This book traces the history of early seventeenth-century Portuguese Sephardic traders who settled in two communities on Senegal’s Petite Côte. There, they lived as public Jews, under the spiritual guidance of a rabbi sent to them by the newly established Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam. In Senegal, local Muslim rulers protected the Jews from agents of the Inquisition. The Petite Côte communities included several Jews of mixed Portuguese-African heritage as well as African wives, offspring, and servants. The blade weapons trade was an important part of their commercial activities. These merchants participated indirectly in the slave trade, illegally supplying West African markets with swords. This blade weapons trade depended on artisans and merchants based in Morocco, Lisbon, and northern Europe and affected warfare in the Sahel and along the Upper Guinea Coast. After moving to the United Provinces around 1620, the members of these communities had a profound influence on relations between black and white Jews in Amsterdam. The study not only discovers previously unknown Jewish communities but by doing so offers a reinterpretation of the dynamics and processes of identity construction throughout the Atlantic world.

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The Forgotten Diaspora

Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World

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Our dedication calls to mind a Portuguese drinking toast: “aos presentes e aos ausentes”; “To those who are present and to those who are absent.” In this case, those who are absent will always be present for us:

To Odile Goerg
To Cristina Amaro
In Memoriam:
Herbert Mark
Maria Eugénia and Jorge Horta
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