

Zora, Zar, Ohad, and Nubia

Research Memos for Reggie Wilson's *Moses(es)*

Susan Manning



As recounted in the accompanying essay, “Reggie Wilson and the Making of *Moses(es)*: Notes from a Dramaturg’s Journal,” I compiled research memos on four disparate topics as part of my assignment as dramaturg.¹ Just as Reggie’s creative process transformed his found movement sources, so too did the choreography transform the research clusters nearly beyond recognition. Reggie did not want to release the research memos until after *Moses(es)* had completed its tour, to avoid having the memos limit spectators’ interpretations of the work. Included here are excerpts from all four of the research memos.

1. Three other articles by Susan Manning complete this special section of TDR (59:1) on Reggie Wilson: “Reggie Wilson and the Traditions of American Dance”; “Reggie Wilson in Conversation”; and “On the Making of *Moses(es)*: Notes from a Dramaturg’s Journal.” TDR online includes supplementary content: a 15-minute video on the making of Wilson’s most recent work, *On Fixing My Mouth to Say...Moses(es)*, by Nel Shelby Productions. — Ed.

Zora Neale Hurston

Reggie first read Zora Neale Hurston's writings during the 1980s, when her work was rediscovered and celebrated by black women artists and critics, notably Alice Walker. Although Hurston had been a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance in the years between the two world wars, she had fallen out of favor in the postwar era, for her aesthetics and politics seemed out of step with the civil rights and Black Power movements. Yet as Walker and her peers became dissatisfied with the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Hurston's writings appeared newly relevant, an inspiration and a precedent for their own artistry.

In 2010 Reggie traveled to Israel with a group of artists as guests of the American Academy in Jerusalem, sponsored by the Foundation for Jewish Culture. As he was preparing to leave his apartment in Brooklyn, his copy of Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) caught his eye, and he decided to take the book along on his trip and reread it, partly as a way of reminding himself to keep some distance from the politics of his Israeli hosts. He soon became reenchanted with Hurston's retelling of the Moses story in the language of Southern black folklore.²

At the recommendation of dancer Anna Schön, Reggie looked up her uncle Avigdor Shinan while in Israel. Professor Avigdor Shinan, a leading scholar at Hebrew University, told Reggie how he shows students an array of images of Moses—from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and challenges them, "Show me your Moses and I'll tell you who you are." Reggie dates the conception of *Moses(es)* to his trip to Israel.

Hurston inhabited diverse worlds as a writer, theatre artist, folklorist, and ethnographer, and her correspondence collected by Carla Kaplan reveals a broad circle of friends and acquaintances. She kept up a lifelong correspondence with Carl Van Vechten, a white patron of many Harlem Renaissance artists. (Hurston coined the term "Negrotarians" to describe Van Vechten, Julius Rosenwald, and other white patrons of black artists. The artists in turn called themselves the "Niggerati.") Hurston became close to Langston Hughes in the late 1920s, but their friendship collapsed after the two argued over authorship rights for the play *Mule Bone* (1930). In 1935 she met Alan Lomax when he was on one of his folk music collecting trips as a college student and introduced him to musicians on an island off the Georgia Coast. In 1938, while working on *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, she undertook fieldwork on "sanctified" church practices in South Carolina with Jane Belo, a fellow anthropologist who had earlier worked with Margaret Mead in Bali.

2. All quotations and paraphrases of Reggie Wilson's views are from formal interviews and informal conversations with the author from June 2011 through September 2012. Wilson edited and checked the memos for accuracy before they were made accessible to his dancers and collaborators in September 2012.

Figure 1. (previous page) Reggie Wilson and dancers from Fist and Heel visited the Oriental Institute in Chicago as part of their research on Nubian culture. (Photo courtesy of Reggie Wilson/Fist and Heel Performance Group)

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Among Hurston's many correspondents was Melville Herskovits, who joined the faculty of Northwestern in 1927 and worked to establish the first program in African Studies at an American university. Herskovits, who like Hurston had studied with Franz Boas at Columbia University, did fieldwork in Africa and in the Caribbean, and he argued that enslaved Africans had brought significant practices to the New World—a novel and even controversial argument during the 1920s and 1930s.

Herskovits first articulated this position in a 1925 essay, "The Negro's Americanism," included in Alain Locke's path-breaking anthology *The New Negro* (1925). Herskovits's most influential publication, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, appeared in 1941 and extensively cited folklore Hurston had collected and published in *Mules and Men* (1935).

Correspondence between Herskovits and Hurston, housed at the Northwestern University Archive, spans the years from 1930 to 1937 and reveals a complicated relationship. Herskovits, born in 1895, was actually four years younger than Hurston, although she presented herself as younger than Herskovits, and he certainly saw himself in the role of mentor. Herskovits was also a mentor to Katherine Dunham during her fieldwork in the Caribbean, undertaken just a year before Hurston traveled to some of the same field sites, and the correspondence reveals a rivalry between the two artists, both of whom used ethnographic research as source material.

Here it is important to note that Reggie was impacted by Hurston and members of her circle long before she and they became a research cluster for *Moses(es)*. Herskovits's *The Myth of the Negro Past* had served as something of a foundational text for his thinking. The music Lomax collected over several decades traveling through the South has provided inspiration and accompaniment for many of his dances. In his early years as a choreographer in New York, Reggie regularly attended the annual Margaret Mead Film Festival, which features anthropological documentaries. In fact, Hurston and Dunham were both pioneers in ethnographic filmmaking, and Reggie followed their example on his research trips to Trinidad and Tobago to investigate the Spiritual Baptists.

For Reggie, Hurston's and Dunham's very different relationships with Herskovits raise all sorts of complex questions regarding leadership and power. Herskovits took on the role of mentor to both Dunham and Hurston, but whereas Hurston slyly challenged Herskovits's presumed authority, Dunham (nearly 20 years younger than Hurston) played up to Herskovits. Who is the leader and who is the follower? When do we lead and when do we choose to follow? These are questions raised by the Moses story as well as by the relations between mentors and disciples, choreographers and performers.

In 1926 Hurston collaborated with younger members of the Harlem Renaissance to publish *Fire!!*, a journal intended to stage an alternative to the vision of the "New Negro" as defined by Alain Locke in his anthology of that title published the year before. Langston Hughes also participated in this venture, and Aaron Douglas contributed illustrations. The journal never appeared again after its first issue, but the point was made that Hurston, Hughes, and their



Figure 2. In 2010 Reggie Wilson gathers with other fellows at the American Academy in Jerusalem. Wilson dates the conception of *Moses(es)* to his trip to Israel. (Photo courtesy of Foundation for Jewish Culture)

peers intended to “burn up a lot of old, dead conventional Negro-white ideas of the past”—as they proclaimed in their manifesto for *Fire!!* (in Kaplan 2002:793).

Among the “conventional Negro-white ideas of the past” they intended to challenge were norms of respectability applied to sexuality. Sexual experimentation and exploration were important components of the Harlem Renaissance across generations. Carl Van Vechten, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay—all explored same-sex desire in differing ways in their lives and works, as did many of the female blues singers of the time—Bessie Smith, Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Alberta Hunter. Hurston—who was married briefly, three times—also experienced diverse sorts of intimacies—she “fell in love with Jane Belo,” according to her own account, an experience not incompatible in her view from her affairs with men (in Kaplan 2002:434).

In 1934 Hurston published two critical essays in *Negro*, an anthology edited by Nancy Cunard, that are still influential today. Playing off of W.E.B. Du Bois’s 1926 essay “Criteria of Negro Art,” Hurston’s first essay, titled “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” outlines traits observed in the expressive arts of all but the educated elite, which Du Bois had called the “talented tenth.” Hurston identified and illustrated qualities such as mimicry, the will to adorn, angularity, asymmetry, and “dynamic suggestion”—qualities that later commentators such as Robert Farris Thompson and Brenda Dixon Gottschild would call Africanisms in American culture.

Hurston’s second essay in the book, “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals,” pushes her analysis further and challenges Du Bois’s characterization of the genre as “sorrow songs.” Rather, Hurston insists that “there never has been a presentation of genuine Negro spirituals to any audience anywhere” (360) and that the renditions made famous by college singing groups such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers and by such soloists as Paul Robeson were “*not* spirituals,” for “[spirituals] to be heard truly must be sung by a group [...] bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects” (360). In both essays Hurston sets up an opposition between authentic and inauthentic expression that has had far-reaching reverberations in many fields.

In *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Hurston’s “Author’s Introduction” notes the “numerous” and “varied” “concepts of Moses abroad in the world.” She continues, “All across Africa, America, the West Indies, there are tales of the power of Moses and great worship of him and his powers. But it does not flow from the Ten Commandments. It is his rod of power [...] For he is worshipped as a god” (1939:viii). Hurston’s source—and inspiration—for the novel was her research on “hoodoo,” the American variant of Voodoo, which she had collected a decade earlier and published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1931. There she noted that “all [practitioners] hold that the Bible is the greatest conjure book in the world. Moses is honored as the greatest conjurer” (414).

Early reviews by white critics captured Hurston’s intent and inspiration. In the *Saturday Review*, Louis Untermeyer wrote, “Zora Hurston has depicted the central figure of the Old Testament not so much as a questioning rebel or an illuminated lawgiver but, chiefly, as the great voodoo man of the Bible” (in Gates and Appiah 1993:26). In the *New York Times* Percy Hutchinson wrote, “This is the story of Moses as the Negro sees and interprets [him...] Moses was just about the greatest magician ever in the world” (in Gates and Appiah 1993:27). Yet both reviews also note limitations in the novel, notably, the mixing of black dialect and “straight-forwardly ‘correct’ [diction...] in the ‘white’ manner”—to quote Untermeyer (in Gates and Appiah 1993:27). In contrast, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) had used dialect consistently throughout, and critics could not understand why Hurston had mixed registers in her subsequent novel.

Early reviews by black writers were less generous than Untermeyer and Hutchinson. In *Opportunity* Alain Locke called the novel “caricature rather than portraiture” (1940:7), and in the *New Masses* Ralph Ellison asserted that “this work sets out to do for Moses what ‘The

Green Pastures' did for Jehovah: for Negro fiction it did nothing" (1941:24). Although Locke had advocated for folklore as source material for black fiction in the 1920s, by 1940 he had shifted his critical allegiance to realist fiction, in part because he believed that "folklore fiction" reinforced primitivist stereotypes of black folks. Indeed, the reviews by Untermeyer and Hutchinson demonstrate the hold of such stereotypes.

Strikingly, the Hurston revival launched by Alice Walker mostly overlooks *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. Compared to the mountains of literary criticism published on *Their Eyes were Watching God* over the last three decades, there is relatively little on *Moses*. One exception is Valerie Boyd's biography *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (2003). Boyd comments, "A hundred pages into the novel, you're no longer sure if Moses is black or white, Egyptian or Hebrew. But you realize that it doesn't matter—and that perhaps race itself doesn't matter, at least not based on skin color. Perhaps, Hurston suggests, identification, culture, and 'inside feelings' are the only things that count" (331–32). Was Hurston's mixing of black dialect and "white" poetic diction intended to underscore her challenge to racial purity in the novel?

Reggie acknowledges that Hurston's dismissal by earlier critics is partly what drew him to her work. Is it too much of a stretch to see a parallel between the Africanist and postmodernist dimensions of Reggie's work and the "the mixing of black dialect [...and] the 'white' manner" in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*?

Ohad Naharin

On his trip to Israel in 2010, Reggie reconnected with Ohad Naharin, with whom he had danced in New York City more than 20 years earlier. In 1988/89, Reggie had just graduated from New York University's Department of Dance and was beginning his professional career as a performer and choreographer. Naharin, 15 years Reggie's senior, had been making work since 1980 and was considered an up-and-coming choreographer. In 1990 Naharin was invited to return to his native Israel and take over the directorship of Batsheva Dance Company, where he had started his career as a dancer in 1974. In fact, Naharin asked Reggie to relocate with him to Israel, but in the end Reggie remained in New York City.

From 1990 to 2012, Reggie kept in "loose touch" with Naharin. During those years, Reggie remembered how tough Naharin could be on his dancers when rehearsing, but also how Naharin had supported his ambition to become a choreographer and had seen his earliest works. However, not until Reggie spent sustained time with Naharin in 2010 did he realize that perhaps he had influenced the Israeli choreographer. His thinking raised compelling questions: Are leaders influenced by their followers as much as the other way around? If so, how might the Hebrews as a collective have shaped the leadership style of Moses? In fact, Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* explores this question quite directly.

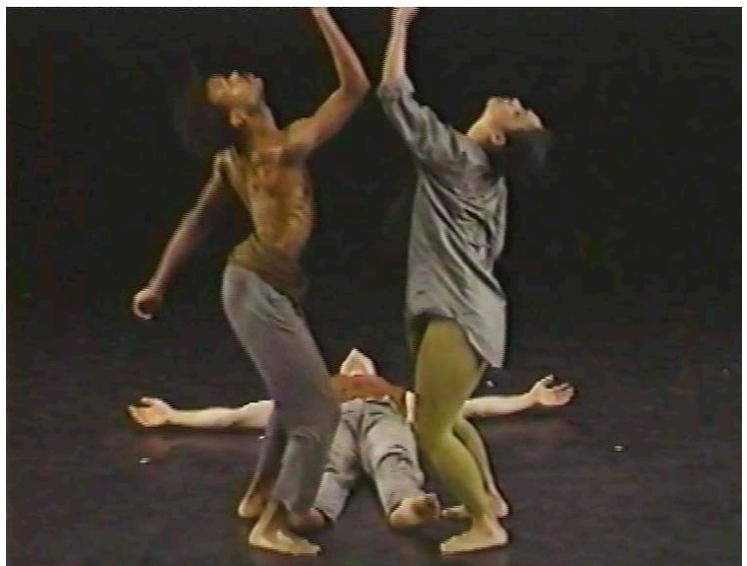


Figure 3. As a young dancer in New York, Reggie Wilson performed in Ohad Naharin's *Safe Tradition* (1988), shown here. Reflecting on his relationship with Naharin became one of the research clusters for Wilson's *Moses(es)*. (From Ohad, directed by Tomer Heymann; courtesy of Tomer Heymann)

Reggie first saw Naharin's work in 1986—during his first year in New York—when Naharin set a piece on the Second Avenue Dance Company, a company of advanced NYU students that presents works by invited professionals as well as by student choreographers. Two years later Naharin was again invited to choreograph on the student company, and this time Reggie—now in his final year of the three-year intensive program at NYU—was cast in the New York premiere of *Chameleon Dances (6–12)* (1988). During rehearsals for the piece, Naharin invited Reggie to join his company, and since Reggie had not yet graduated, he had to seek special permission from then department chair Larry Rhodes.

The 1980s was the decade when Naharin evolved his characteristic movement style, although it would be many more years before he formalized the method he calls Gaga. During the 1980s Naharin regularly presented his own company in New York, while also setting works on companies elsewhere. Although critics in New York were not always enchanted with Naharin's work, recalls Reggie, dancers always loved his movement. A few years after relocating to Israel, Naharin looked back on his time in New York and commented on the process:

When I was in New York I learned to choreograph by choreographing, and every next step was a different period [...] When I was in New York during the Eighties, I always felt that a lot was happening but that a lot of it was uninteresting. In order to make something good you have to try a lot of things [...] Certainly there is a lot of pressure in New York to succeed, to be “in.” For me it is better to find a personal way of working, something really connected to the real potential of the person—instead of trying to be part of a style of a group. (in Garske 1992:23–24)

While working with Naharin in 1988 and 1989, Reggie also launched his own choreographic career. In fact, Reggie premiered a solo on the same program of the Second Avenue Dance Company as his performance in Naharin's group dance. Jack Anderson reviewed the concert in the *New York Times*, noting that the student choreographers “acquitted themselves professionally,” while the “professionals offered workmanlike, although seldom memorable, creations.” Anderson continued:

Reginald [*sic*] Wilson, a student, choreographed *Geerewol*, a solo to recorded Pygmy music in which he rose from a crouch to move assertively. He thereby built his dance to an effective climax and held attention with his stage presence [...] Ohad Naharin made 10 dancers stagger and run in contrapuntal patterns in the New York premiere of *Chameleon Dances (6–12)*, to music by John Hassell. Everything was done with great intensity, yet the unremitting solemnity made the choreography seem pretentious. (1988:16)

Reggie found the title *Geerewol* in a book on ritual dance performances in Niger. Inspired by the photographs in the book, he used cowry shells to decorate his brief costume.

While dancing with Naharin, Reggie decided to audition for the Fresh Tracks program at Dance Theater Workshop (DTW). In so doing, he went against the advice of the NYU faculty, who told the graduating class to wait a few years before even attempting an audition for the prestigious series. But Reggie figured he had little to lose, and so he was all the more pleased when he received a slot on the Fresh Tracks program scheduled for December 1989. However, by the time the concert came around, he was sidelined by a knee injury, and so he set his solo, titled *N/UM*, on a classmate from NYU, David Titchnell. At this point, Reggie was still planning to follow Naharin to Israel; his bio noted that he would soon relocate to Tel Aviv. Again his piece received positive notice from Jack Anderson: “Mr. Titchnell's intensity suggests he was portraying someone confronting adversity. Rhythms give rise to meanings in this fascinating solo” (1989:20).

Shortly after Fresh Tracks, Executive Director David R. White invited Reggie to present a full evening of work at DTW, scheduled for December 1990. Reviewing the concert for the *New York Times*, Jennifer Dunning noted that Reggie, “a 1988 graduate of the Tisch School of

the Arts [...] is relatively unseasoned as a choreographer. But his promise is clear” (1990:C37). The program bio noted Reggie’s membership in Naharin’s company in the past tense. In retrospect, Reggie says that his knee injury and surgery, along with the choreographic opportunities opening up in New York, determined his decision to not move to Tel Aviv, but to stay in Brooklyn.

From 1990 through 2010, the public narrative of Reggie’s career rarely made mention of Naharin, although Reggie privately always remained aware of Naharin’s influence on his work. Not until visiting Naharin in Israel, however, did he realize that the influence perhaps went two ways. Naharin invited Reggie to watch the Batsheva II apprentice company rehearse *Kyr*; a work that Naharin had created just after his return to Israel and that was based on *Safe Tradition*, a full-evening work from 1988 created on the company that had included Reggie. A duet from the work, originally created on Reggie and Bettina Escañó, focused on movements for the arms; in fact, the dance became known simply as “Arms,” and in Israel was considered one of Naharin’s early masterpieces. Twenty-two years after performing in the premiere, Reggie sat alongside Naharin as both watched apprentice dancers perform the moves originally created on Reggie’s younger body.

These experiences led Reggie to reflect on his relationship with Naharin more consciously than he had before. During the first studio residency in Chicago in June 2012, Reggie returned to Naharin’s work as one possible starting point for *Moses(es)*.



Figure 4. In 2011 Reggie Wilson traveled to Mali, where he discussed his research on Zar with djeli Hamar Diabaté. (Photo courtesy of Reggie Wilson/Fist and Heel Performance Group)

Zar

After traveling to Israel in 2010 as part of a delegation sponsored by the Foundation for Jewish Culture, Reggie took the opportunity to travel on his own to Egypt. While in Cairo, he first encountered Zar at Makan, an organization dedicated to preserving traditional and indigenous music. He heard a predominantly female group, Mazaher, perform for the general public, and their performance struck him as “the closest music I have heard outside Senegal to Sabar”—the name of a Senegalese drum, drumming style, and dance he has studied and practiced.

The research clusters, I must emphasize, turned out to be deeply—and at times surprisingly—interrelated. For example, the questions of Egypt-in-Africa and Africa-in-Egypt underlying the research cluster on Nubia play out directly in terms of Zar: Nubia was a likely origin for Zar, given its role as a crossroads between West Africa and Egypt. Zar also relates to the research cluster on Zora Neale Hurston; the questions that engaged Hurston and anthropologists of her acquaintance—Franz Boas, Melville Herskovits, Katherine Dunham, Margaret Mead, Jane Belo—also inform the large body of anthropological literature on Zar: What does it mean to understand another culture from the perspective of an outsider? From the perspective of an insider or informant? From the perspective of embodied practice?

In one of many unexpected connections between research clusters, the website for Makan in Cairo quotes Alan Lomax, whom Hurston had advised during his early years of field collecting: “If we continue to allow the erosion of our cultural forms, soon there will be no place to visit and no place to truly call home” (ECCA 2014). Here an Egyptian center for traditional music quotes a white American folklorist who recorded black musicians in the South and who had been mentored by Hurston, who set her novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain* in ancient Egypt among Hebrews who speak in Southern black dialect! It’s hard to find a term to describe these complicated interweavings.

The term “Zar” refers to a musical form, to a possession ritual widespread in West and North Africa and the Middle East, and to the group of spirits that are believed to possess the afflicted, who are most often, although not always, women. Over the past 170 years there have been many accounts of Zar written by travelers, missionaries, anthropologists, and psychologists. In fact, there are over 100 books and articles written in English, French, German, Arabic, and Amharic. Why is there so much writing on Zar? First, it would seem, because Zar and related practices are so widespread, from Islamic West Africa to Ethiopia and the Sudan to North Africa and the Middle East. Second, it may well be that writings on Zar prompt more writings, as anthropologists observe numerous variants of the form and write up their findings in relation to other literature in their discipline. In fact, the 100-plus citations trace some of the major contours of anthropology over the past hundred years, as cultural theory and fieldwork developed in tandem and together reflected and challenged the ethnocentrism of researchers’ home cultures.

The earliest Western descriptions of Zar are by Charles William Isenberg and John Ludwig Krapf, British Protestant missionaries to Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia) from 1838 to 1842. While Isenberg learned Amharic, Krapf learned Galla, and they widely distributed their translations of the Bible in both languages. Their account of Zar dates from September 1839, when they were living in Shoa (Shewa) under the protection of the King (Negus Sahle Selassie). Not surprisingly, they interpret the ceremony as the “inroads of Satan” (Isenberg and Krapf 1843:118), but essential elements described in later accounts are present: a sick woman singing and smoking, speaking in an unfamiliar tongue, moving in unusual ways, sacrificing a hen. A local informant tells the missionaries about the 88 different sar (an alternate spelling of Zar), and the missionaries conclude that the ceremony, performed both by Abyssinian Christians and by “heathen” Gallas, mixes “Christianity, Judaism, Mahomedanism, and Heathenism” (118).

C.B. Klunzinger was a doctor, quarantine officer, and naturalist who lived in the port town of Zusayr on the Red Sea from 1863 to 1869 and again from 1872 to 1875. His account of Upper Egypt was originally published in German in 1877 and translated the following year into English. Unlike the missionaries Isenberg and Krapf, Klunzinger attempted to record what he saw without explicit editorializing, for he believed that “the inhabitants of Upper Egypt,” in contrast to residents in Cairo, “have preserved the ancient [...] customs with remarkable purity” (1878:iv). Thus he places Zar among the people’s “popular beliefs and superstitions” and states that the practice “is said to have been introduced by Abyssinian female slaves” (395). Although he does not call the practice “heathen,” he does believe that women are more susceptible to Zar than men, for women are “the more nervous sex”—a widespread belief in 19th-century Europe (395).

One of the earliest anthropological accounts of Zar is by Brenda Z. Seligman, who published her account in 1914 in the British journal *Folklore*. Her essay demonstrates the emerging conventions of the new discipline of anthropology: the writer frames her own observations in the field with comparisons to other writers’ accounts and to evolving theories in the discipline, in this instance, theories of origins. She believes that West African slave women brought Zar to Egypt via Sudan and Ethiopia (in other words, via Nubia). To a large extent, subsequent research has substantiated Seligman’s claim, although the current consensus posits far more complex routes of circulation. As a pioneering female anthropologist, Seligman, unlike her male

colleagues, had access to the women's quarters, and this made it possible for her to observe and realize the cultural significance of women's practices in a way that her male predecessors Isenberg, Krapf, and Klunzinger did not.

Extensive research on Zar was carried out by Michel Leiris, who published a number of essays on the topic from 1933 to 1938 and a monograph in 1958 titled *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar*. In 1920s Paris, Leiris became enthralled by jazz dance and music, Freudian psychoanalysis, modern art, and surrealism. He published two volumes of poetry and numerous essays before joining Marcel Griaule on his nearly two-year expedition from Dakar to Djibouti. It was on the expedition from 1931 to 1933 that Leiris encountered Zar. In contrast to Brenda Seligman, who observed Zar on several occasions and asked her Sudanese associates about its significance, Leiris lived for several months with the family of a leading Zar practitioner in Gondar, Malkam Ayyahou, and became sexually attracted to her daughter Emawayish. After returning from the journey, he published *L'Afrique fantôme* in 1934, a diary of the expedition that ran more than 500 pages. His extended discussion of Zar in the diary narrates the conflict he felt between his own desire for intense engagement with the possession ritual (and its female practitioners) and his recognition that the expedition invariably distorted his understanding of the ritual and his relations with its practitioners. (Hence the title of his diary, which roughly translates as "Phantom Africa" and reveals his realization that Europeans viewed Africa as a spectre or shadow.)

Over the next several decades anthropologists regularly published on Zar, and in 1988 an international conference was held at the University of Khartoum, with support from the International African Institute in London, the Ford Foundation, and the Swedish Agency for Research Co-operation with Developing Countries. Three years later a volume titled *Women's Medicine: The Zar-Bori Cult in Africa and Beyond* (1991) was published that included fifteen papers presented at the conference, as well as an extensive annotated bibliography. The volume was coedited and introduced by I.M. Lewis, who had published an influential study of *Ecstatic Religion* in 1971 and had spent decades doing research among Somali nomads. Lewis's introduction to the volume does not give the sort of ethnographic detail included in other accounts, but rather gives an overview of what researchers collectively know about Zar 150 years after Isenberg and Krapf first described the practice for their British readers. Significantly, the voices of African and Middle Eastern researchers are included, alongside British, French, and Americans.

Janice Boddy published the first explicitly feminist account of Zar in her 1989 book *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zār Cult in Northern Sudan*. Her dedication to her book—"for the women of 'Hofriyat,' from a kindred spirit" (Boddy 1989)—suggests that a shared gender allows for the crossing of profound differences in religion and nationality. Indeed, *Wombs and Alien Spirits* strives to "attend to [Boddy's] informants' experiences of possession and not seek merely to explain them away as something at once less dramatic and more clinical than they appear" (Boddy 1988:4)—a veiled critique of the earlier approach of I.M. Lewis.

Research published since the 1988 conference suggests that Zar is becoming more widespread, not less. In an essay from 2002, Monika Edelstein examines how Ethiopian Jews combine their practice of Zar with their Jewish beliefs. The essay reminds us that Zar has Christian and Jewish variants as well as Islamic versions. Like Moses, Zar finds expression in all three monotheistic religions.

Nubia

On his trip to Egypt following his 2010 residency in Israel, Reggie visited museums and archaeological sites that spurred his interest in Nubia. The term "Nubia" refers to a historical region encompassing present-day southern Egypt and northern Sudan, and to ancient kingdoms that

inhabited that area as well as to present-day inhabitants. From around 3000 BCE to 1200 CE Nubia served as an important crossroads between ancient Egypt and the interior of Africa and developed an advanced civilization that rivaled ancient Egypt. In fact, for nearly a century from 742 to 663 BCE, Nubian kings—known as the Black Pharaohs or the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty—ruled Egypt.

When the Aswan High Dam was constructed during the 1960s, it flooded an area where many of the Nubian temples stood. Thus, UNESCO undertook a rescue campaign to move the most important temples to higher ground. In addition, several other temples were disassembled and reassembled in museums that had aided the UNESCO campaign, and in this way the Nubian Temple of Dendur found its way to the Metropolitan Museum in New York. In other words, the Temple of Dendur that several generations of New Yorkers—including Reggie—have seen as emblematic of “ancient Egypt” is actually a salvaged artifact of ancient Nubia.

Nubia boasted a rich trade in gold and other minerals as well as spices, ivory, exotic animal skins, incense, and aromatic plants that passed through ancient Nubia. In fact, the name “Nubia” probably derives from the Egyptian word for gold (*nbw*). Nubia was part of the trading route in West Africa that also includes Gao, Djenné, and Timbuktu. These sites in West Africa had been central to Reggie’s earlier research, and it is important to note that not only commodities were exchanged through ancient Nubia, but also peoples—some enslaved, some free—who in turn transmitted cultural practices. The practice of Zar reflects the lively cultural crossroads of Nubia past and present.

Given the significance of Nubia, it is striking how little was known about the ancient culture until quite recently. As a 2011 exhibition catalog states:

Racial prejudice has [...] contributed to a lack of knowledge about ancient Nubia. In the early twentieth century, for example, scholars investigating the history of the Nile valley explained the brilliance of Egyptian history in racial terms by positioning Egypt as separate from Africa. As Nubia was considered part of black Africa, scholarly interpretations systematically undervalued its political complexity, aesthetic traditions, and military force. More recently, scholars have [...] acknowledged that Egypt is in fact in Africa. We now recognize that populations of Nubia and Egypt form a continuum rather than clearly distinct groups and that it is impossible to draw a line between Egypt and Nubia that would indicate where “black” begins. (Emberling 2011:30)

In 1965 Swiss archaeologist Charles Bonnet started extensive archaeological work in present-day Sudan, which has continued into the present and uncovered many of the most significant finds.

Scholars would never have interpreted Nubia as significant to world history, however, without the pioneering work of Cheikh Anta Diop, a Senegalese historian, physicist, and political activist. Diop spent the years from 1946 to 1960 in Paris, where he became involved in anti-colonial activism and where he came to know, among others, Aimé Césaire, Marcel Griaule, and Michel Leiris. At the University of Paris he wrote his dissertation on the African origins of Egyptian civilization, and it took several years for his radical thesis to find enough professorial support for him to receive his degree. In 1960, with degree in hand, he returned to a newly independent Senegal, where he became a political opponent of President Leopold Senghor. Nonetheless, he took a leading role at the First World Festival of Negro Arts, organized in Dakar in 1966. In the 1970s and 1980s his writings were translated into English and became enormously influential on the emergence of Afrocentricity as an educational and intellectual paradigm.

Although scholars do not agree with all the particulars of Diop’s thesis, his broader thinking has become integrated into current scholarship. Indeed, archaeological evidence unearthed by

Bonnet and others supports the larger outlines of his theory. As the encyclopedia *Africana* states, “Modern consensus sees Egypt, from its beginnings, as a multi-racial civilization, with African cultural aspects particularly coming from Egypt’s Nubian corridor to Africa” (MacDonald 1999:93).

Although Reggie appreciates that Diop’s thesis has now become accepted among many scholars, he still questions how the entry in *Africana* formulates that thesis. For doesn’t the term “Nubian corridor” suggest simply a place to pass through, rather than a destination with its own excitement and interest? Reggie believes that we still have a way to go before Nubia and the global impact of Africa on world culture are fully recognized.

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