seen as an intruder, a spy for the Portuguese (Mandivenga, 1984, p.393). The Muslim disdain for competition led to the murder of Fr. Goncalo da Silveira in 1561, courting the ire of Portuguese mission.

The Portuguese who came on a revenge-mission against Emperor Nogomo Mupunzagutu found out that the Muslims were well established in the empire and had considerable influence at the imperial court (Mandivenga, 1983, p.2). The Portuguese used the term mouro for any Muslim practice including the wearing of the fez hat without distinguishing ethnicity (cf. Beach, 1980, p. 107). “Nonetheless, there is no doubt some of the African inhabitants
Islamised by the Arab Muslims were Swahili-speaking, Sena-speaking and Shona-speaking peoples” (Mandivenga, 1983, p.2). Some of these “Swahili-speaking, Sena-speaking and Shona-speaking peoples” could have spread to Great Zimbabwe before 1500 CE. Their presence at Great Zimbabwe affected the local customs. “Their eating, marriage and circumcision of their sons are in conformity with typical Muslim practice. It appears that with the coming of Muslim traders the whole area was turned over to Islamic influence to a large extent. Besides, many of the tribesmen apparently adopted such Muslim names as Ali, Moosa, Kassim, Mustafa, Adam, Yusuf. These indigenous people are today identified as the Varemba” *sic* (Mandivenga, 1983, p.2). Mandivenga further notes that some Remba names are derived from Swahili or Arabic: Madi, Sadiki, Hasani, Sarifu, Seremani, Bakari and Saidi (cf. Hammond-Tooke, 1937, p.82).

Mandivenga (1983, p.2) agrees with Beach that the Remba are local Shona people with “vestigial Islam” (cf. Beach, 1980, p.108). The initial “re-introduction of Islam” to the Remba people took place in the Buhera District in Masvingo Province in 1961 (Mandivenga, 1983, p.2). This initial process involved two hundred tribesmen who may be regarded as having been Muslims in practice. These men were reintroduced to the religion of their forefathers in that year. In addition, in 1974 a total of at least five hundred people in the Gutu District were also “re-Islamised.”

Some Remba people inhabit the area around Great Zimbabwe where there is “evidence of Muslim presence a few centuries ago” (Mandivenga, 1983, p.30). Some of these Remba people claim Arab ancestry, in addition to similar circumcision patterns and similar *ngoma* names. Mandivenga’s argument leans closely to that of W. D. Hammond-Tooke. Hammond-Tooke (1937, pp.81-4) notes that like Muslims the Remba circumcised their sons between seven and fifteen instead of at infancy. He maintains that the marriage and dietary laws are aligned to the Muslim practice. The names of the Remba tribal groupings are actually Arabic and generally used by Muslims: Sadiki, Hasane, Hamisi, Haji, Bakeri, Sarifo and Saidi. For him the Remba descended from Muslims, at least in part. These Remba, skilled in mining and metal work, were believed to be foreigners in Zoutpansberg. They are believed to be the source of the rite among the Venda, Sotho and Thonga.

Nowhere is Mandivenga clearer in his advancement Muslim-Remba thesis than in the abstract to his PHD Thesis (1986): “Chapter Two identifies and describes vestiges of Muslim influence among the Varemba people in the Southern interior, among whom traces of Islamic culture have survived. It concludes that the Semitic cultural traits among the Varemba are
indeed Islamic and not Jewish, as some writers have suggested, and that these influences had a South East African origin. It is also tentatively suggested that the Varemba may be distant descendents of the Muslims who got ‘cut off’ from the cost by the Portuguese.”

**The Thesis of Parfitt’s Argument**

Tudor Parfitt, a British anthropologist born in Wales and bred in England of a non Jewish family with “an intense admiration for Jewish people,” has travelled to the remotest regions of the world looking for the “lost tribes of Israel” (www.miamherald.com …). He has seeped ‘seven days’ (home-brew beer) with the Remba in Zimbabwe, among whom he has found what he believed to be the lost Ark of the Covenant. While the Remba’s DNA tests eventually confirmed Parfitt’s theory that they were one of the lost Jewish tribes (Parfitt, 2002, p. 49), the Gogodala of Papua Northern Guinea who also claimed Jewish ancestry, failed the DNA test.

Parfitt came into the lime light with his publication of *Operation Moses*, which dealt with the airlifting of the Ethiopian Jews, the Falashas, to Israel. The book is modeled on the Biblical *Exodus* which dealt with the liberation of Jews from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. For Parfitt the airlifting of the Ethiopian Jews resembled the original Exodus, and hence *Operation Moses*. By invoking the legendary name of Moses Parfitt wanted to appeal to the nostalgic emotions that go with the re-play the Egypt-Canaan emigration.

On coming to South Africa to give a lecture on the Falashas, he got invited by Professor Mathiva, a Remba whose father has offspring in Mberengwa, to do for the Remba what he had done for the Falashas. Mathiva, the Remba “spiritual leader” commissioned him to find Sena, the “lost city” of the Remba (www.pbs.org/wgbh). Sena for the Remba is invaluable, and has a semi-mythical status as a city of origin and perhaps the end. A kind of opening came when Parfitt was doing a book on the Jews of Yemen. In traversing the land from village to village, he trampled upon ‘Sena;’ an ancient Jewish city, whose inmates once boasted of converts in North Africa (Parfitt, 2002, p.48). Of particular interest, is that, in the sixth century Arabia contained the only Jewish kingdom. He noted that the Jewish population had dwindled in the area ever since the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, and wars in the area had given impetus to further population dispersion.

Commenting on the finding to the Nova reporter he said, “I was very pleased at the end of my journey to be able to offer at least a version of where they (Remba) may have come from. I think it holds water.” From then on, he postulated a theory on how the Remba could have
been associated with the old Jewish city. The Remba claimed to have crossed from Arabia into Africa through Pusela. In Africa they built another Sena in Portuguese East Africa. The latter city is well documented. Beach (1980, p.173) concurs that there were *mwenye* rulers around Sena by the late sixteenth century, but notes that they were tributary to the Mutapa and disputes Parfitt’s Jewish connection in favour of the Muslim one.

On his inaugural visit to the Remba he noted that they were endogamous and harboured a great disdain for the *Senzi* (Gentiles) as the Jews do. According to the Jewish Talmud, the male Jew prayed every morning thanking the Lord for not having made him a sinner or a Gentile which was meant to separate “us” (Jews) from “them” (Gentiles) (Malina, 1981, p.110). The Gentile was grouped together with sinners, and the Jewish purity code dictated a complete disengagement with sinners. He also noted with interest the extraordinary importance placed on ritual slaughter of animals, “which was not African at all” (www.pbs.org/wgbh). He does acknowledge of course that ritual slaughter is both Islamic and Judaic, but definitely Middle Eastern.

He noted that the Remba helped build Great Zimbabwe, and their presence in the monuments area is marked by the excavated models of circumcised male organs that have been found at Great Zimbabwe. Ken Mufuka, Tudor Parfitt and Magdel le Roux assert that the Remba were not the Great Zimbabwe architects, but may have contributed to its building as did many other groups (Parfitt, 2000, pp. 1f).

Parfitt further relates the Remba to the Jews on the basis of genetic similarity. The genetic studies on the Remba indicate possible links with the people of Southern Arabia. In Eastern Hadramaut (a valley in Southern Yemen where Sena is located) there are many tribes with precisely similar tribal names as the Remba (Sadiki, Hamisi etc). The DNA samples for Hadramaut and the Remba were tested in London in 1999, and the Y chromosomes of the two groups had similar features. The Cohanim (Jewish priestly tribe) modal haplotype (CMH) Y chromosome was much higher among the Buba Remba clan than even among other Jewish tribes (Parfitt, 2002, p. 49). The CMH is found in some populations across the Middle East. Among the Remba it represents entry through a male Semite as there is no sign of female contribution (www.pbs.org/wgbh).

It is impossible to prove precisely when the genetic link entered the Remba, though it is more plausible to have come from Hadramaut. No white Jew is known to have penetrated the African interior until very recently. Since there was a non white Semitic population already
resident in East Africa, Parfitt proposes a wandering, though unheard of Jewish peddler, bringing the Y chromosome to East Africa a millennium ago.

Among the Remba he has found what he believed to be the ‘lost Ark of the Covenant.’ The Ark of the Covenant is one of the Bible’s holiest objects. It comprises a wooden box measuring about 4 feet x 2.5 feet x 2 feet. It was gold-plated and carried by two poles inserted into rings. Biblically it was a container of the Ten Commandments (content.time.com…). The Ngomalungundu, the drum that thunders, which he interpreted to be the replica of the Ark of the Covenant is said to be treated by the Remba as near divine. It has the same style as the Biblical Ark of the Covenant. The Ngomalungundu was used by the Remba to carry sacred objects. This for Parfitt creates a similar mythical character with the Ark of the Lord in that the latter carried the sacred Commandments of Yahweh (Nova). “The drum element is the biggest stretch, since scripture never straightforwardly describes the Ark that way…” (content.time.com…). Parfitt made parallels with the Ark of the Covenant’s association with the trumpets (sound creating instruments). The Ngomalungundu is dated around 1350 CE, 2500 years after Moses.

He found eighth century Ark accounts by Jewish Muslims of Yemen. Suspecting that the Remba followed the spice route from Arabia he trekked the Ngomalungundu from Egypt, through Ethiopia and New Guinea to a museum of Human Sciences in Harare. The artifact was last displayed and photographed in 1949 in Bulawayo (Parfitt, 2002, p.41). The colonial administration took it to Harare for security reasons during the liberation struggle. The drum was put on display in Harare in 2010 in a ceremony attended by the Remba and government ministers (Le Roux, 2003, p.169). The idea of migrations from the Middle East as will be shown below, are now generally labeled antiquarian.

**Points now agreed upon or generally taken as given**

1. The Remba tradition of abstinence and ritual identity is of Semitic origin.
2. Once upon a time, the Remba were at Sena in the Zambezi Valley. In one of his publications this writer notes that they only left Sena to gain freedom from the marauding Yao Muslims. Mandivenga and Beach maintain that the Portuguese may have been the greatest threat facing the Remba traders. It was A. H. Stayt (1931, pp.231-238), however, who initially associated the Remba with Sena, and noted that they were largely endogamous and would always call the non-Remba, Senzi, a derogatory term meaning uncircumcised and unclean. Muhammad bin-Dohry writes
that the Remba were trade middlemen with a large settlement at Sena, thus, “The Lemba praise name Mushavi means trader.” In that he agrees with Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo who say that the Remba were originally in the Zambezi valley in the vicinity of Sena. On their southward migration the Remba broke into 12 clans with some settling as far north as Guruve and Wedza, while other groups settled in Gutu and areas South of Great Zimbabwe.

3. They use the honorific name Vasena signifying their traditional place of origin.

4. Before finally settling in Mposi in Mberengwa the Remba crossed the Limpopo and then came back. Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo maintain that a group of the Remba joined the Rozvi moving south to Zoutpansberg from their new capital at Matonjeni: “Shortly thereafter, a Remba chief, Chinounda, decided to lead his people back to Sena, but in the event they were forced to settle in the Mberengwa area and thus the Mposi dynasty was born.” Raftopoulos and Mlambo’s argument falls within the general argument, indicating that the Remba migration from Sena went beyond the Limpopo before the finally settlement in Mberengwa. And finally, Beach (1980, p.306f) drove the point home in his discussion of the Remba who originally crossed the Limpopo into the Transvaal, but later returned northwards to settle in the central and Southern Mberengwa, possibly with the generally wave of migrations. He puts it like this:

Finally a group of Lemba from Zoutpansberg had come to the area South of Belingwe peak not long before the fall of the Changamire State. Although the Mfecane caused the ruling Mposi Zhou dynasty to flee back to the Vhenda for a while, enough Lemba remained to establish the claim of the Lemba to the Belingwe peak area as a whole.

5. Mposi in Mberengwa became the most important place for the Remba after Sena. Those Remba who remained in South Africa continued to regard Mposi as their spiritual home. In a correspondence to the then Belingwe District Commissioner, Professor Mativha, the then secretary general of the South African Lemba Cultural Association (L C. A.) wrote:

The Lemba cultural Association further appreciates the guidance which you as district commissioner give Chief Mposi and his council in the administration of Belingwe Reserve which is the spiritual home of all Lemba in Rhodesia …the Belingwe area is the spiritual home of all the Lemba because even those who came to the Transvaal migrated from Belingwe long ago.
6. That the Remba/Lemba in South Africa came from Zimbabwe and were the authors of the circumcision rite among the Venda, Sotho and Thonga. Junod’s main contribution on the subject came in 1913 (p. 72) when he was discussing circumcision rites among the Thonga people of Zoutpansberg. Posing a question about the origins of circumcision among the Thonga, Vhenda and Sotho he proceeded thus:

Is it possible to ascertain its true origin? My informants, Viguet especially, were convinced that *ngoma* was brought to the tribes of the northern Transvaal by the Balemba… as regards the Bavenda of that country; the rite was adopted quite recently under the influence of the Malemba or Balemba. These Balemba are a very curious people living among the Thonga and the Sutho of the Zoutpansberg, just as Jews among the European nations, without chief, without national unity, but with the characteristic customs to which they adhere from generation to generation … Historians may however be intrigued by the easy reference to the Middle Eastern tribe, Jews, as a model.

**The Cross-Roads**

1. Tudor Parfitt has gone to great lengths to prove that the Remba are of Jewish origin while Ephraim Chikakano Mandivenga has stood his ground that the said Jewish origin is fallacious. The loophole in the genetic proof, Parfitt’s seemingly greatest tramp card, is that both Jews and Arabs being cousins share the same genetic configuration to the same levels found among the Remba. The said Cohanim modal haplotype is shared by a number of tribes across that Middle East. Locally, Mandivenga is supported by Pathisa Nyathi who says, “When a circumcised MuRemba slaughters a beast he faces east…During the process, the man who slaughters the beast utters the following words: ‘BisMilayiTakabira’ … which means, ‘I slaughter in the name of God, God is great.’” This procedure is clearly Islamic. Driven by the zeal to unearth this tradition among the Remba of Mposi, the current researcher found himself at cross roads with local practice of the “Lemba spiritual home” (Dube, 2013). The tradition was strange even to the oldest surviving Remba.

2. The genetic theory shows that the genes entered the Remba from the male side only, and no female genetic contribution has been noted. This makes the original Remba a man of mixed blood. Parfitt theorizes that the founder of the Remba tribe must have been a Jewish loner of whom current history is oblivious. Mandivenga and Beach take
the founders to have been the Arab and Swahili Muslims known in history to have thronged the Zambezi Sena and to have intermarried with the Africans. Their postulation is that they must have intermarried with the local Shona tribes creating a higbbred tribe called the Remba; though some Remba are mere Shona people who adopted ‘vestigial’ Islam through trade contact and representation as middlemen.

3. Parfitt who leaned closely to Mativha with relatives in Mposi has influenced Jews to ‘re-Judaise’ the Remba of Mposi while, Mandivenga who helms from Gutu has theorized in favour of the Muslims now ‘re-Islamizing’ the Remba of Gutu and the surrounding areas. Are the domicile connections also at cross roads? Such an assertion would undermine scholarship, and the current researcher is convinced that this dichotomy may not have been directly at play.

4. The biggest huddle comes from the insider-outsider paradigm, for both writers wore the jackets of their explicit-implicit commissioners. Parfitt is clear that he was commissioned by the Remba spiritual leader, Professor Mativha to recover from oblivion the lost city of Sena. Although Mandivenga does not state his motivation, the Muslim World Book Review 8 (3), (Leicester) (1988, p.63) maintains that going through Mandivenga’s 1983 publication “one gets the impression that Mandivenga was largely influenced by those from whom he obtained the information for his work. He merely presents ‘the facts to speak for themselves’ but gives little or no analysis.” The implication is that Mandivenga also respected his implicit commissioners whom he never seriously cross-examined. In the eyes of many historians, however, this assertion is only valid for other aspects other than the Remba origins, for which he has shared scholarship with reputable historians.

The Antiquarian Link
Mazarire, in a 2001 presentation published on line, proposes that the problem of the origins of the Remba has been complicated by the antiquarian (non-systematic, untrained) anthropologist who “never thought of the African as being indigenous and thus never resisted the temptation of linking them to other large-scale narratives.” This linkage was done will nil. Beach (1986, p.4) lays the challenge of misinterpretation squarely in the hands of “Leo Frobenius and the Kultur Kreise School and its fascination with the Judeo-Christian template which manifested itself in local jargon as migrations of the Bantu from the Middle East Diaspora.” The Judeo-Christian template gave rise to the diffusionist theories which saw
locals as beneficiaries of Northerners through the North-South migrations. In the case of Mberengwa the relevant culprit was von Sicard. He saw the Southern Midlands Bantu groups as linked to external groups “in almost all cases.” He related the Remba to ‘their kin,’ the Abyssinian Falashas, on account of burial rites (von Sicard, 1957 p13). In making use of the information provided by Stayt, von Sicard tried to demonstrate the Remba origins within the Arabian Peninsula. This very link has dominated modern debate on the origins of the Remba, with Parfitt on the affirmative and Mandivenga on the opposing side. This linkage has undermined local innovation by inserting the Hamitic theory wherever there is a fabulous invention. Current scholarship has challenged the Hamitoid or Semitic foundation of the local Shona states as advanced by antiquarians (cf S. I. G. Mudenge).

Mudenge (2011, p.44) rejects the said Remba migration from the Arabian Peninsula, but notes in its place that Muslims used local middlemen called vashambadzi and due to like dressing both Muslims and their agents were designated Moors (cf. Mouros). Mudenge (2011, p.58) quotes Custo’s reference to a 1571 “village of friendly Moors” near Sena whose vicinity is associated with the residence of the Remba by Stayt and oral history. Mudenge (2011, p.363) insists that, besides learning the material cultures of the peoples they came into contact with, the Shona of the Mutapa also learned of the beliefs of some of these people. We know that the present Lemba people in Zimbabwe owe their Islamic observances and traditions to the Moslem traders who used to trade with the people of Zimbabwe in pre-colonial times.

Here the antiquarian is at loggerheads with the trained historian. Mazarire quotes Zachrisson (1978, p20) as saying that the Remba were locals who adopted Arabic customs through contact with Arab Muslims. He notes that most Remba accounts have lost originality due to Biblical antecedents and other Western influences grafted onto them. According to his findings (A. Ruwitah) the Remba have rarely directly referred to themselves as Arabs, Jews or Falashas, and that where these descriptive terms have been embraced they never at any time enjoyed universal application, except where they appear to confer an advantage on the Remba such as racial or ethnic superiority (cf Ruwitah, 1997, pp53-71).

The foreign origin of the Remba is categorically rejected by the local seasoned historians. This puts Parfitt’s theory into a defensive mode to survive the current thrust which labels it antiquarian. Its lone male Jew link has remained theoretical and the Pusela route has been disabled by the absence of the female genetic linkage.
Conclusion

Mandivenga and Tudor Parfitt are not diametrically opposed. They have areas of general agreement with the generality of scholarship and between themselves. They agree, for example, that the Remba culture has Middle Eastern origins, which they locate within the Abrahamic traditions, but disagree on which house of Abraham was directly responsible: Isaac (Jewish) or Ishmael (Arabian). This genealogical discourse has sucked in several scholars on either side. The Jewish origins have attracted the ire of the majority of seasoned historians who have labeled it fallacious diffusion-ism, a kind of antiquarian ‘Western contamination.’ Modern history having classified Jewish origins antiquarian, left Hammond-Tooke, Beach, Mandivenga and Mudenge in no mood to give it a second ear. It is however worthwhile examining whether ‘Western contamination’ has not left many in favour of Biblical association and cringing from Quranic association for fear of stigmatization.

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