

# **Theological Transvestites, Duplicitous Imposters, or Just a Bunch of Wannabees? Messianic Judaism's Ambivalent Relationships with Mainstream Jewry and Evangelicalism**

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**ABSTRACT:** Messianic Jewish congregations, composed of Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus, began to appear in the 1970s. Claiming to revive the first-century Jesus movement as it was before it became institutionalized as “gentile-dominated Christianity,” members of Messianic congregations assert that they are *not* Christians, but authentically Jewish in faith and practice. The mainstream Jewish community rejects the claims of this invented tradition, dismissing Messianics as convert-hungry Christian impersonators or “confused,” religiously uneducated Jews who have been bamboozled by the missionaries. One sociologist (and Reform rabbi) has proposed that Messianics play the role of “theological transvestite” to American Jewry by calling into question the time-honored separation between Jewish and Christian identities (Harris-Shapiro 1999).

This paper explores the discourses, fields and grammars of identity/alterity in which Messianic subjectivity is constructed. As Messianics create “Jewish space” in their life journeys by adopting Jewish liturgical and ritual practices, their agency is channeled in relation to both mainstream Jewish and Evangelical dreams and desires. Might the sometimes hyper-Jewish “play” of Messianic Jews allow Evangelicals to assuage their post-Holocaust guilt and mourn their own loss of ritual (without validating Catholicism)? Could the putting on (and off) of Jewish forms allow gentile Evangelicals to master their own “inner Pharisees” through the magic of mimetic appropriation? Since sameness can only be maintained through alterity, has liberal Judaism become so similar to liberal Christianity that it needs a repugnant Messianic Other to replace its age-old foil?

## INTRODUCTION

The title of Messianic Rabbi Mark Kinzer’s 2005 book, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism* temptingly beckoned to me from the shelf. While I am sure it was not Kinzer’s intent, the title seduced me into a theoretical reverie; it begged me to turn a critical eye, and to consider how postcolonial theory—how postmodern anthropological approaches to contested, power-enmeshed subjectivities and contingent proprietary identities—might elucidate my fieldwork of the last few years.

To date, several thorough and fairly “traditional” ethnographies of congregations in the Messianic movement have been produced, but none yet (to my knowledge) have investigated the phenomena through the lens of critical query. In this paper, I will draw on or allude to the thought of Mikhael Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Julia Kristeva, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, bell hooks and Michael Taussig (among others) in order to begin interpreting the discourses and lived experiences of Jews, non-Jews and “ambiguous” Jews who have crossed into, out of, or decided to dwell in, this fascinating (and rapidly growing) movement.

## LOCATING POST-MISSIONARY MESSIANIC JUDAISM

### *Ethnographic Settings*

The reflections on the ambivalent relationships of Messianic Jews (broadly defined) to one another and to those whom they would consider “outsiders” to their movement which follow are based upon:

- (a) four years of participant observation in six Messianic congregations in Florida, Oregon and Southern California (from 2004-2008), as well as
- (b) approximately twenty hours of interviews with nine members—or former members—of three congregations in Southern California and one in Central Florida.

The contemporary Messianic movement has its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hebrew Christian Churches, which were themselves the fruit of Christian missions to the Jews beginning in earnest around 1880. Growing in tandem with the 1960s countercultural “Jesus People” movement (which appealed to many “hippies” who had already “dropped out” of mainstream religious life, a significant number of whom were

Jews), a new, more *Jewish*-conscious (rather than “Hebrew *Christian*”) entity, christened “Messianic Judaism,” eventually emerged on the national religious scene between 1970 and 1975 (Cohn-Sherbock 2000:73-76, Fehrer 1998:47 and Robinson 2005:20). Contemporary Messianic congregations include both Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus (whom they call by his Hebrew name, *Yeshua*) who have “rejected Christian congregational expressions as being [too] ‘Gentile’ ... [and who] have chosen to express their religious identity and corporate worship in a more ... Jewish style” (Wasserman 2000:3).

Since there are multiple competing umbrella organizations and denominations of Messianic Judaism, as well as numerous independent congregations, it is very difficult to pin down how many congregations and congregants there really are. Estimates for the American expression of the movement range from 200 congregations to 250 (Robinson, et al. 2005:21) and from 10,000-20,000 Messianic believers worldwide (Harris-Shapiro 1998:47).

The *Hashivenu* “think tank,” started by leaders of one of the two largest Messianic “denominations” in the US (the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, hereafter, UMJC) has stated that “Messianic Judaism is a Judaism, and not a cosmetically altered ‘Jewish-style’ version of what is extant *in the wider Christian community*” (Hashivenu 2009, italics added). However, the use of the word “wider” in this statement implies that Messianic Judaism *is*, in fact, situated within the *wider Christian community*. The need to make such a statement from above is necessitated by the fact that many of those who call themselves “Messianic Jews” (especially outside of the UMJC umbrella) recognize *themselves*, when pressed, as practicing a Jewish version of “Biblical” Christianity (as opposed to the “unbiblical” practices they observe in the wider “Gentile-dominated” Church).

Interviewee after interviewee in my sample experienced slips of the tongue, and sometimes even made *deliberate* word choices (as for one “Jewish believer” who has left the Messianic

movement behind), referring to their own or others’ congregations as “churches” and their leaders as “pastors,” rather than as “rabbis.” One disenchanted former congregant of a medium-sized Messianic congregation in Irvine, California put it this way: “you could take [their] ... service, run it on Sunday and take out the Star of David, and you wouldn’t know the difference” (Marc B. January 20, 2009).

The *Hashivenu* statement would not need to make the point that the “Jewish people are ‘us’ not ‘them’” (2009) if there were not such a large number of “them” (Messianic Gentiles-behaving-Jewishly) in “our” (Messianic Jews’) ranks. When Mark Kinzer (himself a contributor to the *Hashivenu* group) states, “Messianic Judaism [is] the attempt of Jewish *Yeshua*-believers to sustain their Jewish identity and religious expression as intrinsic to and required by their faith in *Yeshua* ...” (Kinzer 2005:11), he is defining the movement by a demographic (“born” Jews) who are a minority in most congregations. Leaders of the congregations I have worked in generally estimate their Jewish-by-birth membership as being between 20-30%. One of the two UMJC congregations I have spent time in (and keep in mind that these congregations are led by two of the most prominent *Jewish*-membership - emphasizing Messianic Rabbis in the UMJC) reckons about 50% “born Jews” and the other slightly less than that.

Kinzer goes on to state that “post-missionary Messianic Judaism ... summons Messianic Jews to live an observant Jewish life as an act of covenant fidelity *rather than missionary expediency*” (2005:13, italics added). However, in my field experiences and interviews, I encountered numerous people who saw the “primary function of [their] ... existence” as “Jewish outreach” (Mouse February 9, 2009). As Heather, a 45 year old psychiatrist who leads worship in her congregation puts it (January 16, 2009), some of the “healthiest element” consists of:

...people who are Jewish by birth, they have come to faith in *Yeshua*, and they are hungry to save other Jewish people. They

come in and it's really a Jewish ministry. Their emphasis and their focus is on "How do we reach the unbelieving Jew? .... What do we do to reach the other Jewish people? What can we do, what can we do, what can we do?"

Even Messianic Rabbi Stewart Dauermann, one of the original founders of *Hashivenu*, asserts that messianic liturgical practice and religious services should be as close as possible to "the same" as those engaged in by the wider Jewish community. Why? Because "*communicational context ... [is] directly proportional to what we have in common*" (Dauermann 2001:4, italics added).

*Hearts Set on Pilgrimage: Crossing and Dwelling*

Thomas Tweed defines religions as "*confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries*" (2006:54). He proposes that religious people engage in performances and storytelling in order to "find [their] place" or "make homes" and to "cross boundaries" or "move through space" (Tweed 2006:59, 74). In my sample, interviewees frequently referred to their joining the Messianic movement as a "coming home" after wandering "lost" in atheism or "bouncing" from religion to religion. Their congregation is the place where they finally "fit." As Doug, a 53 year old "residential remodeler" puts it (in regard to himself and his traveling companions), "maybe we are longing for heaven and home, whose builder and architect is God" (January 20, 2009). Dauermann himself describes a "flexibly embraced Jewish heritage" as "Jewish space" (2001:1) and in his plea for increased "contextual communication" goes on to urge that "messianic liturgical practice should be the 'same kind of car' as is 'driven' by our fellow Jews everywhere (2001:4).

For those in the movement who came to it from a "traditional" American Jewish

upbringing—after having spent what is generally described as "some uncomfortable time" in mainline or evangelical churches—there is a deep relief at finally realizing their "desire to further, to preserve, the Jewish expression of faith and the ways that ... we grew up in [while remaining committed to Yeshua]" (Doug S. January 20, 2009). Children of "mixed" Jewish-Gentile marriages (usually children of Jewish fathers and Gentile mothers) express that they now recognize Israel as such a home space as well. For Gentiles who now find themselves "grafted in" to the "olive tree" of Israel (see Rom. 11:11-24), and for children of mixed marriages rediscovering their roots, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict takes on new valences: in marches, demonstrations and e-mail chain letter campaigns, they are defending a place that they feel in a very powerful way, has now become *their own* spiritual home.

Gentile homemaking in Messianic Jewish space often takes the form of "code-crossing," where, as Rampton has defined it, a speaker "... [uses] a language which isn't generally thought to 'belong' to the speaker ... [and] involves a sense of movement across quite sharply felt social or ethnic boundaries" (1998:291). As Tweed has pointed out (following Bakhtin), this is usually accompanied by the insertion of a new semantic intention into the discourse, typically one that is directly opposed to the original intention (2005:118).

Gentile Messianic believers in my sample often peppered their conversations with sometimes awkwardly mispronounced Hebraisms, where mainstream American Jews of their own generation (mostly "Boomers") would more unreflectively use Yiddish cognate words. The Gentile believers would use Hebrew *tallit* rather than Yiddish *tallis*, and *Shabbat* rather than *Shabbos*. They were often more conscientious than Jewish Yeshua-believers about using terms like "Messiah" instead of Christ. When probed about how he "sensitively shared his Messianic faith," one Messianic Gentile, named Chuck (January 15, 2009) reports on an incident when a Chabad Chasid (an ultra-Orthodox mystical Jew)

challenged him after he shared his faith in Yeshua, saying, "Well, you know, *we* have *our* Messiah." Chuck responded with: "You mean, *Schneerson?! ...* You've got Schneerson, but Yeshua has been resurrected! He is the one who is the Passover lamb." Chuck flatly reports that, "[the Chasid] didn't take that well at all" (January 15, 2009).

Of course, code-crossing may occur more broadly than in linguistic discourse; other symbolic systems are likewise susceptible to the introjection of new meaning. A clear example of the insertion of a new and, at least in the mainstream Jewish community, perhaps impropriety meaning being applied to a Jewish ethno-religious symbol is the use of the *tallit* (prayer shawl) by Gentiles. Chuck, the 55 year-old Messianic Gentile and retired software developer I introduced a moment ago, explains why he, a Gentile, wears the *tallit* (January 15, 2009):

The reason I wear the tallit, is frankly, to me, is because it's a sign of respect for the Lord. In reality, my understanding of the prayer closet [mentioned by Yeshua in Matthew 6:6] is, in reality, the *tallit* over one's head in prayer.

As an aside, it is worth noting that in a year of attending services at Chuck's congregation, I never saw him *or any other person* wear the *tallit* over their head. When I asked him how he would defend his wearing of the *tallit*, a commandment specifically for the children of Israel (and not the "strangers in their midst") to a non-believing Jew who found his use or interpretation objectionable, he replied (January 15, 2009):

According to my understanding of Scripture, you know, we are all grafted in. And those of us who are not Jewish by ancestry have been grafted into the root of believing Israel .... And if I choose, out of respect to wear the *tallit*, I have no problem with that, and I'm sorry that *you* do!

Interestingly, despite *Rav Shaul's* (or, as the rest of the world calls him, St. Paul's) assertion that "there is neither Jew nor Greek ... *male nor female*, for you are all one in Messiah" (Gal. 3:28), Chuck's logic does not seem to extend to women (Gentile *or* Jewish) in the movement. After four years of field work across multiple sites, I have yet to observe a single woman wearing a *tallit* in a Messianic congregation, a practice which has become common in Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal and some Conservative mainline Jewish congregations.

Messianic Gentiles are also more likely than Messianic Jews to be keeping what they term "biblical kosher," a term regularly contrasted in their discourse with "rabbinic kosher." Of course, "biblical kosher" is a neologism which makes little sense to mainstream Jews, for whom rabbinic kosher *is* biblical kosher (in fact, the *only* kind of kosher), but that is beside the point. For most Messianics, biblical kosher involves avoiding pork and shellfish, but not keeping meat and milk products separate, as in "rabbinic kosher." Some Reform, Conservative and secular American Jews would hold that God's prohibition on combining dairy and meat as well as limiting their meat consumption to properly ritually-slaughtered, "clean," *permitted* animals, has effectively kept the Jews separate, and has insulated them from the influence of neighboring peoples. Ironically, Chuck's defense of "biblical kosher" over and against adherence to "rabbinic kosher" as advocated by former fellow congregants misses this point:

We had people who would tell us, "You should never have cheese and meat or milk and meat together," and my response to that was, you have to be kidding me! Y'know, we're not engaged in a pagan practice of boiling the young in the mother's milk and eating it, you know.

As Messianic Jews and Gentiles cross into and out of the movement spatio-temporally, ritually or linguistically; as they dwell in it for a season or a

lifetime, their subjectivities are fashioned in relation to one another and to those outside the movement. In the next section of this paper, I will present three “grammars” of Identity and Alterity with which we can model how different discourses within the movement order relations between Messianic selves and others.

### IDENTITY/ALTERITY, ABJECTION AND TABOO

#### *Grammars of Identity/Alterity*

As Weedon so succinctly puts it, “Identity is perhaps best understood as a limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one *is*” (2004:19, italics in original). He goes on to say that (2004:19)

One of the key ideological rules of identity is to curtail the plural possibilities of subjectivity inherent in the wider discursive field and to give individuals a secure sense of who they are and where they belong.

Identity is always “defined in a relation of difference to what it is not” (Weedon 2004:19). So, when Messianics assert, “we are not Christians,” “we are not the Church,” “we don’t celebrate pagan holidays like Easter or Christmas,” “we want to reach out to *unbelieving* Jews,” etc., they are defining who they are by what they are not. Even finer nuances prevail *within* the bounds of the movement as various players attempt to distance and define themselves *vis-à-vis* others in their own congregations or the wider movement.

Anthropologists have long known that it would be too simplistic to assume that identities are merely based on how selves *differ* from their “others.” While similarity to others in the “in” group also play a significant role in identity formation, felt resemblances and perceptions of *too much* similarity across dividing lines can precipitate a deep ambivalence between groups (Harrison 2006:150-153).

The fact that so many Messianic Gentiles utilize Jewish symbolic markers—and frequently

they do so to a degree far outstripping and exceeding such use by their Messianic *Jewish* compatriots—has engendered an abiding hostility from the non-Messianic Jewish community (since these *goyim* are perceived as either misappropriating, or far worse, *deceptively* using, Jewish sancta *to attract unwitting Jews to Christianity*). Such Gentile practice frequently merely befuddles, bemuses, or annoys Jewish adherents to Yeshua. Mouse, a 36-year old beefy mountain of a man (a jovial biker and motorcycle mechanic by day and a night club musician by night) wittily observes (February 9, 2009):

The beard is a good distinguishing point. There are probably two of us with big beards like this [in my congregation], and several others with shorter beards. *And none of the Jewish men have beards* [Laughs]. I've always found that kind of amusing. But I can see where people would point at us and say, “You're trying too hard.”

As developed by Gerd Baumann, Andre Gingrich and others in the volume *Grammars of Identity/Alterity* (2006), the segmentary grammar (based on Evans-Pritchard’s analysis of Nuer segmentary organization), the encompassment grammar (based on Dumont’s analysis of the Hindu caste system) and the orientalist grammar (based on Said’s interrogation of Westerners’ relations with “Oriental” others) may be fittingly applied to the Messianic congregational movement. It is important to note that these grammars do not “describe how social systems work,” but are, instead, “guides” for how different discourses “order relationships” (Baumann 2006:20). In addition, at any given time, more than one grammar may be in play in any given social situation, (Baumann 2006:26). Further, the same individual may use multiple grammars in the same situation. While the grammars may appear to be binary in nature on first inspection, in fact,

all three exhibit a ternary aspect, as they invoke an “us,” a “you,” and a “them” (Baumann 2006:37-40).

#### *The Segmentary Grammar*

The segmentary model of identity/alterity is “a logic of fission or enmity at a lower level of segmentation, overcome by a logic of fusion or neutralization of conflict at a higher level of segmentation” (Baumann 2006:23). All levels may be engaged “concurrently and simultaneously” (Baumann 2006:24). Thus, the “contextual awareness” that “the Other may be my foe in a context placed at a lower level of segmentation, but may simultaneously be my ally in a context placed at a higher level of segmentation” means that “identity and difference are not matters of absolute criteria ...” (Baumann 2006:24).

The segmentary grammar allows Messianics to ally themselves with evangelical Christians in matters of Yeshua-belief against “unbelieving” (in Yeshua) Jews. But in other contexts, they may ally themselves with Orthodox and sometimes even ultra-Orthodox Jews in opposition to rising Jewish secularism. Defending some Messianic Gentiles’ “good intentions” in extreme Torah observance, Heather notes (January 23, 2009): “They're not putting down the Orthodox and the ultra-Orthodox. They want to *be* that. Who they're putting down are the secular Jews: “I'm better than *you*, you *secular Jew*; ‘cause look what *I'm* doing. *I'm doing* what *you're* supposed to be doing.”

Rarely, Messianics have the opportunity to group themselves with both evangelical Christians and Orthodox Jews simultaneously. One of my Messianic Jewish interviewees (Daniel, January 12, 2009) tells how he visited a Chabad bookshop shortly after the death of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. After the clerk noticed him thumbing through a book on *Moshiach*, he reports that she glumly remarked, “The Gentiles know more about *Moshiach* than we do.” Daniel was thrilled to agree with her and affirm her in this estimation! He explains (January 12, 2009) that he often feels a closer spiritual connection with

ultra-orthodox Chasidim than to other Jews, because

We actually have more belief in spiritual realities in common with them than with other Jews. They actually believe the *Tanakh* [(Hebrew Scriptures)] is the inspired Word of God, that sin is real and that the world is broken! Not to mention they're probably the only ones [(i.e., Jews)] left except for us who believe in a personal Messiah!

#### *The Encompassment Grammar*

Encompassment involves “an act of selfing by appropriating” or “co-opting” certain kinds of “otherness” (Baumann 2006:25). According to Baumann, “the lower level of cognition recognizes difference, the higher level subsumes that which is different under that which is universal” (2006:25). The Messianic model of encompassment allows Messianics to subsume “born again” Evangelicals, Jewish Yeshua-believers and even “*unsaved*” Jews!

The most common expression of the encompassment grammar in the Messianic congregational movement is the “olive tree” metaphor drawn from the Book of Romans, chapter 11, verses 11-24 (NIV):

I am talking to you Gentiles .... If some of the branches have been broken off [(i.e., the unbelieving Jews)], and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others ... do not boast over those branches .... And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree [(i.e., Israel)], how much more readily will these, the natural branches,

be grafted into their own olive tree!

We have already heard Chuck describe himself as “grafted into the root of believing Israel.” Heather tells about a Gentile man from England who “calls himself an Israelite, because, of course, ... once you’re a believer, you’re a child of Abraham and you’re an Israelite, *grafted in*, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah” (January 23, 2009). While on the surface, it might appear that Messianics are saying that Jews and Judaism are the root stock, represent the overarching, encompassing category, and that Gentiles are the encompassed branches grafted on, there is a subtler distinction to be made.

Since unbelieving Jews have been broken off (recall how Chuck sees himself as grafted into “*believing Israel*”), and the only Jews who are on the “olive tree” now are *Messianic Jews* and the Messianic Gentiles who have been added to them, it is ultimately the Messianic *ekklesia* which encompasses; both believing Jews and believing Gentiles are encompassed by Messianic Judaism, while unbelieving Jews and Gentiles are excluded as a third party “them” who have yet to be grafted in. Mouse makes this abundantly clear when he defines what he means by “Messianic Jews:” “I’m actually referring to messianic Jews *and* messianic Gentiles. I’m a messianic Gentile, I don’t have any Jewish blood at all” (February 9, 2009). Intriguingly, he goes on to remark, “We actually have a very low percentage of *Jewish Messianic Jews* in our congregation.” In a stunning expression of the encompassment grammar, Mouse explains what he would tell a non-believing Jew who was befuddled upon witnessing an ethnically diverse and mostly Gentile group of people engaging in Jewish-style worship at his congregation (February 9, 2009, italics added for emphasis):

These are a whole bunch of different people here. We’re all worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We all believe that the Torah is God’s inspired Word ... [We] believe that

Yeshua the Messiah is the Messiah spoken of in the Torah and the Prophets. *But if you don’t, you’re still worshiping our God.*

Sometimes, the relationship becomes ambiguous for Messianics. Since Messianic Gentiles earnestly desire to be affiliated with Messianic Jews, challenges to the encompassment of Messianic Jews (and their disenfranchisement by) Jewry-at-large must be forcefully answered. The standard argument to the challenge goes something like this: If JuBus (Jewish Buddhists) are still Jews, HinJus (Hindu Jews) are still Jews, Atheist Jews are still Jews and Neo-Pagan Jews are still Jews, then how can it be, as Chuck perceptively asks (January 23, 2009), “...okay to deny all of the tenets of Judaism that the Orthodox hold and still allow these people...to call themselves Jews,” while excluding Messianic Jews (who as Daniel pointed out, share many of the tenets of Orthodox Judaism), solely on the grounds that “...[Jews] don’t believe in Jesus?” Every interviewee who brought up this line of conversation made the point that a Jew born of a Jewish lineage is a member of Israel, whether they are an apostate, atheist, or any other objectionable category.

#### *The Orientalist Grammar*

The orientalist grammar is probably the most frequently applied grammar in my data set. It is not simply a binary opposition of “we are good, they are bad,” but may entail both the denigration of *and* the desire for, the other (Baumann 1996:20). As Baumann has pointed out, orientalism can serve as a “cultural self-critique” for elites “tired of and estranged from their own cultural milieu,” and may be modeled as “negative mirroring” and “positive reversals” where ““what is good in us is [still] bad in them, but what got twisted in us [still] remains straight in them”” (the bracketed “still” invokes a “denial of contemporaneousness” often involved in “othering” processes) (2006:20). A highly simplified and tentative mirror/reversal binary orientalist grammar based on my fieldwork and

interviews with Messianic Gentiles so far might look like the following (where “Self”=Gentile

Evangelicals in the Messianic Movement and “Other”=Non-Messianic Jews):

<p><b>Self +</b>                  Free from the Law                  Logical                  Inspired                  God-ordained praxis                  Saved</p>	<p><b>Other -</b>                  Legalistic                  Mystical (Note: For some MGs, this is a +)                  “Fairytale”                  Human-ordained praxis (Rabbinic)                  Unsaved</p>
<p><b>Self -</b>                  Shallow history                  “Pagan” Greco-Roman based Worldview                  Merely something to believe                  Anchorless/changeable worship style                  Old Testament as “just background” to NT</p>	<p><b>Other +</b>                  Deep historic roots                  “Biblical” Worldview                  Something to do                  Liturgical stability                  Old Testament is still relevant</p>

**Figure 1.** A Grammar of [Evangelical] Messianic Gentile Orientalism as Reverse Imaging.

While a complete (and “truer”) presentation of *ternary* orientalist grammars of Messianic subjectivities would require a form of representation similar to the “staggered three-dimensional pattern” Barthes ascribes to the semiological system (1973:115), a more “collapsed” ternary version would merely distinguish three categories: an “us” who speak, a “you” who are “potential partners in dialogue” and a problematic “they” who are excluded from real constructive/productive group-internal dialogue (Baumann 2006:40). In my analysis of interview transcripts, I have allowed that the “they” category may include both people completely outside the movement and people inside the movement who are considered “impossible to work with.” The following figures are such collapsed representations of the ternary orientalist grammars posited for three current or former members of one congregation:

- (a) Heather, the daughter of a Jewish father and a sometimes “anti-Semitic” Gentile mother (her mother was obliged to convert to Judaism in order to marry Heather’s father, who then objected to going to synagogue with her). Heather considers herself to not be very Torah observant. She continues with the congregation.
- (b) Marc, the son of a Jewish father and a Japanese (Shinto) war bride mother, is committed to radical (and often, *Rabbinic*) Torah observance for all participants in the Messianic community. He has left the congregation in order to start his own more Orthodox-like home “fellowship.”
- (c) Doug, the son of a Jewish father and mother, was raised Conservative in a tightly knit Jewish community. He has been involved with and led in the Messianic movement since the early 1980s, but has since disowned the movement and regards it as a “game” or “club.” The grammar presented for Doug is based on how he expressed he felt *before* he left the movement entirely.

1. “Us”	2. “Tolerable Others”	3. “Excluded”
(a) “Open-Minded Christians” (b) “Jewish believers dedicated to evangelizing ‘unsaved’ Jews”	(c) “Former Armstrong Followers/7 <sup>th</sup> Day Adventists” in the Messianic movement (d) Hispanic Gentiles who claim to be Moranos (e) “Confused Jews”	(a) <i>Over-Torah Observant</i> Gentiles and children of “mixed” marriages (b) De-Judaized Jews (in Churches) (c) *Closed-Minded Christians (d) *Non-believers

Figure 2. Heather’s “Collapsed” Ternary Orientalist Grammar.

Heather is not sure which of the two “us” categories she fits under due to her mixed parentage. The (a)s in the “Tolerable” group are described as people who say, “this fits my lifestyle.” The (b)s in the same column represent people she describes in her professional capacity as “almost delusional” and informally describes them as “Torah-focused,” but not extravagant in their Torah observance. The (c)s in the “Tolerable” column are Jewish believers who think that there are too many non-Jews in the movement and that it is too Gentile in its expression. They are perceived as being highly

likely to leave the congregation. In column 3 (the “Excluded”), group (a) consists of persons who might at some point convert to mainstream Orthodox Judaism, and group (b) consists of persons like Doug. Though unmentioned when I asked her about the “types of people one would find in your congregation,” other interview passages imply that Christians in Gentile-dominated churches who are unsympathetic with the Messianic perspective and unbelieving Jews would qualify as “them” categories. Conjectural categories in Figures 2-4 are marked with an asterisk (\*).

1. “Us”	2. “Tolerable Others”	3. “Excluded”
Torah observant Yeshua-believers who have exited from Torah-antagonistic/apathetic Messianic congregations	Torah observers who stayed for family reasons (mostly the good childhood education program)	(a) Dispensational/Torah-antagonistic individuals (b) Non-Torah observant Jews (Messianic or otherwise) (c) *Non-believers

Figure 3. Marc’s “Collapsed” Ternary Orientalist Grammar.

1. “Us”	2. “Tolerable Others”	3. “Excluded”
(a) Jewish leaders (b) Other Messianic Jews who are “happy” to “do” Jewish, but do not feel <i>compelled</i> to “do” Jewish	Gentile spouses of Messianic Jews	(a) “Wannabees” (essentially, all Gentiles not married to Messianic Jews) (b) Jewish believers looking for a “club” (c) *Non-believers

Figure 4. Doug’s “Collapsed” Ternary Orientalist Grammar.

*Abjection and Taboo*

As has already been noted, between competing religious systems, the threat of *too much similarity* may become acute. In such cases, the Other or the Others' practices and/or beliefs become *abject*. Kristeva defines the abject as having "only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I" (1982:1). Abjection is caused by that which "disturbs identity, system, order. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 2002:232). It displays the fragility of order and is therefore "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" (Kristeva 2002:232). By remaining resolutely members of an in-between composite, Messianic Jews and Gentiles display the fragility of the "mainstream normative" Jewish project and are therefore viewed as "duplicitous" (and dangerous) "imposters" by many outside their own movement.

Valerio Valeri argues that "a distant, antithetical object would be no danger, if it really

**HYBRIDITY AND "THEOLOGICAL TRANSVESTISM"***Hybridity and the Ambivalence of Desire*

As persons who are in-between, or ambiguous composites of Judaism and Christianity, Messianic Jews have become abject, literally "thrown out" by Mainstream Jewry, and to some degree mainline Christianity as well. In the eyes of many (including some among their own number), they are ambivalently *neither the one nor the other*. They are *hybrid*. As Homi Bhabha has shown us, such hybrid post-colonial (or in our case, post-missionary) subjects, have accepted an invitation to take up a kind of split subjectivity by dominating colonizers/missionaries: "you're *different* [from others of your kind], you're one of us" (1993:63). As Bhabha points out though, "to be different from those that are different is to be the same" (1996:63).

So it is for the Messianic Jew. Told by evangelicals, "you're different from other Jews, you're one of us (a believer in Jesus/Yeshua)" (cf. Bhabha 1996:64) the Messianic Jew is caught in a double bind: For most American Jews, to be different from Jewish is to be *Christian*, but due to a long history of persecution, forced conversion,

were so different, if it did not have a dimension of similarity to the subject that made the transfer of its qualities possible in certain forms of contact" (2000:347). Since it is generally difficult for human beings to be consistently aware of their automatic and habitual relations to the "ordinary world," it becomes necessary to engage in "self-definition by contrast" in the form of taboos which "by virtue of a certain amount of conscious and intentional nonbeing ... contrasts the subject to other subjects by contrasting ... the opposed relations of different subjects to external objects" (Valeri 2000:411).

*Yeshua* is the tabooed object which defines an extremely pluri-form "Normative" American Jewry. *Obligatory* Torah observance viewed as salvific, as well as evangelical dispensational theology and prioritizing of orthodoxy (coupled with an antipathy toward praxis) are taboo for Messianics.

and other forms of anti-Semitism, believing Jews find the label and associations repulsive. Should they cling to Torah observance or other Jewish external forms in an effort to prove to their people that they have not defected, but "believed the most Jewish thing possible" (Daniel, January 12, 2009), the dominant (and Gentile-dominated) Church will find their faith suspect or inferior. As a result, the Gospel message as held by non-Messianic Gentile Evangelicals becomes hybrid and "deeply flawed" through the assertion of indigenous Jewish signs, just as native catechists in India brought "their own cultural ambivalences and contradictions" with them into their new religion and called into question colonial cultural authority in matters of faith and practice (Bhabha 1996:49).

In post-colonial (and I would assert, post-missionary) settings, demand and desire "is a space of splitting" (Bhabha 1996:63). According to Bhabha, "The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the Masters place while keeping his [own] place ...", but Bhabha recognizes this as a "phantastical" dream (1996:63, 64). However, in

the case of the post-missionary Messianic Jew, the “native” is living that dream! Kinzer states that (2005:15, italics added)

[Post-missionary] messianic Judaism serves the (Gentile) Christian Church by linking it to the physical descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thereby confirming *its* identity as a multinational *extension of the people of Israel*.

When Kinzer states that the Gentile Christian Church is an extension of the people of Israel, or any number of my interviewees assert that Gentiles are “grafted in” to a Jewish root, we see Jews—members of a minority religion (at least as historically perceived by many Jews in America)—obtaining mastery over those who were previously frightening, powerful and dominating others (Christians). Though the “dominant” Jewish group (the majority of American Jews) may reject them as apostate, a significant and growing number of Evangelicals (the group *that dominates* the dominant Jewish group) affirm Messianic Jews *as Jews*, and to some degree, superior to themselves. Almost all of the Messianic Gentiles I have met have expressed some degree of deference to the Jews in their congregations, even if it was linked with more ambivalent feelings of being somehow “second-class” in the Kingdom of God, or at least, the congregation. It is the Jewish believer who holds the key to open up the Gentile Evangelicals most important treasure: their faith.

*“I Was a Teenage Theological Transvestite”*

The ambiguous and hybrid identities of Messianic Jews and Gentiles are performed through “words, acts, gestures and desire”, which, as Judith Butler informs us (in regard to gender identities), “produce the effect of an internal core or substance” (2003:208). The essence of Messianic identities, like gender identities, is a *performative fabrication* produced and maintained through various discursive techniques, including “acts, gestures, [and] enactments” (Butler 2003:208).

Sociologist Carol Harris-Shapiro has already pointed out that, in seeking to bridge both Jewish and Christian worlds, Messianic Judaism can be viewed as “the dangerous symbol, the ‘theological transvestite’” (1999:166). Although she invokes Butler’s summary of Esther Newton’s analysis of the performativity of drag (via Heschel’s summary of Butler in “Jesus as Theological Transvestite”, 1997) , she does not dig any deeper than suggesting that the “theological transvestite” of Messianic Judaism is seen as *dangerous* by mainstream Jews because its use of Jewish ritual practices “dismantles the boundary between Jewish and Christian peoples” and thereby “sabotages the whole project of Jewish ritual” (Harris-Shapiro 1999:166).

Taking Butler’s twin assertions that “the inner truth of gender is a fabrication” and “true gender is a fantasy” seriously as a model for looking at the construction of *religious* identities (and especially, *hybrid* religious identities, like those of Messianics) necessitates a closer look at what she has to say about drag. Expanding on ideas put forward in Esther Newton’s book, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1979), Butler suggests that “the structure of impersonation”/drag “fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space, and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and of the notion of a true gender identity” (Butler 2003:209). According to Butler (2003:209),

Newton writes, “[drag] is a double inversion that says, ‘appearance is an illusion.’ Drag says... my ‘outside’ appearance is feminine, but my essence ‘inside’ {the body} is masculine.” At the same time, it symbolizes the opposite inversion: “my appearance ‘outside’ {my body, my gender} is masculine, but my essence ‘inside’ myself is feminine.”

While several interviewees in my sample objected to Harris-Shapiro's estimation of Messianic Jews (or Gentiles) as "theological transvestites," some of those who most loudly decried her "bigotry" (as Heather called it), have elsewhere in my recordings spoken of Gentiles who adopt Orthodox (or Ultra-Orthodox)-like Jewish forms of dress as, essentially, "playing dress up." Heather, a clinical psychiatrist, describes a male Gentile who engages in dressing "like a Chasidic Jew", as follows (January 23, 2009):

He wears *tzit-tzit* [(symbolic fringes)] every day, he wears the black wool pants every day, he wears the black wool jacket everyday, he wears a *kipah* [(skullcap)] every day, he wears a fedora everyday, he wears *peyises*, he's even beginning to pick up" an accent "like an eastern European Jew who's lived in Brooklyn for thirty years".... [Ultimately, he is] like, in a way, a transvestite."

She goes on to do *her own impersonation* of his impersonation:

[Its like the transvestite who says,] "I'm not a man, but I want to be a man, so I dress like a man." And, "Being a man is better than being a female, so therefore I'm going to dress like a man." [Its like he is saying,] "Yes. Being Jewish is better than being Gentile, so I've got to dress like a Jew, talk like a Jew, *smell* like a Jew, and then maybe I'll *be* a Jew." ... [And then,] of course [there is] the transsexual, who says, "It's not enough, I feel somewhat like a Jew, I must *be* a Jew, I'm going to convert to Judaism." .... Its, "I'm

dissatisfied with what I am and I want to be something else."

Many of the "born" Jews in the movement whom I have spoken with have indicated that, at some time, or under particular circumstances, they have taken on higher levels of Jewish ritual observance than they performed before they became Messianic. Frequently, they have talked about taking on practices they had *never* engaged in before, including wearing a *kipah* and *tzit-tzit*. Thus, members of both Messianic categories (some Messianic Gentiles and some Messianic Jews), in some ways, play "dress up."

A Messianic "rewrite" of Newton's formula, following Heschel's precedent of treating Christianity as having a masculine valence and Judaism as feminine (1997), would look something like the following: "My 'outside' appearance (e.g., my dress, ritual observance) is Jewish, but my essence 'inside' (i.e., what I believe) is Messianic" and its opposite inversion, "My 'outside' appearance (e.g., my public profession of faith) is Messianic (i.e., Christian), but my essence 'inside' myself is Jewish." Intriguingly, the second half of the formula works equally well for both Messianic Jews (who still feel deeply Jewish "inside" their heart of hearts and often express that this is the "most Jewish thing" they could believe or that they are "more Jewish than ever before") and Messianic Gentiles, many of whom are certain that they *must* have Jewish genealogical roots somewhere, because, as Chuck says (January 15, 2009), it would "[give] me a reason, a solid reason, to feel the way I feel." Figure 5 is a British advertisement for Jews for Jesus which presents a perhaps unintentional visual exposition of these themes.

Only two of my interviewees immediately embraced Harris-Shapiro's "theological transvestite" label for themselves. Daniel (something of an iconoclast and a self-described "cynical generation-X'er" who was raised "conservadox" and has now left the Messianic movement "indefinitely" for a mainline church) felt that the label reverberated with the following

story he told of how he informed his parents about his faith in Yeshua (January 12, 2009):

So, I was in high school and there's this girl. She's the girl that introduced me to Jesus, her name was Jen. So, I said, "Mom, Dad, I have something important to tell you." My Mom goes, "Oh God! Jen's pregnant!" So I go, "No, no, no. It's not that, that's not the kind of relationship we have. And she goes, "It's drugs! You've been acting so strangely lately." And I go, "No, no, that's not why." And my Mom goes, "You're *gay*?!" [Laughs] That would have been preferable, right? And so I go, "No, ... just let me tell you: "I'm more Jewish than I've ever been, I'm also more Christian than I've ever been" and then my parents

hit the roof! My Dad nearly killed me right then.

Later in the interview, Daniel recounted how he shared this story with his non-Yeshua-believing brother over ten years later, in an effort to empathize with him, since he was also beginning to feel estranged from their father (for non-religious reasons). At the point in the narrative where their mother was about to say, "You're *gay*?!" Daniel's brother interjected with, "Mom, Dad, I'm a lesbian." Daniel's brother's interruption and tongue-in-cheek contribution to the story suggests that some kind of "queer" reference is most apropos at this point in the narrative. In fact, he queers the story further than in Daniel's original version, metaphorically likening his younger brother to a man who begins by having a sex change to become a woman and then compounds the sexual transgression by becoming a lesbian.



**Figure 5.** Jews for Jesus Advertisement Displaying Elements of the Theological Transvestite Schema.

The other interviewee who related positively to the label was Sarah, a Jews for Jesus missionary who explained that when her non-believing lesbian cousin's partner died, all of the other family members who came left immediately after the funeral. Only she and members of the gay

synagogue stayed around to comfort Sarah's cousin in her bereavement throughout the seven ritually-prescribed days of mourning (known as sitting *sheva*). Sarah reports that at one point near the end of the mourning period, one of the members of the gay synagogue (who now knew

that she was a Yeshua-believer and had heard her testimony) said, "You're just like us. They treat you the same way."

While none of my Gentile interviewees were eager to accept Harris-Shapiro's label, Mouse was able to get a good laugh out of it: "I suppose it *is* kind of flattering," he said, "that she equates our movement with the Messiah himself. Um, I think for a lot of people [in the movement] she probably makes a good point" (February 9, 2009).

Heather exemplifies what Heschel calls "the scandal of transvestism" (1997:191). Heschel observes that "Transvestism creates a sense of confusion and displacement that underlines the absence of a fixed referential gender. The scandal of transvestism is its revelation of the truth about gender, namely, that gender exists only in representational performance" (1997:191). When Heather—raised with very little awareness

of her own Jewishness (despite having a Jewish father)—became conscious of her own hybridity, she was thrown into turmoil (January 23, 2009):

Then all of a sudden I'm Jewish and I, . . . now what am I supposed to do?! Do I follow these [commandments]? Do I not follow these? If I don't follow these, am I betraying God, because I'm a Jewish person? If I don't follow them, am I not betraying God because I'm a gentile too? What the hell am I?!

**"JESUS MADE ME KOSHER:" WANNABEEISM, CONSUMING THE OTHER AND THE MAGIC OF MIMESIS**

*The Lost Tribe(s) of Israel: Wannabees in a Jewish/-ish Wonderland*

In her 1988 article entitled, "The Tribe Called Wannabee," Rayna Green describes persons of "Anglo-American or Anglo-European background, . . . persons of Hispanic, Mediterranean and African/Afro-American background . . . and even . . . ['real' Native American] Indians" who engage in a performance she terms "playing Indian" (30). The non-Native American "wannabees," as she terms them, may play the role of Indian intermittently and situationally, as a way of "escaping the conventional and often highly restrictive boundaries off their fixed cultural identities" (Green 1988:30, 31) and, she goes on to suggest, for the enjoyment of "loosening . . . boundaries, the frisson that comes with acting out a different role (1988:32).

Many non-Indian wannabees claim Indian blood and desire to be rewarded for it, or, at the very least, to be seen as an interesting individual with an admirable heritage (Green 1988:46).

Green goes on to suggest that Anglo-American players "are connecting to an America that existed before European invasion; they are connecting to the very beginnings of the mythological structure of America" (1988:48). Marty observes that wannabee Indians "want to 'borrow' and 'be' Native American in worship. One sees and hears them rejecting the boring and non-fun Christian traditions as they play drum (badly), dance (clumsily) and invoke Mother Earth and Father Sky (uprootingly)" (1994:563). Finally, Green points out that "it is the role, not the real, which is to be enjoyed" (1988:34). Performances do not need to be perfectly authentic to "do the job."

All of these attributes of the Native American wannabee have their parallels in the Messianic movement (in fact, several interviewees volunteered the term "Jewish wannabee" for some of their co-congregants). Messianic congregations tend to be extremely ethnically diverse, bringing in not only persons of Jewish descent and Anglo-Americans, but persons of African and African-

American descent, Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans. Just as in the Native American movement, the role play may be intermittent or situational and “fun” and exotic activities, like engaging in “Davidic dance” (almost unheard of outside the Messianic movement) abound.

Every Messianic Gentile I have encountered has at some point undertaken a serious genealogical inquiry in order to determine if they have any Jewish “blood.” Numerous Hispanic Messianics, across multiple congregations, claim that they are *Moranos* descended from Spanish *conversos* (Jewish victims of forced conversion to Catholicism). Often, this assertion is based on very flimsy grounds (“if your family name occurs in this book from the time of the Inquisition, then you are Jewish”). Heather describes a fellow congregant who is a British gentile, but claims that he is an Israelite, on the grounds that the Hebrew word *brit* means ‘covenant’ and the word *ish* means ‘man,’ so *British* really means ‘Man of the Covenant,” i.e., Jew. This man and others influenced by him have gone on to claim that people of any nationality ending in *-ish* must be Jewish: Spanish, Danish, Swedish, Turkish, etc.

It is very clear that Messianic Gentile Evangelical “wannabees” desire to connect with the earliest mythological beginnings of Christianity before it was tainted by paganism (e.g., Christmas trees, Easter eggs, Greco-Roman philosophy, etc.), secularism, and especially, *Catholicism*. As Heather explains (January 23, 2009):

What I see in Messianic Judaism is an attempt, it's not a perfect attempt certainly—there is no way we can backtrack that well—but it is an attempt to go back to when Yeshua had first died and the movement was a sect [of Judaism].

Many Messianic Gentiles of evangelical background express a deep remorse at the lack of ritual and historical continuity in their Christianity. They eagerly embrace a Jewish

liturgy untainted by pagan-syncretized Catholic ritual. However, this liturgy is often inauthentic, clumsy and, as several respondents put it, just plain “weird.”

Green also points out that the performance of “playing Indian” by non-Indian peoples requires two things: (1) “the physical and psychological removal of real Indians” even while non-Indians claim that their performance is out of admiration, love and respect for Indians, and (2) “[real] Indians ... forced to *remain* Indian, acting out various aspects of their savage lives for ... [non-Indian] audiences.” (1988:31, 33, 49). Marty also implies that some wannabee performances will be learned from ostracized Native Americans who are willing to share formerly secret traditions with non-Indians that desire to play Indian (1994:564).

In a similar vein, it seems that large numbers of American Jews needed to be bred out through intermarriage (physically removed) or assimilated (psychologically removed) to secularism, NRMs, or other non-Jewish engagements, before their loyalty to God through thick and thin could be lauded by Gentile Evangelical wannabees. I have already cited Heather's description of what is going on in the mind of the Messianic wannabee: “I'm better than *you*, you *secular Jew*; ‘cause look what *I'm* doing. *I'm doing* what *you're* supposed to be doing.” Without significant numbers of American Jews becoming secular or a-religious, there would be no point in “playing Jew.” It also seems that the Messianic movement has “show” Jews to parallel Green's “show Indians:” Jewish believers who are encouraged to remain *just Jewish enough, but not too Jewish*. These “show” Jews (those who worship in gentile-dominated churches often fill a similar role as esteemed “pet Jews”) perform various aspects of traditional Jewish life (seders, liturgical blessings, etc), frequently performing ritual behaviors that may have previously been foreign to their own personal experience, in order to feed the Evangelical ‘scopic drive’ for seeing “authentic Jewish praise and worship.”

*Blackophilia:Blackophobia::Judeophilia:Judeophobia*

In her 1992 book, *Black Looks*, bell hooks explains that “Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish of mainstream white culture” (1992:21). Further, she states that “Cultural appropriation of the Other assuages feelings of deprivation and lack that assaults the psyches of radical white youth who choose to be disloyal to Western civilization” (hooks 1992:26).

Bill Yousman builds on hooks’ ideas in his article “Blackophilia and Blackophobia: White Youth, the Consumption of Rap Music, and White Supremacy” (2006). He argues that the seeming benevolence of White consumption of Black popular culture is really a case of “eating the other” by means of which Whites are able to “sooth their guilt over black repression” and “cope with the crisis of white identity” (2003:378). The fascinated gaze of Whites engaging what they believe to be “authentic” moments of Black culture belies the fact that “What is most important is not [actual] authenticity” (that the “images represent the life of most Blacks), but *the appearance* of authenticity (Yousman 2003:375, 379) in superficial and distorted images of ‘blackness’” (Yousman 2003:382). Ultimately, these expressions of love, attraction and fascination (blackophilia) parallel *and are linked with* expressions of hate, repulsion

and dread (blackophobia) in wider White society (Yousman 2003:366, 370, 379).

Like the “spice” of “blackness” for Whites, attempting to embrace a Messianic lifestyle can add excitement and verve to an otherwise dull evangelical existence. All of my Gentile interviewees expressed a sense of lack in their own culture, often termed as a “lack of roots” with which to identify. Mouse describes how exciting it is for Gentile believers when they first discover the richness of Jewish culture in the commodities they can purchase to live out this new expression of their faith: “they’ve [(Messianic Gentiles)] got new toys to play with! I mean, it’s like, ‘I can go and I can do a Shabbat dinner and buy \$150 worth of silver and cloth and buy an interlinear *siddur* [(Hebrew prayer book)]!’” (February 9, 2009). The Jews for Jesus T-Shirt in Figure 5 (more often worn by Gentiles than by Jews, in my experience) evokes the “eating the other” theme of cultural commodification. When considered through a hooks-inspired critical lens, the message that seems to read: “Jesus has made me (a Gentile) like you (a Jew), *kosher*” takes on a more ambivalent significance; the primary semantic association of ‘kosher’ for most American Jews is “fit to eat.”



**Figure 5.** Jews for Jesus T-Shirt Exemplifying the “Eating the Other” Theme.

Several of my interviewees hinted at repressed guilt feelings regarding Gentile Christian treatment of Jews. Mouse, who is of German ancestry expressed how he kept doing reports on Hitler throughout his school years because he wanted to prove that Hitler was not representative of the German people, "He was Austrian" (February 9, 2009). Evangelicals are clearly in a crisis of destabilizing and insecure identity in a rapidly religiously (and ethnically) pluralizing America. As one Gentile interviewee put it (Mouse, February 9, 2009):

It's almost, it's almost a cultural *sin* to be proud of your own culture, because that means you're putting down somebody else's culture. And I think in the Jews they [Gentile believers] find something that, you find a people group who has actually been proud of their culture for 4000 years and maintained it and kept it separate. And I think that, that seems something *strong*. That's not just a pile of dirt they can belong to, that's a mountain that they can really feel a part of. They derive their strength from belonging to a strong group .... [Gentile] people don't have a strong sense of their identity. That is one of the things that attracts people to the [Messianic] movement: ... there is a sense of identity just *embedded* in being part of this congregation.

Just as the actual authenticity of Black culture is irrelevant when compared to the *appearance* of authenticity to the White gaze, Messianic Jewish performances are often superficial or distorted images of mainstream Jewish expressions, sometimes unrecognizable to "Normative Jews." For example, "David Dance" is a constant thread across numerous congregations. From what I have been able to gather by anecdotal "oral

history," it is, in origin, a style of "worship in motion" based on 1960s-era Israeli folk dancing picked up by the first generation of Jews for Jesus missionaries and passed on to those they "led to the Lord." When non-Messianically enculturated Jews first experience this form of expression, they are often bewildered by it. I have been told by several "Jewish-born" individuals that "Jews don't really dance except at weddings and Bar Mitzvahs." Most "normative" Jews find Davidic Dance alien to their prior Jewish experience and either uncomfortable or, as Daniel puts it, "Just plain silly" (January 12, 2009). Messianic Gentiles in congregations which highlight this expression are often befuddled at the fact that they have just met a Jew who can't "dance like David danced."

As in the relationship between blackophilia and blackophobia, it seems that there is a link between the adoring Judeophilia of Messianic Gentiles and the latent repulsion and dread of Judeophobia. Heather chalks up the mainline Churches' ambivalence toward Messianic Judaism as anti-Semitism, pure and simple (January 23, 2009): "I think the Church doesn't like Messianic Judaism, because the churches are anti-Semitic. So, it's [(i.e., Messianic Judaism)] just another Jewish extension to hate, and they can hate them and that's a little bit more acceptable than hating Jews." On a deeper level, among *Messianic* Gentiles, I find that their adoration of Judaism only goes so far. While churches may be seen as "anti-Semitic," "backwards," or even "pagan," in my approximately 20 hours of interview transcripts, *all* insult words and phrases [(abject) stupid(ity), ridiculous, idiot(s), you've got to be kidding me, etc.] are reserved only for those "over-valuing" Jewish expression.

#### *Identity Fetishism and Mimetic Empowerment*

In his 1993 book, *Mimesis and Alterity*, Michael Taussig proposes that the Frazerian Laws of magical Similarity and Contagion are inherent in all acts of mimesis (and especially post-colonial acts of replication). His book makes a strong case for "the magical power of replication" wherein

“the representation shares in or takes power from the represented” (1993:2).

For the Law of Similarity to operate upon the “fetish of culture” (1993:xiii), a copy need not be exact, merely “faithful” (Taussig 1993:52). However, he notes that fairly often, the copy is “an imperfect ideogram” (1993:52, 63). What makes up for the lack? Taussig argues that in most systems of magic “the material connections—those established by attaching hair, nail cuttings, pieces of clothing, and so forth, to the likeness” are what do the trick (Taussig 1993:57). He thus finds “the magic of Similarity ... [to be] but an instance of, the magic of Contact” in which “image and contact interpenetrate” (1993:57). Thus, when a Cuna healer copies “the look of the West; he is also putting it on [when he dons Western clothing]” (Taussig 1993:191). Taussig goes on, “*In putting it on* he is establishing physical contact with the West, the touch, the feel, like putting on a skin” (Taussig 1993:191). Taussig also presents the corollary of this idea: “Seeing something or hearing something is to be in contact with that something” (Taussig 1993:21).

If one may gain magical power over something by miming it, by replicating its image, hearing, or seeing it, or by being in contact with it (e.g., putting it on like a skin), then what are Messianic Gentiles attempting to gain power over when they mimetically replicate Jews (albeit imperfectly, superficially, or distortedly)? Are they attempting to gain power over “the Jews?” Over Judaism? Based on my interactions with them so far, I would like to make the conjecture that one of the greatest fears of the American Evangelical is their own “inner Pharisee,” who Evangelicals may represent to themselves by the image of the modern-day descendants of the Pharisees, rabbinic Jews. The inner Pharisee is that prideful inner voice which “prays about itself,” saying, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this [fill in the blank].” (Luke 18:11). The inner Pharisee is the tendency to compile uncritically considered lists of dos and don'ts. Perhaps, they are hoping that by reversing the polarity and wearing the Pharisee *on the outside*, they may overcome their Pharisee within.

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