

Returning To Their Own Borders

*A Social Anthropological Study of Contemporary
Messianic Jewish Identity in Israel*

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מִנְעִי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינֶיךָ מִדְּמָעָה
כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לַפֹּעֲלֶתָךְ נְאֻם־יְהוָה
וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב׃

וַיֵּשׁ־תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרִיתְךָ נְאֻם־יְהוָה
וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגִבּוֹלָם׃

ירמיה ל"א ט"ז - י"ז

Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears;
for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord,
and they shall come back from the land of the enemy.

There is hope for your future, says the Lord,
that your children shall return to their own border.

Jeremiah 31:16-17

תקציר

חרף העובדה שאיש אינו מסוגל כמעט להסכים על הסוגיה מיהו יהודי, כלל ידוע הוא שיהודי לבטח אינו מאמין בישוע (ראה לדוגמא, Ben-Rafael 1996:194). אמונה בישוע¹ כמשיח עם ישראל, ממקמת את המאמין מחוץ לגבולות המחנה היהודי, יותר מכל דבר אחר. אך בתקופת הבית השני, נחשבו תלמידים יהודים של ישוע לכת כמו כתות יהודיות מגוונות אחרות (Yisrael 2000). לאחר כמעט 2000 שנה של יחסי יהודים-נוצרים מצולקים באלימות ואיבה, קיימים היום בישראל יהודים המבקשים לסגור מעגל בטענה שהגירושין בין היהודים לבין האמונה בישוע כמשיח הם חטא היסטורי בלתי נסבל שיש לתקנו למען גאולת עם ישראל וגויי העולם. יהודים משיחיים ישראלים מערערים על אחת הדיכטומיות היסודיות ביותר ועל פרדיגמה המהווה עמוד תווך חברתי בעולם המערבי, דהיינו ההבחנה בין יהודי ונוצרי.

עבודה זו בוחנת את הקהילה המרתקת של יהודים משיחיים שחברים בה דוברי עברית ילידי הארץ ומהגרים מצפון אמריקה, נשים וגברים, מנהיגים ואנשי שורה, המתגוררים ברחבי הארץ, ומשקפים את כל הקשת הרחבה ביחס לשמירת מצוות, מחדדים בבני ברק ועד ל'חילונים גמורים' בטיילת תל אביב. דיסרטציה זו היא המחקר האנתרופולוגי הראשון על ההבנייה החברתית-תרבותית של זהות יהודית-משיחית בת זמננו בישראל.

סקירה ספרותית

המחקרים המעטים בתחום מדעי החברה שנערכו על יהודים משיחיים בני זמננו, בין אם על ידי אנשי הקהילה ובין אם על ידי אנשים מחוצה לה, הם או מחקרים אתנוגרפיים המתמקדים בתת-קבוצות ספציפיות (Feher 1998; Glick 1958; Harris-Shapiro 1992; Lipson 1980, 1990; Sobel 1974) או מחקרים היסטוריים ותיאוריים על מנהיגים וארגונים בקרב היהודים המשיחיים, המסתמכים בעיקר על מסמכים תיעודיים (Cohn-Sherbok 2000; Fleischer 1996; Nerel 1996; Stanfield 1996).

קומץ קטן של סוציולוגים, אנתרופולוגים ותיאולוגים שעבודותיהם גויסו כדי לשרת סדר יום חברתי או פוליטי, גברו עד כה על מעט המחקרים האקדמיים על יהודים משיחיים. לעבודות אלו זיקה רופפת ליהודים משיחיים עצמם. הסקירה הספרותית פותחת בניתוח המראה כיצד משרתת הגישה הרווחת בכתיבה ההיסטוריוגרפית על היהודים המשיחיים כמכשיר לדיכוי הקבוצה ולחיצוק היחסי של היהודים הלא-משיחיים, המממנים והמבצעים את מחקרים אלה. דוגמאות לכך כוללות האריס-שפירו (Harris-Shapiro 1992, 1999), רבה רקונסטרוקטיביסטית הפועלת להעצים את תנועתה ובו בזמן להרחיק את המשיחיים מהגבולות האידיאליים לדעתה של היהדות הנורמטיבית; כהן-שרבוק (Cohn-Sherbok 2000) הרואה ביהדות הרפורמית את העוגן המרכזי של היהדות הנורמטיבית כאשר בקצה האחד ניצבים המשיחיים ובקצה השני היהדות ההומניסטית; סובל (Sobel 1974) המנסה להרגיע הורים יהודים היסטריים באמריקה של שנות ה-70 באומרו שהמפגש של ילדיהם עם ישוע, הוא לא יותר מגחמה פתולוגית חולפת;

¹ שמו של ישוע מופיע בברית החדשה: "ואתה תיקרא שמו ישוע, כי הוא יושיע את עמו מחטאותיהם." מתי א' 21. שמו הידוע בציבור הישראלי, יש"ו, הינו המצאה רבנית המהווה ראשי תיבות לביטוי המכפיש "יימח שמו וזכרו".

וליפסון (Lipson 1980, 1990) הטוענת שאמונה אקטיבית בישוע יכולה להוות תופעה טיפולית לאותם יהודים שנדחקו לשולי החברה.

לחילופין, הניתוח התיאולוגי של ווסרמן (Wasserman 2000) לגבי יהדות משיחית אמריקאית ובמידה פחותה ישראלית, שולל כל חשיבות רוחנית לזהות היהודית של יהודים מאמינים בישוע. הוא מטפח את גישת המיסיון של אימוץ מנהגים תרבותיים המחקים נטיות מקומיות נורמטיביות של יהודים, למען מטרות ביזור בלבד. זאת במקום להתייחס ליהודים המשיחיים כחיל חלוץ רוחני נבואי המוביל את עמו חזרה למקורות 'האותנטיים' כפי שמרבים לפרסם בספרות יהודית-משיחית. כל המחקרים הללו נוטים להפוך את היהודים המשיחיים לאובייקט ולהכפיף לסדר היום החברתי-פוליטי של החוקרים, תוך כדי הצגת מעין 'חשיפה' כביכול של האחר, אשר שקופה למדי בקביעת מסקנותיה מראש ובהשמצותיה.

לאור היסטוריה זו של מחקרים על היהודים המשיחיים, דיסרטציה זו מאמצת נקודת מבט ביקורתית שמנסה לגלות ולנתח אידיאולוגיות ומבני כוח הקשורים להבניית זהות יהודית משיחית. בהכרה שכל הגדרה של קבוצה חברתית בהכרח מפרידה בין חברי הקבוצה לאחרים, זכותם של הנחקרים להגדיר את עצמם מקבלת דגש ראוי, כמו גם המחויבות המקצועית של החוקרת להימנע מלכפות הגדרות מקובלות המשרתות הגמוניות חברתיות שולטות.

תיאוריה

מחקר זה מבוסס על גישה פנומנולוגית המבקשת להציג באופן ביקורתי את הזהות היהודית-משיחית בעזרת השיח והפרקטיקה של אלו המבנים אותה וחיים לפיה. מאחר שזהות נבנית באמצעות פעילות גומלין חברתית, נקודת המבט האמית המוצגת בעבודה זו מציעה אלטרנטיבה ביקורתית לזהויות הגמוניות יהודיות ונוצריות. גישה חילופית זו לזהויות קלאסיות דתיות ולאומיות מערביות יכולה לסייע לחוקרים בעבודתם הביקורתית, לפירוק המציאות החברתית והצגת אפשרויות חדשות ולא מדכאות לזהויות חברתיות.

התיאוריות של אן סוידלר (Swidler 1986) ודבורה הולנד (Holland 1998) המשוות תרבות ל'ארגז כלים' ול'כלים חיים' (living tools) בהתאמה, כמו גם התיאוריה של שרי אורטנר (Ortner 1990) בנוגע לסכימות תרבותיות, מסייעות להדגיש הן את הנזילות של זהות חברתית הן את תפקידה המוגבל של סוכנות (agency) בהבניית זהות. תפקודם של אנשים כסוכנים מתואר כהליך הדומה לטווייה; הסוכן מביא באופן מתמיד סוגי חושים חדשים של שיח וטווייה אותם, בדרך כלל באמצעות סיפור יצירתי, עד שנוצר אריג יישומי. התוצאה היא מגוון של יחידים המזדהים כיהודים משיחיים בדרכים מגוונות, משתנות ומשותפות חלקית.

מחקר אתנוגרפי המבוסס על נתונים אמפיריים מקל, בהכרח, על גרסאות קיצוניות של תיאוריית ההבניה החברתית (social constructivism) בכך שהוא מגלה פרקטיקות של שיח יותר מאשר שיח מומחש (reified discourse, Holland 1998). מושג ההטרולוסיה המכוון פוליטית של בכטין (Bakhtin 1999) מגלה כיצד לסוגי שיח מתחרים נועדים ערכים חברתיים שונים ומשתנים. באופן דומה מושג ה'ריבוד הזהותי' של ג'ואן נגל

(identity layering, Nagel 1994) ממחיש כיצד בחירה אישית של אידיאלים, ערכים ואסטרטגיות מתוך 'ארגז הכלים' החברתי תלויה במידה רבה בהתאמתם ויעילותם בהקשר חברתי נתון.

ה'דוקסיה' של בורדיו (Bourdieu 1977) מתארת כיצד פועלת הגמוניה למניעת שינוי חברתי כדי לשמר יחסי כוחות שוררים, ואת המאבק הפוליטי המתרחש כתוצאה מאינטרסים מנוגדים לשינוי. המושג 'עיצוב מחדש של כלים' (retooling) של סוידלר מתאר תקופות בהן 'כלים' תרבותיים ישנים כבר אינם משרתים לאנשים דיים, ועוזר להסביר, למרות מגבלות הסוכנות, כיצד בכל זאת מתחולל שינוי חברתי, והמחיר לכך.

תיאוריות אלה ואחרות, כמו הגדרת אותנטיות יהודית של סטיוארט שרמה (Charmé 2000), וניתוחיה של מארי דגלאס של סמלים 'טבעיים' (Douglas 1970a) והאשמות כישופים (1970b) מסבירים בדיוננו את המאבק ההיסטורי בתוך הממסדים, היהודיים והנוצריים, להרחקת יהודים המאמינים בישוע המאיימים על עקרונות בסיסיים של ההגמוניה הדתית המערבית. תיאוריות אלו מציידות גם את הניתוח שלנו של הבניית זהות חברתית ושל המאבקים הפוליטיים המתלווים לה בקרב הקהילה היהודית-משיחית בישראל עצמה.

מתודולוגיה

שלוש המתודולוגיות המשמשות במחקר זה – ראיונות עומק, תצפיות משתתפות וניתוח טקסטים – מסייעות למקד את הדיון בזהות במלים ובמעשים, במקום בהגדרות מקבעות. המתודולוגיה העיקרית של המחקר היא ראיונות עומק מובנים חלקית המבוססים על עקרונות אתנוגרפיים איכותניים (Fontana & Frey 1994, 2000; Spradley 1979). שישים ראיונות עומק, שארכו בין שעה וחצי לשלוש שעות וחצי כל אחד, התנהלו בעברית או באנגלית עם חברים בקהילות יהודיות משיחיות דוברות-עברית בכל רחבי ישראל. נעשו מאמצים לראיין, בעיקר בשימוש שיטתי 'כדור השלג' (Stake 2000), מגוון רחב ביותר של יהודים משיחיים מקהילות שונות. החוקרת גם פיתחה מדגם מאוזן בקפידה של גברים ונשים, מנהיגים ואנשי שורה, אנשים שנולדו או התחנכו בישראל וכן עולים מצפון אמריקה, מכל אזור מייצג בארץ, וכך נוצרה קשת נרחבת מייצגת של הקהילות הקיימות. הראיונות התמקדו בעיקר במספר סוגיות מרכזיות מבלי לכפות תסריט קבוע מראש (Shkedi & Horenczyk 1995). המשתתפים עודדו לספר אודות 'מסעם לאמונה בישוע' ולהביע את דעותיהם על הפרקטיקה, הגבולות, תפיסות הקבוצה, סכסוכים, חזונות וחלומות המתייחסים לחייהם כיהודים משיחיים. כל הראיונות הוקלטו ושוקלטו בדיוק נמרץ ולאחר מכן נותחו הטקסטים על פי העקרונות של 'תיאוריה מקורקעת' (grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin 1990) לפיה קטגוריות הניתוח צומחות מהחומר האמפירי.

מחקר זה המתפרס על פני תקופה של יותר משמונה שנים, כולל מגוון רחב של תצפיות משתתפות: אסיפות קהילתיות שבועיות ובחגים, מפגשים של תפילה והשתחויה, חגיגות הקשורות למחזור החיים, התכנסויות משפחתיות, קבוצות בית, זמני התחברות, מפגשי אחווה ותפילה של נשים, כנסים לאומיים, מפגשי פיוס בין ערבים נוצרים ליהודים משיחיים, שיעורי בר ובת מצווה, פעילויות לילדים ובית ספר לשבת, אירועי בישור, קונצרטים, הופעות מסוגים שונים ועוד.

המתודולוגיה האמפירית השלישית שמשמשת בעבודה זו היא ניתוח ספרותי המבוסס אף הוא על עקרונות 'תיאוריה מקורקעת'. הטקסטים הפנים-קהילתיים במחקר זה שנותחו כוללים: ספרים, מנשרים ומאמרים בכתבי עת משיחיים ישראלים; תכניות ללימוד מבוגרים; מילות שירים; ספרות נוצרית מערבית מתורגמת; גיליונות אלקטרוניים של ידיעונים, מאמרים ומנשרים המודיעים באתרי אינטרנט על אירועים יהודים-משיחיים, גיוס תרומות ופורומים; ושורה של חיבורי התבוננות עצמית ביקורתיים שנכתבו על ידי סטודנטים משיחיים בקורס על זהות יהודית-משיחית שהועבר במכללה על ידי החוקרת. בנוסף לכך, נותחו טקסטים של יהודים משיחיים אמריקאים בהיותם הצד השני בדו-שיח מתמשך בין ישראלים ואמריקאים שבקרב היהודים המשיחיים. שתי הקהילות מתמשקות לא רק באמצעות סוגים שונים של מדיה, אלא גם באמצעות יהודים מאמינים המהגרים מצפון אמריקה לישראל, שילובם בקהילות המאמינים הישראליים דוברי העברית, ונסיעות דו-סטרויות מתמדות בין שני האתרים של אמריקה וישראל.

רקע

עקב סדרה של שינויים פוליטיים, כלכליים ודתיים שהתרחשו בעיקר במערב מאז תקופת ההשכלה ואילך, פתיל שלושת החוטים של אמונה, תרבות ולאומיות יהודית החל להיפרם (Neusner 1987). יהודיות החלה להופיע ככל צירוף אפשרי של שלושת החוטים הללו, וכך נוצר מרחב למגוון של פרדיגמות הגדרה עצמית יהודית (Cohen 1999). שינויים היסטוריים אלו בפרדיגמה השולטת של הגדרת היהודי, יחד עם צמיחתם של הציונות החילונית, המיסיון הנוצרי בקרב היהודים, והנצרות הציונית, הם הגורמים העיקריים שתרמו להופעתה של הנצרות העברית במאה ה-19 ויותר מאוחר, להתפתחות היהדות המשיחית.

עם הפיכת גבולות ההגדרה של מיהו יהודי לעבירים יותר, נהיה היהודי המאמין בישוע לתופעה חברתית אפשרית, אף כי עדיין נתפס הדבר הפרת טאבו בסיסי ומובנה ביותר ביהדות. אף יותר שערורייתית הייתה העובדה שיהודים המאמינים בישוע החלו להזדהות יותר ויותר כיהודים, מתוך דחייה של אמת המידה הימבינימית של המרת הדת לנצרות וניתוק הכרחי של כל קשר שהוא עם העם היהודי. החלטתו של המאמין לדחות ציפייה נורמטיבית זאת, ולהחליט 'להישאר יהודי', בהגדרה קוראת תגר על המושגים היהודיים הנורמטיביים העוסקים בסוגיית ההגדרה של יהודי/יהודיות מול נוצרי/נוצרות. יתר על כן אם יהודי אינו חייב להמיר את דתו לנצרות של הגויים, כיצד תבוא אמונתו לידי ביטוי כאשר במהלך 1700 השנים האחרונות היו המאמינים היחידים הידועים גויים? עקב שאלה זו החלו היהודים המשיחיים, במהלך המאות ה-19 וה-20, לעיין מחדש בפרקטיקה של אמונתם בישוע בניסיון להשיבה הביתה להקשרה היהודי.

הציונות החילונית ועצם הקמתה של מדינת-הלאום היהודית השפיעו רבות על התפתחות הזהות היהודית המשיחית, בייחוד עקב פסילתה של היהדות, הגדרת יהודיות מחדש כלאומיות ישראלית, והרעיון האירופאי הרומנטי של לידה מחדש דרך אהבת הארץ. לעתים קרובות כוננה הציונות החילונית את היהדות כ'רוח התאום' שלה (Doppelgänger), שריד מרחף כרוח רפאים מחיי הגולה שנידון להחלפה על ידי האידיאולוגיה הציונית, תרבותה והחיים המשותפים שלה במולדת, כפתיח לתהליך חילוני של ריפוי ובנייה מחדש של העם היהודי. למעשה, הישראלי נקרא 'העברי החדש', מעין ניסיון חילוני להוליד מחדש את האומה העברית (Zerubavel 1995:21). כתבי הקודש העבריים היו למפה ולספר

לימוד שנועדו למצפן יהודים החוזרים לאדמות אבותיהם (אלמוג 1997:254) ולציידם בכלי חשוב להשגת מטרתם לייסד מחדש חברה חקלאית אותנטית, מתוך החזרת השעון לאחור, לתור הזהב התנ"כי, זה שהיה קיים לפני הגולה ולפני הרבנות. עם הקמתה של מדינת ישראל, הפכה התנועה הציונית הישראלית לכת של לאומיות, קרי דת אזרחית.

לבסוף, המיסיון הנוצרי הפרוטסטנטי והנוצרים הציונים מהווים אף הם קהילה משפיעה מתמשכת על היהודים המשיחיים בישראל. בדומה לציונים חילוניים, דחה המיסיון הפרוטסטנטי את הדת היהודית המתייחסת לקיום המצוות כאל מפתח לגאולה רוחנית או לאומית של העם היהודי. בנוסף, פירשו הציונים הנוצרים את הציונות כסימן מבטיח להגשמת הנבואות בכתבי הקודש לגבי שיבת ציון, דבר שיקדים את חזרתו המיידית של מלך המשיח וכינון מלכותו מירושלים. מכאן שנוצרים פרו-ישראלים תומכים בשיבת היהודים הגולים לארץ, אך לעתים קרובות הם דוחים בד בבד את תרבותם היהודית ואת הפרקטיקה של אמונתם. המיסיון הוריש את התמיכה הזאת בעליה ובלאומיות היהודית, ובמקביל את דחיית השיח והפרקטיקה היהודיים לקהיליית היהודים המאמינים בישראל, וזאת באמצעות מימון וייסוד של קהילות, תכניות ילדים, ספרות, חונכות ולימוד.

חוט השני בעבודה זו הוא מאבקם המתמשך של היהודים המשיחיים להגדיר, תיאורטית ומעשית, את משמעות היותם יהודים המאמינים בישוע לאור ההתפתחות הפוליטית-חברתית של המושגים יהודי ויהדות, וכן לנוכח השפעתם של אידיאליים, ערכים ופרקטיקה של ציונים יהודיים חילוניים, ציונים נוצרים והמיסיון הפרוטסטנטי.

ממצאים

ממצאי המחקר נפתחים בלקסיקון קצר ומבוא לקולות הרבים הנשמעים בשיח היהודי-משיחי בישראל. ניתן לומר שהקהילה הנחקרת בכללותה הינה רגישה לאופן ההבנייה האידיאולוגי והפוליטי של שפה, לאפשרויות החברתיות והשכבות החבריות במשמעויות השפה; לרב ערכיות של השפה שבכוחה לקרב ולדחות אנשים ופרקטיקות; ולפוטנציאל שיש בשפה לשמר גבולות או לחצותם. העמדה הספית של יהודים מאמינים מטפחת רהיטות רב לשונית ורב תרבותית המקלה על תקשורת עם קבוצות התייחסות שונות (יהודים לא-מאמינים אורתודוקסיים, נוצרים אוונגליסטיים, ישראלים חילוניים וכד'). אותה ספיות חברתית מביאה יהודים משיחיים בישראל לחתור, במודעות, תחת השיח ההגמוני הדתי השולט בישראל או לחזקו.

פרק שש, 'מפת הדרכים של הקורא', מפתח מודל אנליטי של הזהות הנחקרת ומסביר את מתווה הממצאים. הגישה לזהות הן של הנחקרים הן של הצגת ממצאי המחקר היא כאל מסע – נתיבים, שורשים וגבולות. נמצא כי יהודים משיחיים ישראלים מתארים את זהותם כשיבה לציון, למקורם וליעדם המשולש. הם מספרים כיצד מצאו לעצמם נתיב חדש אל עבר אלוהי ישראל, כיצד נטעו עצמם מחדש בארץ וכיצד הגדירו מחדש את גבולות זכותם המולדת.

פרק שבע ניגש אל נתיבים כשלב הראשון בדרך אל 'הזהות כמסע'. המרואיינים מדברים על תחילתו של מסע ששיאו הוא אמונה מוצהרת בישוע כמשיח ישראל. מנקודה זו ואילך, מה שהחל כמסע רוחני מסופר מחדש כחזרה מטאפיסית לאלוהים. השיח ההגמוני היהודי כמו זה הנוצרי נעזר במבנה נרטיבי ליניארי של מסע אמוני כדי לרמוז על קרע

המתרחש כאשר יהודי 'מגיע לאמונה': הוא מתנער מיהודיותו וחוצה את הקווים לנצרות. לעומת זאת, במבנה האמפירי של המסע האמוני היהודי-משיחי בישראל הסיפרים מגלים נתיב ספיראלי של שיבה לציון, המתאפיין בהמשכיות במקום קרע. מן הממצאים האמפיריים עולה השאלה מדוע, למרות הנתיב הספיראלי של סיפר המסע האמוני של היהודי המשיחי, בכל זאת, ישנם יהודים מאמינים שבוחרים, לעתים, להפעיל פרשנות הגמונית ליניארית של 'המרה' – חדשות ולא חידוש – שנראית כמו מתכחשת לזהותם הייחודית המתמשכת כיהודים. הממצאים מצביעים על כך, שהשימוש בסיפר ליניארי של 'המרה' הוא חלק משיח אנטינומי (נגד התורה) ואנטי-רבני גדול יותר המדמה קרע בהגיע היהודי לאמונה, קרע שלאחריו מתנתק היהודי המשיחי מהיהדות ותופס את עצמו כיהודי רק במובן האתני או הלאומי (ישראלי) ולא במובן הרוחני.

זהות כשורשים, בפרק שמונה, בוחנת את השלב השני של 'הזהות כמסע'. הפרק בוחן מנקודת המבט היהודית-משיחית חזונות ואתגרים בכל הנוגע למקומיות, עצמאות ורלוונטיות תרבותית. הפרק חוקר את המאמץ שעושים הנחקרים לחזור לשורשים 'האמיתיים' של אמונתם בארץ דרך ישוע, לאור ההשפעות של התרבות הישראלית החילונית, הציונות הנוצרית, המיסיון הפרוטסטנטי והקולוניאליזם הצרפתי. סכימה תרבותית מעניינת עולה מהסיפרים בהם השיח והפרקטיקה של היהודים המשיחיים בישראל מושווים לצמיחה האורגנית והאיטית של העץ. האם הם דומים לעץ אשוח בחג המולד, עקר, עקור, ארעי ומסחרי, לחלוטין לא במקומו בישראל? או האם הם מדמים את עצמם לעץ זית, ששורשיו נעוצים עמוק באדמה הישראלית, העומד בסבל בצורות ומלחמות, הניזון ממקורות מקומיים ולאט, אך בבטחה, גואל את האדמות השוממות ומספק שמן משיחה לישראל ולאומות?

לבסוף הזהות היהודית-משיחית בישראל נבחנת על פי המטאפורה של גבולות ועיצובם. פרק תשע מתמקד במאבקים של יהודים מאמינים להשיב לעצמם את זכותם המולדת ולחדשה. תת הפרק הראשון בודק את האסטרטגיה של חזרה בציר הזמן להבניית של היסטוריוגרפיה יהודית-משיחית ייחודית המהווה מקור השראה ל'שחזור' זהות יהודית-משיחית עכשווית. תתי הפרקים שלאחר מכן מפרטים את שלושת המאבקים הבולטים ביותר על גבולות הזהות בקהילה הנחקרת.

מאבק הגבולות הקולקטיבי הראשון על זכות המולדת מעורר את השאלה על הסובייקטיביות היהודית-משיחית. כלומר, האם על יהודים מאמינים לקבל את מרות השיח ההגמוני של הממסדים היהודיים והנוצרים או שמא יכולים הם ואף חובה עליהם להגדיר באופן סובייקטיבי שיח יהודי-משיחי ייחודי.

הויכוח השני הוא על המאבק למען אוטונומיה תיאולוגית לבסס פרקטיקה יהודית-משיחית בישראל. המאבק לאוטונומיה מצרף לדיון את שאלת היחסים של יהודים משיחיים עם הקבוצות הגדולות יותר של יהודים ומאמינים נוצרים (נוצרים גויים). מצד אחד, ניצב הטיעון ההגמוני בעד הפרדה בין הזהות היהודית לבין הזהות המשיחית של המאמין, ושמירה על יחסי היררכיה או דיכטומיה, המתבטאים פרקטית בהיפרדות רוחנית מהקהילה היהודית ובו-זמנית באינטגרציה עם הגוף 'האוניברסלי' של המאמינים. מצד שני ניצב האתגר היהודי-משיחי לשאוף לשילוב הגוף, הנפש והרוח בזהות יהודית-משיחית ייחודית, ובו בזמן, ככל שניתן, השתלבות בקרב היהודים הלא-משיחיים ובקרב המשיחיים הלא-יהודיים.

הויכוח השלישי והאחרון עוסק בסוגיית סמכות רוחנית. במקרה זה שיח הנחקרים מתגלה כ'שדה-קרב' פוקויאני (Foucauldian Kampfplatz), שנצפה בתרגומים ובניסוחים דוקטרינאליים, בשעה שחברי הקהילה נאבקים על שיח, אידיאולוגיה ויחסי כוח. המאבק סביב סמכות רוחנית כולל אסטרטגיה הגמונית, על צירוף כריסטולוגיה (תורת אופיו ותפקידו של המשיח) לסוגיות העוסקות בקיום המצוות, ומתוך כך שיוך פרקטיקות של אמונה יהודית לדוקטרינות כפירה, במאמץ הגמוני לדכא את קיום מצוות היהדות. אולם, ישנם חברי קהילה המגלים יוזמות הטרודוקסיות להתנגד לכך ולחתור תחת הגמוניות דתיות קיימות בניסיון להחיות ולשחזר סמכות רוחנית יהודית-משיחית על ישראל ועל כל האומות.

דיון

הדיון נפתח בחמש אסטרטגיות פעולה שנזכרו כבר בחלק התיאוריה של המבוא, המיושמות כדי לשמר הגמוניה אנטינומית בעיקרה בתוך הקהילה המשיחית בישראל. האסטרטגיה הראשונה מגדירה יהודיות כאנניות או לאומיות 'טבעית' ולא דווקא כזהות רוחנית. כפי שמפרט מארי דאגלס (Douglas 1970a), אסטרטגיה זו מבוססת על תפיסת הרוח (ניות) כדבר מה נפרד, הנלחם עם הגוף. ההתעסקות בתורת משה, גמילות חסדים או הלכה רבנית מתפרשת לא רק כמאמץ מיותר, היא נתפסת כעצם ניגודה הדיכוטומי לרוחניות 'האמיתית' המוגדרת כאמונה המתמקדת בישוע והמתבססת על חסד.

האסטרטגיה השנייה, שמנתח סטיוארט שרמה במאמרו על אותנטיות יהודית (Charmé 2000), טוענת שיהודים מאמינים הדבקים בחיפושם אחר ביטויים של האמונה היהודית, אינם אותנטיים. הם 'עושים הצגה יהודית' ואולי אף מנסים להוכיח שהם משהו שאינם, ובעצם מרמזים על האפשרות לקלקול מידות מוסרי, חוסר יציבות או חוסר בטחון. אסטרטגיה זו מניחה שיהודים משיחיים נוטלים לעצמם אלמנטים של תרבות זרה, שונה, כזו המתעמתת עם תרבותם-הם. במילים אחרות, תרבות יהודית דתית מואשמת בכך שהיא אחרת, מסוכנת ומוטעית. יתר על כן, יש כאן הנחה נסתרת שליהדות האורתודוקסית בעלות בלעדית על שמירת מצוות ולפיכך, כל שימוש בפרקטיקה יהודית חייב להיות כפוף ללא עוררין למוסכמות האורתודוקסיות. מכיוון שהשימוש שעושים הנחקרים באלמנטים יהודיים הוא לעתים קרובות חלקי ובלתי-אורתודוקסי, לפי הפרדיגמה ההגמונית, שימוש כזה מבטא בורות ואי מוכשרות. כלומר, אסטרטגיית האותנטיות מקדמת את רעיון הזהות כמהות, ובמקרה שלפנינו כמכלול שלם של יהדות רבנית שיש לגלות שליטה בה, אך גם לקבל את מרותה לפני שמישהו יעז לקיימה. על כן, גישה זו דוחה את כל רעיון קיום המצוות כמטרה שמראש ידוע שלא ניתן להשיגה.

אסטרטגיה שלישית היא קואפטציה של ההטרודוקסיה היהודית-משיחית, כפי שזה עולה מעבודתה של קרולין דין (Dean 1999). דין מתארת כיצד כובשים נוצרים ספרדים הטמיעו, כביכול, את השיח והפרקטיקה של דת האנדים, אך באותה עת שהם שימרו ביטויים ילידיים, החליפו את תוכן בתוכן נוצרי. הביטוי הדתי הסינקרטי (המשולב) שנוצר היה בעצם הרחבת הכיבוש הפוליטי הספרדי על ידי המרת התרבות המקומית לצורה אחרת של קתוליות ספרדית. בדומה לכך, ההגמוניה הדתית בישראל בקרב הנחקרים מאמצת מינון נמוך וחיצוני של שיח ופרקטיקה יהודית-משיחית כאשר באותו זמן היא דוחה ומחליפה את מהות התוכן בניסיון לשלוט בה ולהמיר את השיח ההטרודוקסי. אימוץ מסווג של

שפה ופרקטיקה יהודיות-משיחיות מקהה במידת מה את יעילות העוקץ שבשיח ההטרודוקסי, כי השימוש בשפה בצורה כה אוניברסלית גורם לשיח לאבד מייחודיותו ומחדותו. במקום לעודד מאמינים לקרוא תגר על הסטטוס קוו בשיח ובפרקטיקה של האמונה, אסטרטגיה זו נותנת להם תחושת רעננות, עדכון, תקינות פוליטית ואחדות, ובה בעת מבטיחה כניעה מתמשכת לאותם מבנים הגמוניים.

על פי האסטרטגיה הרביעית, תרבות האמונה המשיחית בישראל מתאפיינת ברוחניות הקשורה לעתים קרובות מאוד, ואולי בראש ובראשונה, בקבלת מרות של השיח והפרקטיקה ההגמוניים. 'רוחניות' זו נלווית גם בדחייה במידה כזו או אחרת של שמירת מצוות 'הברית הישנה' כחלק מעבודת האל. כמו קריאת התיגר על כל אסטרטגיית פעולה הגמונית אחרת, כאשר מנדהו קורא תגר על הביטויים הדומיננטיים של 'רוחניות', המאתגרים נתפסים כסוטים 'לא-רוחניים' או כ'חלשים' באמונתם, מפני שדי סביר שהם סוטים בצורה זו או אחרת מהתפיסות והביטויים הדומיננטיים של רוחניות (Boyarin 2004, Gager 1992). יתר על כן, במידה שמאמצים הטרודוקסיים שכאלו כוללים הסברים מתוחכמים, מחקר או פרקטיקה גשמית, הם נדחים כ'בשריים', לעומת השיח ההגמוני שלעתים קרובות למותר לומר שהינו 'רוחני'.

האסטרטגיה החמישית, והתקיפה מכולן, היא ההאשמה בכפירה, כפי שנידון בהרחבה בעבודתה של מארי דגלאס על האשמות על כישופים (Douglas 1970b). כאשר הטיעון של 'אי-רוחניות' של הטרודוקסיה אינו משכנע יותר, האשמות בכפירה מיושמות כמוצא אחרון במטרה להשיב ולשמור על סטטוס קוו הגמוני על חשבון יחסים קיימים. לפיכך, ההטרודוקסיה מוכרת כ'רעה', אך בכל זאת כתופעה 'רוחנית' שגם נדחית ככפירה. האשמה בכפירה כופה גבולות ברורים על יחסים חברתיים, מרוממת את מטרות ההגמוניה ומקטינה באופן ניכר את התחרות הטרודוקסית על ידי הוצאת הכופרים האשמים (או שנרמז שהם כופרים) מהאחווה שבתוך הקהילה ההגמונית התחומה.

אחרי בחינת התגובה הטרודוקסית לחמש האסטרטגיות האמיות המוזכרות לעיל, העבודה מגיעה למסקנה שבלי דו-שיח אמיתי נטול אקסיומות, בין היהודים המשיחיים בישראל כמובשר בואה של אחדות אמיתית, הקהילה המקומית תמשיך לשעתק אותם אידיאולוגיות אקסלוסיביות ואותם יחסי כוח של שליטה והשלטת מרות (Bekerman 2005) שהצליחו לאורך ההיסטוריה לפגום ביחסים בתוך הקבוצה ומחוצה לה.

הדיון ממשיך ובוחן אם היהודים המשיחיים בישראל הם בני כלאיים שעתידיים להיטמע בנצרות הגויים (Glick 1958) או שמא ישנם סימנים למודליות יהודית-משיחית ייחודית אשר עשויה לשרוד לאורך הדורות. מחקר זה מצביע על כך שאותם יהודים מאמינים הדבקים במשיחיות ישראלית אנטינומית, מסתכנים באבדן זהותם היהודית לאורך זמן, אם הם יעזבו את הארץ מחד, וסיכוייהם להינשא עם נוצרים גויים גדלים אם הם נשארים בארץ מאידך. הסיכויים אינם גבוהים שהסביבה בה הם מקיימים את הפרקטיקה שלהם תביא לעולם דורות עם תחושת מחויבות משמעותית לרעיונות, ערכים, אסטרטגיות פעולה או המשכיות מתוך תפיסת עולם יהודית. מה שמסתמן הוא שרגשות וזיכרונות העולים מהתרבות היהודית של הדור הראשון, חזקים ככל שיהיו, מהווים בסיס רעוע להמשכיות יהודית לאורך דורות, אם אין הדור השני משתלב בסביבה חברתית של פרקטיקה יהודית.

למרות זאת, שלושת המאבקים על גבולות זהות, המנותחים בפרק תשע של הממצאים, מצביעים על מאבק בתוך הקהילה הנחקרת על סובייקטיביות, על אוטונומיה תיאולוגית ועל סמכות רוחנית. מאבקים אלו הם שמשרטים את מתווה צמיחתה של מודליות יהודית-משיחית ברורה בסביבה המורכבת של זרמי היהודים האורתודוקסים, הציונים היהודים החילוניים, הנוצרים הציונים והמיסיונרים הפרוטסטנטים בישראל. יתרה מזאת, אחד ממקורות העוצמה של המודליות העולים והמתבררים הוא שימורו של מתח דינאמי בין הפרדה מוחלטת להיטמעות מלאה בשתי הקהילות הגדולות יותר בארץ ובחו"ל – זו היהודית וזו 'המשיחית'.

החלק השלישי והאחרון של הדיון בוחן את יעילותו של המודל האנליטי של 'זהות כמסע' כפי שהוא מופיע בעבודה. 'החזרה' המשולשת, המתוארת על ידי הנחקרים, לאלוהים, לארץ ולזכותם המולדת, נבחנת באמצעות הפרדיגמות של נתיבים, שורשים וגבולות. יהודים משיחיים ישראלים מהווים מקרה מבחן ייחודי למתח המשלים הקיים בין נתיבים ושורשים בשיח ובפרקטיקה של זהות (Gilroy 1993:133). 'המסע לאמונה' והחזרה לאלוהים מתבטאים במונחים של נתיבי חזרה. שיבה לארץ והטיפוח של זהות ישראלית מקומית מוצגים כחזרה לשורשים.

אולם נתיבים ושורשים לבדם אינם מספיקים כדי להסביר גוונים ומתחים בתוך הקבוצה, או את יחסיה עם קבוצות התייחסות אחרות. מכאן נובע הצורך בדיון כיצד הנחקרים נושאים ונותנים על גבולות השיח והפרקטיקה של קהילתם. החזרה לזכות המולדת, הכוללת אישור או ביסוס מחדש של קשר הפרט עם עם ישראל ועם ייעודו הרוחני, מדגימה את המאבקים הכרוכים בחזרה אל גבולות ישראל השנויים במחלוקת מתמשכת, ואת תביעתם המחודשת להימצא בתוך גבולות אלה. לסיכום, 'זהות כמסע' המורכבת מנתיבים, שורשים ועיצוב גבולות הינה דגם מחקר מועיל המסייע לנו להבין טוב יותר את הנחקרים, לא כמהויות סטטיות מקובעות אלא, כסוכנים המקיימים דו-שיח חברתי בעל זיקה פוליטי.

השלכות

הבנה עמוקה יותר של מאבקי הזהות בקבוצת המחקר היא מטרה מכובדת בפני עצמה. בנוסף לכך, למחקר אנתרופולוגי אמפירי בן-זמננו ראשון מסוגו על יהודים משיחיים בישראל, קבוצת מיעוט קטנה בשולי החברה אך הולכת וגדלה, ישנן השלכות מתודולוגיות ותיאורטיות המשפיעות על דרך הבנתנו תופעות חברתיות רחבות יותר בכלל, ואת תחומי מחקר הזהות ומחקר הזהות היהודית בפרט.

השלכות מתודולוגיות

אחת התרומות של מחקר איכותני זה היא האתגר שהוא מציב בפני מתודולוגיות מחקר מתוקננות המשתמשות בקטגוריות שמרניות קבועות מראש למחקר של זהות יהודית. מחקרים רבים מבקשים למדוד זהות יהודית לפי רמות השמירה של מצוות דתיות, במקרים רבים באמצעות שאלונים אמריקאיים. מתודולוגיה זו מציגה גרסה ביותר של יהודיות המתבססת על סטנדרטים אורתודוקסיים. אולם זהות חיה אינה יכולה להיות תחומה באופן מלא ופורה באמצעות בחירה בין אופציות אחדות קבועות מראש; מתודולוגיה כזו אינה משכילה למקם פרקטיקה באתרי שיח

רלוונטיים. למעשה, מממצאי המחקר אנו למדים כי אילו נמדדה הייחודיות על פי מנהגים אורתודוקסיים בלבד, היו נחשבים רבים מהמשתתפים במחקר ליהודים למופת. מתודולוגיות יותר פתוחות המעודדות שיח ופרשנויות סובייקטיביים, משיגות ממצאים אמפיריים עשירים ורלוונטיים יותר, ועשויים לשפר מחקרים ופיתוח מדיניות בקהילה היהודית. בנוסף לכך, מתודולוגיות מגוונות תורמות לממצאים אמפיריים משמעותיים, מאוזנים ומדויקים יותר, בהקשרים ובנקודות התייחסות רחבים יותר.

השלכות תיאורטיות

הביקורות המשכנעות מבחינה אסתטית של בראיידוטי (Braidotti 1994) על השתרשות מתעמדות עם הדגמים של באומן (Bauman 1996) המתארים באופן מבהיל את הצד האפל של מסע בנתיבים ללא שורשים המאפיין זהות פוסט-מודרנית. לא שורשים ולא נתיבים הם מקור ההגמוניה או הפתרון לה. גם נאמנויות מרובות ואלטרנטיביות (Appadurai 1993; Mouffe 1994) אינן מובילות בהכרח לביסוס יחסים בלתי-אנטגוניסטיים. איזו קהילה אמפירית מייצגת במידה ניכרת נאמנויות אלטרנטיביות ובריתות מרובות, אם לא היהודים המשיחיים בישראל? למרות זאת, כפי שמוכיח דיו מחקרנו הנוכחי, לעתים קרובות הגמוניה משכפלת את עצמה באופן נמרץ בתוך קבוצות מיעוט שנדחקו לשולי החברה. אכן, קבוצות מיעוט שאינן משכילות להכיר בדינמיות החברתית של זהות – אפילו זהות אמונתית – אכן ימשיכו לשקף ולשכפל ביטויים הגמוניים, אידיאולוגיות ויחסי כוח של שולט-נשלט בתוך הקהילות שלהם ובכך יחניקו כל פוטנציאל יצירתי 'בלתי מיוסד' לממש סדר חברתי אלטרנטיבי ובלתי-אנטגוניסטי. מבלי להשיג יחסי גומלין, קיים סיכוי שהיהודים המשיחיים בישראל לא יצליחו לשחרר את עצמם מהגמוניות דתיות מערביות, ויסתפקו בהחלפת מקורות הכוח והמרות בגרסאות חדשות בתוך הקהילה (Bekerman 2004).

בלב מאמצי חוקרים למצוא אלטרנטיבות פוריות לבעיות של המודרניות המערבית, לא מצויה הדאגה לשורשיות או למסע של לאומיים, קולוניאליסטים, נשים או נוודים זרים, אלא חיפוש אחר דרך לעורר תודעה ביקורתית, 'מחשבת הנווד' הדלזיאנית (1985), קרי הפוטנציאל היצירתי לשינוי חברתי שלעתים קרובות עולה מחוויות של הידחקות לשולי החברה (Ben-Ari and Bilu 1997; Cohen 1997). במילים אחרות, חוקרים ביקורתיים מונועים, בין שאר הדברים, מיכולתו של ניתוח חברתי של קבוצות שוליים לתרום ליצירת תודעה (conscientization, Freire 1970) ושינוי חברתי הן ברמת המיקרו הן ברמת המאקרו.

הממצאים שלנו תומכים בכך שתודעה ביקורתית שנוצרת מהידחקות חברתית והדרה, יכולה לפתוח דלת לשינוי חברתי ולאפשרות ליחסים בלתי-הגמוניים ובלתי-אנטגוניסטים. יתרה מזאת, ניתוח חברתי משווה של מגוון צורות של 'חזון' בתוך קהילה נתונה ותהליך הזה-מיסטיפיקציה והדגמה של כלי שיח ביקורתיים, הינם דרכים באמצעותן חוקרים המחויבים לקהילה יכולים לסייע לעורר מודעות ביקורתית, התבוננות עצמית ודו-שיח בין קהילות ובין חברי הקהילה.

במידה זו או אחרת, מערערים הנחקרים על הסטטוס-קו החברתי-דתי. למרות מלחמת התרבות (Kulturkampf) הצפויה בתוך הקהילה, מציעים ממצאי המחקר הצעות רבות לפוטנציאל הדלזיאני היצירתי וה'בלתי מיוסד' של היהודי המשיחי בישראל לקרוא תגר ולשנות את המוסכמות ההגמוניות השולטות, על ידי הצגה של חלופות מעשיות

לפרקטיקה ושיח. בהתאם למגמה העכשווית אצל קבוצות מיעוט בישראל (Ben-Ari and Bilu 1997), חולקים היהודים המשיחיים על סמכות הממסד היהודי-דתי והממסד הישראלי-אזרחי לקבוע מיהו יהודי, וקוראים ליהודים ישראלים להכיר בסוגים אחרים של יהודים ויהודיות ולקבלם.

יתר על כן, כתוצאה מעצם ההפרה שמפרים היהודים המשיחיים את הסטטוס-קוו, הם מבליטים משא ומתן ודו-שיח על זהות, ומסייעים בכך לבסס את תיאוריית ההבניה החברתית שהיא עדיין חסרת בסיס אמפירי רחב. הם גם מזכירים לחוקרים חברתיים את האלימות ואת העיוות שנגרמות בכפיית הגדרות זהות אקסקלוסיביות על ידי שיתוף פעולה עם כוחות הגמוניים, לעומת ערעור ביקורתי עליהם.

כאן טמון הפוטנציאל של המחקר על קהילות שנדחקו על ידי ההגמוניה לקרן זוית בכלל, ועל היהודים המשיחיים הישראליים בפרט: לעורר תודעה ביקורתית על ידי חשיפתם של שיח, אידיאולוגיה ויחסי כוח, ואת מנגנוני השכפול שלהם המבנים הגמוניות שולטות. ובו בזמן הם מייצגים פרקטיקות יצירתיות כוללות יותר, הנבנות בדרכים חילופיות בדו-שיח חברתי, ואף לעתים בעלות זיקה לשלום.

SUMMARY

Returning to Their Own Borders

*A social anthropological study of contemporary
Messianic Jewish Identity in Israel*

ושבו בנים לגבולותיהם

מחקר אנתרופולוגי חברתי על זהות יהודית
משיחית בת זמננו בישראל

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Although no one seems quite able to agree upon who *is* a Jew, it is common knowledge that a Jew certainly *is not* a believer in Jesus (see for example, Ben-Rafael 1996:194). Faith in Yeshua (Jesus), like nothing else, places the Jew outside of the Jewish camp. However, during the Second Temple period, Jewish disciples of Yeshua were considered one among a sizeable assortment of contemporary Jewish sects (Yisrael 2000). After almost 2000 years of Jewish-Christian relations scarred by violence and animosity, there are Jews in Israel today who are seeking to come full circle, claiming that the divorce between Jews and faith in Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah is an insufferable historical transgression which must be remedied for the redemption of the Jewish people and the nations of the world. Israeli Messianic Jews contest and threaten to denature one of the most integral dichotomies and socially constitutive paradigms of the western world: Christian and Jew.

This paper explores the fascinating community of Messianic Jews comprised of Hebrew-speaking affiliated Israeli natives and North American immigrants, men and women, leaders and laypeople, residing in every region of the country, and reflecting the entire gamut of Jewish observance, from ultra-orthodox in Bnei Barak to “totally secular” on the Tel Aviv boardwalk. This dissertation is the first anthropological study of the sociocultural construction of identity among contemporary Israeli Messianic Jews.

Literature Review

The few social scientific studies conducted on contemporary Yeshua-Believing Jews by both in and out-group members, are either ethnographies focusing on specific groups (Feher 1998, Glick 1958, Harris-Shapiro 1992, 1999, Lipson 1980, 1990, Sobel 1974) or histories and descriptions of Jewish Believing leaders and organizations relying largely upon documentation (Cohn-Sherbok 2000, Fleischer 1996, Nerel 1996, Stanfield 1996).

The limited social scientific study of Messianic Jews has been dominated by a few sociologists, anthropologists and theologians whose works were conscripted by social or political agendas that have little to do with Jewish Believers themselves. The literature review opens with an analysis of how the most common approach to the writing of Messianic Jewish historiography serves as a mechanism for the repression of its subjects and the relative empowerment of the non-Yeshua-Believing Jews who fund and execute such research. Examples include Harris-Shapiro (1992, 1999), the Reconstructionist rabbi working to exclude Messianics and include her movement within her ideal boundaries of normative Judaism; Cohn-Sherbok (2000) reimagining Reform Judaism as the central anchor of a normative Judaism which includes Messianics on the one end and Humanists on the other; Sobel (1974) attempting to reassure hysterical Jewish parents of 1970's America that their children's encounter with Jesus is a passing, albeit pathological fad; and Lipson (1980, 1990) arguing that active faith in Jesus can be therapeutic for socially marginalized Jews.

Alternatively, Wasserman's (2000) theological evaluation of American, and to a far lesser extent, Israeli Messianic Judaism, denies any spiritual significance of the Jewish identity of Jewish Yeshua-Believers, and promotes the mission "contextualization" approach of adopting culturally Jewish practices which imitate local normative Jewish trends for evangelistic purposes only, rather than regarding Jewish Believers as a prophetic spiritual vanguard to lead their people back to "authentic" sources, as widely promoted in Messianic Jewish literature and teaching. All of these studies tend to objectify Yeshua-Believing Jews and subordinate them to the researchers' sociopolitical agendas, presenting a purposefully edited, abridged, rather homogenous and generally denigrating "exposé" of the other.

In light of the history of scholarship on Messianic Jews, this dissertation adopts a critical perspective which attempts to reveal and deconstruct ideologies and power structures involved in the construction of Messianic Jewish identity. Recognizing that every definition of a social group necessarily draws lines between members and others, the right of subjects to define themselves receives due emphasis, as well as the professional obligation of researchers to refrain from imposing taken-for-granted definitions which serve reigning social hegemonies.

Theory

This research is based on a phenomenological approach which seeks to critically represent Yeshua-Believing Jewish identity through the discourse and praxis of those who construct and live it. At the same time, since identity is constructed through social interaction, the emic perspective represented in this work also offers a critical alternative to hegemonic (Israeli) Jewish and Christian identities. This alternative approach to classic religious and nationalistic western identities can aid researchers in their critical work of deconstructing social reality and representing new and non-oppressive social identity options.

The theories of Ann Swidler (1986) and Deborah Holland (1998) which respectively compare culture to a “tool box” and to “living tools”, as well as Sherry Ortner’s theory of cultural schemas (1990), serve to emphasize the fluidity of social identity as well as the limited role of agency in identity construction. People are described exercising agency in a way similar to the process of weaving; the agent continually brings different threads of discourse and weaves them, usually through creative narrativity, into a viable fabric. The result is a variety of individuals who each identify themselves as Messianic Jews in various, partially shared and continuously developing ways.

Empirically grounded ethnographic research necessarily mitigates extreme versions of constructivist theory by revealing discursive practices, rather than reified discourse (Holland 1997). Bakhtin’s politically attuned concept of heteroglossia (1999) reveals how competing discourses are assigned different and changing social values. Similarly, Joan Nagel’s (1994) identity “layering” illustrates that individual choice of ideals, values and strategies from a cultural “tool box” largely depends upon their suitability and efficacy in any given social context.

Bourdieu's *doxa* (1977) describes how hegemony works to prevent social change in order to preserve reigning power structures, and the political struggle that ensues as a result of conflicting interests for and against change. Swidler's concept of "cultural retooling", which describes periods in which old cultural "tools" no longer sufficiently serve people, helps explain how despite limitations on agency, social change does take place, and at what costs.

These theories and others (such as the definition of Jewish authenticity by Stuart Charmé (2000) and Mary Douglas' analyses of "natural" symbols (1970a) and witchcraft accusations (1970b), inform our discussion of the historical struggle within Jewish and Christian communities alike to exclude Jewish Believers in Yeshua who threaten foundational principles of western religious hegemony. These same theories equip our analysis of social identity construction and its accompanying political struggles within the Israeli Messianic Jewish community itself.

Methodology

The three methodologies utilized in this research, in-depth interviews, participant observation and textual analysis, help to focus the discussion of identity on words and actions, rather than upon essentialist definitions. The primary methodology of our study is the semi-structured in-depth interview based on qualitative ethnographic principles (Spradley 1979, Fontana & Frey 1994, 2000). Sixty in-depth interviews, ranging from 1.5 to 3.5 hours each, were conducted with affiliated members of Hebrew-speaking Jewish Believing congregations throughout Israel, in Hebrew or English. Efforts were made to interview the widest variety of Messianic Jews from diverse congregations, primarily using the snowball method (Stake 2000). The researcher also developed a carefully balanced sampling of men and women, laypeople and leaders, Israeli-born or socialized and North American immigrants, from each major region of the country, thus representing a broad spectrum of congregations. The interviews focused loosely upon a number of central issues without imposing a preconceived script (Shkedi & Horenczyk 1995), encouraging participants to tell about their journey into Messianic Judaism, and to express their views regarding the practice, boundaries, group perceptions, conflicts, visions and dreams related to their lives as Jewish Believers. All interviews were recorded and carefully transcribed verbatim, after which analysis of the texts followed the

principles of “grounded theory” (Strauss & Corbin 1990), in which analytical categories emerge from the empirical material.

This research, extending over a period of eight years, includes a wide variety of participant observations: weekly and holiday congregational services, worship and prayer sessions, lifecycle celebrations, family gatherings, home meetings, fellowship times, women’s prayer and fellowship meetings, national conferences, Arab Christian – Messianic Jewish reconciliation meetings, bar/bat mitzvah lessons and celebrations, children’s classes and activities, outreach events, multi-media concerts and performances, and more.

The third empirical methodology used is emic literature analysis, also based upon the principles of “grounded theory”. Emic texts analyzed for this research include: published books, pamphlets and articles in Israeli Messianic periodicals; study curricula from adult education programs; song lyrics; translated western Christian literature; e-newsletters, e-articles, e-flyers announcing local Messianic Israeli events, internet site postings, fundraising and forums; and a series of critical, self-reflexive essays and creative writing projects assigned to Messianic Israeli students from a college course which the researcher taught on Israeli Messianic Jewish identity. Additionally, American Messianic Jewish texts were analyzed, constituting the other side of an ongoing dialogue between Israeli and American Jewish Believers. These sources include inspirational literature, books, pamphlets, articles, song lyrics, internet postings, fundraising drives and advertisements. The two communities interface not only through a variety of media, but also through the immigration of North American Jewish Believers to Israel, their integration with the Hebrew-speaking Israeli Believing community, and the continual back and forth travel between the two sites of America and Israel.

Background

Due to a series of political, economic and religious changes primarily in the west from the Enlightenment onward, the three-stranded cord of Jewish faith, culture and nation began to unravel (Neusner 1987). Jewishness began to surface as any protean combination of the three, making room for a variety of Jewish self-definition paradigms (Cohen 1999). These historical changes to the reigning paradigm of who is a Jew, and the

rise of secular Zionism, Christian missions to the Jews and Christian Zionism are major factors which contributed to the emergence of Hebrew Christianity in the 19th Century, and to the later development of Messianic Judaism.

As the boundaries of who is a Jew became increasingly porous, a Jew believing in Yeshua became more of a social reality, though perceived as a violation of one of Judaism's most fundamental and constitutive taboos. Even more egregious, such Jewish Yeshua-Believers increasingly began to identify themselves as Jews, rejecting the medieval standard of conversion to Christianity and the requisite cutting of all ties to the Jewish people. The Believer's decision to reject this normative expectation and to choose to "remain Jewish", by definition, challenges normative Jewish concepts regarding who or what is or is not Jewish or Christian. Yet if as a Jew one does not have to convert to a Gentile Christianity, how then should one practice a faith whose vast majority of known practitioners have been Gentiles for the past 1600 years? Thus Yeshua-Believing Jews also began to revise the practice of faith in Yeshua during the 19th and 20th centuries in an attempt to bring it home to a Jewish context.

Secular Zionism and the eventual rise of the Jewish nation-state also greatly impacted the development of Messianic Jewish identity, particularly through the rejection of Judaism, the redefinition of Jewishness as Israeli nationalism, and the European romantic notion of rebirth through love of the land. Secular Zionism often constructed Judaism as its *Doppelgänger*, a ghostly remnant of Diaspora life to be displaced by Zionist ideology, culture and commune in the Homeland, beginning the secular process of healing and restoration of the Jewish people. In fact, the Israeli was called the "New Hebrew Man", a secular attempt at the rebirth of the Hebrew nation (Zerubavel 1995:21). The Hebrew Scriptures became a map and textbook to orient returning Jews in their ancestral land (Almog 1997:254, Hebrew), and to equip them in the reestablishment of an authentic agrarian society, turning the clock back to a pre-Diaspora, pre-rabbinic biblical golden age. With the establishment of the State, the Israeli Zionist movement transformed into a cult of nationalism, a civil religion.

Lastly, the Protestant Christian mission and Christian Zionists form an additional and ongoing community of influence for Israeli Jewish Believers. Like secular Zionists, the Protestant mission rejected the efficacy of the works-related religion of Judaism as the

key to the spiritual or national salvation of the Jewish people. Christian Zionists also saw in Zionism early signs of the return of the Jewish exiles prophesied in Scripture, preceding the imminent return of the Messiah to reign as king from Jerusalem. As a result, pro-Israel Christians are supportive of the return of the Jewish exiles to the land, but often simultaneously reject their Jewish culture and faith practice. The mission has bequeathed this embrace of *Aliyah* and Jewish nationalism and simultaneous rejection of Jewish discourse and praxis to much of the indigenous body of Jewish Believers in Israel through heavily-financed, mission-founded congregations, children's programs, literature, discipleship and teaching.

The dominant thread throughout the dissertation is the struggle of Messianic Jews to come to terms both theoretically and practically with what it means to be a Jew who believes in Yeshua in light of the sociopolitical development of the concepts of Jew and Jewishness, and the influence of the ideals, values and practice of secular Jewish and Christian Zionists, and the Protestant mission.

Findings

The research findings open with a brief lexicon and introduction to the multivocality of Israeli Messianic Jewish discourse. The Israeli Jewish Believing community on the whole has become sensitized to the ideological and political constructedness of language, its social contingency and quiescent layers of meanings; its multivalency to include and exclude people and praxis; and its potential for policing and crossing borders. The liminal position of Yeshua-Believing Jews fosters a cross-cultural polyglot fluency facilitating communication with vastly different reference groups (orthodox non-Believing Jews, evangelical Christians, secular Israelis, etc.). This same social liminality positions Israeli Messianic Jews to more consciously reify or subvert reigning hegemonic religious discourses.

Chapter six, "The reader's road map", develops an analytical model for Israeli Messianic Jewish identity and explains the layout of the findings. Identity is approached as travel – routes, roots and borders – by both the subjects and the researcher. Israeli Yeshua-Believing Jews are shown to narrate their identity as a returning to Zion, their tri-fold source and destination. They describe rerouting themselves toward the God of Israel, re-rooting in the land and re-defining the borders of their birthright.

Chapter seven addresses routes as the first leg of Messianic Jewish identity-as-travel, commencing with a journey which culminates in a professed faith in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel. From this point onward, what began as a spiritual quest is retold as a metaphysical returning to God. Hegemonic Jewish and Christian discourses employ a linear narrative construct of the faith journey to imply that a definitive rupture occurs when a Jew “comes to faith”: he disavows his Jewishness and crosses over to Christianity. Whereas, the empirical structure of Israeli Jewish Believing faith journey narratives reveals a spiral course of returning to Zion, a continuity rather than a rupture. The empirical findings call into question why, despite the spiral construct of the Messianic Jewish faith journey narrative, some Jewish Believers nonetheless choose at times to invoke a hegemonic linear interpretation of “conversion” – newness rather than renewal – which seemingly denies their unique ongoing identity as Jews. Findings suggest that the use of the linear “conversion” narrative forms part of a larger antinomian and anti-rabbinic Jewish Believing discourse, which envisions a rupture upon coming to faith, after which the Yeshua-Believing Jew breaks from Judaism and perceives himself as a Jew only in an ethnic or national (Israeli) rather than a spiritual sense.

Identity as roots, in Chapter eight, examines the second leg of identity-as-travel through Israeli Jewish Believing visions and challenges of indigeneity, independence and cultural relevance. The chapter explores how Israeli Yeshua-Believing Jews endeavor to return to the “true” roots of their faith in the land through Yeshua, in light of the ongoing influences of secular Israeli culture, the Protestant mission, Christian Zionism and western consumer colonialism. An interesting cultural schema precipitates from the narratives in which Israeli Messianic Jewish discourse and praxis are measured by the slow, organic standard of the tree. Do they resemble the barren, uprooted, ephemeral, commercialized Christmas tree, entirely out of place in the heart of Israel? Or, do they liken themselves to the olive tree, whose roots dig deep into Israeli soil, enduring droughts and wars, drawing from and replenishing indigenous resources, slowly but surely reclaiming the barren wastelands, and providing oil for Israel and the nations?

Lastly, Israeli Jewish Believing identity is examined through the metaphor of borders and border work. Chapter nine focuses on how Israeli Yeshua-Believing Jews struggle to reclaim and restore their birthright. The first sub-chapter examines a strategy of temporal return in the construction of a uniquely Messianic Jewish historiography to inform the

“restoration” of a contemporary Jewish Believing identity. Following sub-chapters detail the three most prominent identity border struggles in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community.

The first collective border struggle over the birthright, involves the question of Messianic Jewish subjectivity, that is, whether Jewish Believers must submit themselves to hegemonic discourses of the Jewish and Christian establishments, or whether they can and should subjectively define a distinctly Messianic Jewish discourse.

The second dispute involves the struggle for theological autonomy to establish a unique Jewish Believing praxis in Israel. The struggle for autonomy brings into question Yeshua-Believing Jewish relations with larger Jewish and Believing (Gentile Christian) groups. On the one hand is the hegemonic argument that a Believer’s Messianic and Jewish identities should be segregated, maintaining a hierarchical or dichotomous relationship, practically expressed through a spiritual segregation from the Jewish community and simultaneous integration into the “universal” body of Believers. On the other hand is the Messianic Jewish challenge to strive for an integration of body, soul and spirit in one unique Messianic-Jewish identity, and at the same time, whenever possible, integration with the non-Messianic Jewish and non-Jewish Messianic communities at large.

The third and last dispute involves the issue of spiritual authority. Here the research subjects’ discourse emerges as a Foucault-inspired *Kampffplatz* (battlefield), observed in translations and doctrinal formulations, as community members struggle over discourse, theology and power relationships. The struggle over spiritual authority includes an hegemonic strategy of conflating christology with issues of Jewish observance, associating Judaic faith practices with heretical doctrines in a hegemonic effort to repress Jewish observance. Yet some community members also display heterodox efforts to resist and subvert reigning religious hegemonies, in an attempt to revive and restore Messianic Jewish spiritual authority over Israel and the nations.

Discussion

The discussion opens with five strategies of action, previously mentioned in the Theory section of the Introduction, that are employed to preserve an essentially antinomian hegemony within the Israeli Messianic community. The first strategy defines Jewishness

as a “natural” ethnicity or nationality, rather than a spiritual identity. As Mary Douglas (1970a) elaborates, this strategy is based upon perception of the spirit(ual) as detached from and warring with the body. Concern with the Law of Moses, good works or rabbinic halacha is interpreted not only as an unnecessary effort; it is quite simply conceived to be the dichotomous opposite of “true” spirituality, defined as Yeshua-centered, grace-based faith. Figures who invoke this reasoning construct themselves as the defenders/crusaders of religious purity against an onslaught of impure and spiritually destructive concerns of the flesh.

The second strategy, elaborated upon in principle in Stuart Charmé’s article on Jewish authenticity (2000), claims that Jewish Believers who persist in their pursuit of Jewish faith expression are in-authentic, “putting on a Jewish show” and perhaps trying to prove that they are something which they are not, hinting at possible moral turpitude, instability or insecurity. This strategy assumes that such Messianic Jews are taking on elements of another, alien culture, which conflicts with their own. In other words, Jewish religious culture is framed as the dangerous, errant *other*. Furthermore, there is an unstated assumption that orthodox Judaism holds sole proprietorship on observance, and therefore that all use of Jewish practice must be monologically subordinated to orthodox convention. Since the research subjects’ use of Jewish elements is often partial and unorthodox, according to the hegemonic paradigm, such use is interpreted as a reflection of ignorance and incompetence. In other words, the authenticity strategy promotes the idea of identity as an essence, in this case, as some essential whole of rabbinic Judaism that one has to both master and to which one must fully submit before venturing to practice at all, in effect dismissing the whole idea of Jewish observance as an unattainable striving from the start.

A third strategy against Messianic Jewish heterodoxy is cooptation, as understood in the work of Carolyn Dean (1999). Dean describes how Spanish Christian conquerors coopted Andean religious discourse and practice, retaining indigenous forms while replacing the content with Christian meanings. The resulting syncretic religious expression was essentially an extension of Spanish political conquest through the conversion of the local culture into a variation of Spanish Catholicism. In a similar fashion, the religious hegemony of the research group adopts a mild dosage of Messianic Jewish discourse and practice, while rejecting and replacing its substantive content, in an

attempt to control and convert heterodox discourse. Adopting Messianic Jewish lingo and practice to a limited extent effectually blunts the cutting edge of the heterodox discourse by using it so universally that it loses its particularistic edge. Rather than subversively encouraging Believers to challenge the status quo in faith discourse and praxis, it gives them the sense of being fresh, up-to-date, politically-correct and united, all the while insuring ongoing submission to the same hegemonic structures.

Fourthly, in Israeli Believing culture, spirituality is most often associated first and foremost with submission to hegemonic religious discourse and praxis, which involves a rejection to some degree or other of Old Covenant commandment observance in one's service to God. Just as with the challenge of any other hegemonic strategy of action, when dominant articulations of "spirituality" are challenged, the challengers are perceived as "unspiritual" deviants or "weak" in their faith, because quite logically they deviate in some way from the dominant concepts and articulations of spirituality (Boyarin 2004, Gager 1992). Furthermore, should such heterodox efforts involve sophisticated explanation, study or embodied praxis, they are rejected as "carnal", versus the hegemonic discourse, which often goes without saying (or study or consciously embodied observance), and is therefore "spiritual".

Fifth and most proscriptive of the strategies is the heresy accusation, as elaborated upon in the work of Mary Douglas on witchcraft accusations (1970b). When the argument of the "unspirituality" of heterodoxy is no longer convincing, heresy accusations may be employed as a last stand in order to restore and maintain hegemonic status quo at the expense of ongoing relationships. Thus, heterodoxy is acknowledged as a "bad", but nonetheless "spiritual" phenomenon, and rejected as heresy. An accusation of heresy imposes clearly defined borders on social relations, elevates hegemonic goals, and significantly reduces heterodox competition by banning the accused (or implied) "heretics" from fellowship within the hegemonically delimited community.

After exploring the heterodox response to the above five emic strategies of hegemonic control and exclusion, the paper concludes that without true, non-axiomatic dialogue among Israeli Messianic Jews as a precursor to true unity, the indigenous community will continue to reproduce the same exclusive ideologies and power structures of domination and subordination (Bekerman 2005) that have historically plagued out-group and in-group relations.

The discussion goes on to examine if Israeli Messianic Jews are simply a half-breed on the road to assimilation into Gentile Christianity (Glick 1958), or whether there are signs of a distinct Messianic Jewish modality which may persist across generations. It is posited that those Jewish Believers who hold to an antinomian Israeli Messianism are more likely to lose their Jewish identity over time should they leave the country, and are more open to intermarry with Gentile Christians should they remain. From their environments of practice it is unlikely that these Believers will produce subsequent generations with a significant sense of commitment to Jewish ideas, values, strategies of action or continuity. It is suggested that Yeshua-Believing Jews who have only strong memories and sentiments associated with a cultural Jewish identity, but who do not engage in social environments of Jewish practice, lay shaky foundations for Jewish generational continuity.

Nonetheless, the three border struggles analyzed in chapter nine of the findings point to a struggle within the researched community over discursive subjectivity, theological autonomy and spiritual authority. It is these border struggles that contour the emergence of a distinct Messianic Jewish modality amidst the streams of orthodox Jews, secular Jewish Zionists, Protestant Christian Zionists and missionaries in Israel. Furthermore, one of the emergent modality's strengths is its maintenance of dynamic tension between total segregation from and complete assimilation into the larger Jewish and "Messianic" communities in the land and abroad.

The third and last section of the discussion examines the efficacy of the paper's analytical model of identity-as-travel. The tri-pronged "returning" described by the research subjects to God, the land and their birthright, is examined through the paradigms of routes, roots and borders. Israeli Messianic Jews provide a unique case study of the complimentary tension between routes and roots in identity discourse and praxis (Gilroy 1993:133). The "journey to faith" and returning to God are articulated in terms of returning routes. Returning to the land and the cultivation of indigenous Israeli identity are framed as returning to one's roots. *En route*, the native is not incarcerated in his homeland (Appadurai 1986), yet neither is he homeless upon returning to his roots (Gedalof 2000).

However routes and roots alone do not sufficiently model in-group diversity and tension or relations with reference groups. Hence the need to discuss how Israeli Messianic Jews

negotiate the discursive and practical borders of their community. Returning to the birthright, which encompasses a reaffirming or reestablishment of the individual's connection with the people and spiritual calling of Israel, illustrates the struggles involved in returning to and reclaiming the ever-disputed physical and sociocultural borders of Israel as their own. In conclusion, identity-as-travel, consisting of routes, roots and border work, is a fruitful research model to help us better understand people, not as static embodied essences, but as socially-interactive, politically-contingent, discursive subjects.

Implications

As the first contemporary anthropological study of Messianic Jews in Israel, a small, but growing marginalized minority in Israeli society, a deeper understanding of the identity struggles of this ethno-religious group is a valuable research goal in and of itself. Additionally, there are methodological and theoretical implications from this empirical study that impact our understanding of broader social phenomena, and more specifically, the fields of identity and Jewish identity research.

Methodological Implications

One contribution of this qualitative research is its challenge of standardized research methods that employ predetermined, orthodox categories for the study of Jewish identity. Many contemporary studies seek to measure Jewish identity according to levels of religious observance, often through closed-question questionnaires. This methodology presents an extremely narrow version of Jewishness, based upon orthodox standards. Yet lived identity cannot be fully and fruitfully delimited through predetermined multiple choice; such a methodology fails to situate praxis in relevant discursive sites. In fact, from the research findings we see that if specific practices or degrees of practice were the primary measure of Jewishness, many Messianic Jews would achieve the category of '*Jew par excellence*'. More open methodologies which allow for subjective discursive and practical interpretations, yield far richer and more critically relevant empirical findings to better inform Jewish community research and policymaking. Additionally, multiple methodologies contribute to thicker, more balanced, and more finely-tuned empirical findings from a wider variety of contexts and perspectives.

Theoretical Implications

Braidotti's (1994) aesthetically compelling critiques of rootedness contrast with Bauman's (1996) models of postmodern identity that alarmingly illustrate the dark side of rootless routedness. Neither roots nor routes are the source of or solution to hegemony. Alternative and multiple allegiances (Appadurai 1993, Mouffe 1994) also do not necessarily lead to the establishment of non-antagonistic relations. Which empirical community considerably demonstrates alternative devotions and a broad range of allegiances, if not Israeli Messianic Jews? Nonetheless, as our present study amply illustrates, hegemony is often urgently reproduced *within* socially marginalized minority groups. Indeed, minority groups which fail to acknowledge the social dynamics of identity – even faith identity – will continue to mirror and reproduce hegemonic idioms, ideologies and dominant-subordinate power relations within their community, stifling any “unsettled” creative potential to realize alternative, non-antagonistic social orders. Without reaching dialogic relations, Israeli Messianic Jews may not succeed in emancipating themselves from western religious hegemonies from without, merely exchanging their sources of domination and subordination for in-group versions of the above (Bekerman 2004).

At the heart of scholarly efforts to find fruitful alternatives to problems of western modernity does not lie concern with hegemonically imposed rootedness or routedness of nationals, colonials, women or nomadic strangers, but the search for how to stimulate critical consciousness, Deleuzian “nomad thought” (1985), the creative potential for social change that often emerges from experiences of marginalization (Ben-Ari & Bilu 1997, Cohen 1997). In other words, critical researchers are motivated, among other things, by the potential of the social analysis of marginalized groups to contribute to conscientization (Freire 1970) and social change, on both the macro- and micro-social levels.

Our findings support that critical consciousness, born of marginalization and exclusion, can open the door to social change toward potentially non-antagonistic, non-hegemonic relations. Furthermore, comparative social analysis of the variety of discursive “visions” within a given community, and the demystification and modeling of critical discursive tools, are ways that communally-engaged researchers may help stimulate critical consciousness, reflexivity and dialogue between communities and among community members.

Israeli Yeshua-Believing Jews are all to differing degrees protesting and challenging the western socio-religious status quo. Despite the expected *Kulturkampf* within the community, the research findings offer many glimpses of the creative “unsettled” Deleuzian potential of the research subjects to challenge and transform reigning hegemonic conventions by presenting viable practical and discursive alternatives. Concurring with a contemporary trend of Israeli minority groups (Ben Ari & Bilu 1997), Messianic Jews in Israel are controverting the authority of the religious Jewish and civil Israeli establishments to determine who is a Jew, and advocating that it is both legitimate and right for Israeli Jews to acknowledge and include other types of Jews and Judaisms.

Furthermore, by upsetting the status quo, Messianic Jews render identity negotiation and dialogue all the more visible, helping to ground social constructivist theory, which currently lacks a broad empirical base. They also remind research practitioners of the violence and distortion incurred by collaborating with, rather than challenging, reigning hegemonic forces in imposing exclusive identity definitions.

Herein lies the research potential of hegemonically marginalized communities in general, and Israeli Messianic Jews in particular: to stimulate critical consciousness, revealing the socially constructed discourse, ideology and power structures, and their mechanisms for reproduction, which constitute reigning hegemonies, while at the same time presenting creative, alternatively-constructed, at times far more inclusive and peaceful practices.

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Abstract

Israeli Messianic Jews contest and threaten to denature one of the most integral dichotomies and socially constitutive paradigms of the western world: Christian and Jew. This dissertation is the first anthropological study of the sociocultural construction of identity in the fascinating community of contemporary Israeli Jewish Believers in Yeshua (Jesus). The dominant thread throughout the paper is the struggle of Messianic Jews to come to terms both theoretically and practically with what it means to be a Jew who believes in Yeshua in light of the sociopolitical development of the concepts of Jew and Jewishness, and the influence of the ideals, values and practice of secular Jewish and Christian Zionists, and the Protestant mission.

The three methodologies utilized in this research, in-depth interviews, participant observation and textual analysis, help to focus the discussion of identity on phenomenological discourse and practice, rather than upon essentialist definitions. This qualitative approach also challenges the employment of narrow, predetermined categories for the study of Jewish identity, common in standardized research methods, due to their failure to situate praxis in relevant discursive sites. If orthodox practice were the only measure of Jewishness, many Messianic Jews would be considered Jews *par excellence*. As the findings indicate, more open and varied methodologies which allow for subjective discursive interpretations, yield far richer and more critically relevant empirical data to better inform Jewish community research and policymaking.

An analytical model of identity-as-travel which emerged from the narratives, consisting of routes, roots and border work, provides a helpful theoretical framework to better understand subjects not as static embodied essences, but as socially interacting, politically-contingent discursive subjects. In their interviews, Israeli Messianic Jews describe re-routing themselves toward the God of Israel, re-rooting in the land and re-defining the borders of their birthright. Narratives concerning returning to the birthright, which entail a reaffirming or reestablishment of the subject's connection with the people and spiritual calling of Israel, highlight the out-group and in-group struggles involved in reclaiming the ever-disputed borders of Israel as their own.

The discussion isolates five strategies of action employed to preserve an essentially antinomian, anti-rabbinic hegemony within the Israeli Messianic community, illustrating that hegemonic relations can be urgently reproduced within the internal social structure of socially marginalized minority groups. One theoretical implication of this research is that minority groups which fail to acknowledge the social dynamics of identity and to achieve dialogic relations, will likely continue to mirror and reproduce exclusive hegemonic discourse and dominant-subordinate power

relations within their community (Bekerman 2004), stifling any “unsettled” Deleuzian (1985) potential for change on the micro- and macro-social levels.

The paper also discusses whether Israeli Messianic Jews are simply a half-breed on the road to assimilation into Gentile Christianity (Glick 1958), or if there are signs of a distinct Messianic Jewish modality which may persist across generations. It is posited that those Jewish Believers who inhabit antinomian, anti-rabbinic environments of practice risk entire loss of Jewish identity should they leave the country, are more open to intermarry with Gentile Christians should they remain, and appear less likely to produce subsequent generations with a significant sense of commitment to Jewish ideas, values, strategies of action or continuity. It is suggested that first generation cultural Jewish sentiments and memories, without second generation engagement in social environments of Jewish discourse and practice, form a shaky foundation for Jewish generational continuity. Nonetheless, three identity border struggles analyzed in the findings contour the emergence of a distinct Messianic Jewish modality from within the community, revealing a self-conscious struggle for an independent Israeli Messianic Jewish discursive subjectivity, theological autonomy and spiritual authority. This modality simultaneously maintains dynamic tension between total segregation from and complete assimilation into the larger Jewish and “Messianic” communities in the land and abroad.

At the same time, all Israeli Messianic Jews are to differing degrees protesting and challenging the western socio-religious status quo. Concurring with a contemporary trend of Israeli minority groups (Ben-Ari & Bilu 1997), Messianic Jews in Israel are controverting the authority of the religious Jewish and civil Israeli establishments to determine who is a Jew, and advocating for Israeli Jews to acknowledge and include other types of Jews and Judaisms. Despite the expected mirroring of western hegemonic discourse and the *Kulturkampf* within the community, this research offers many glimpses of the creative “unsettled” agency of the marginalized Israeli Messianic Jew to challenge and transform reigning hegemonic conventions by presenting dialogically-constructed discursive and practical alternatives.

Introduction

Although no one seems quite able to agree upon who *is* a Jew, it is common knowledge that a Jew certainly *is not* a believer in Jesus (see for example, Ben-Rafael 1996:194). Faith in Yeshua (Jesus), like nothing else, places the Jew outside of the Jewish camp. However, during the Second Temple period, Jewish disciples of Yeshua were considered one among a sizeable assortment of contemporary Jewish sects (Yisrael 2000). After almost 2000 years of Jewish-Christian relations scarred by violence and animosity, there are Jews in Israel today who are seeking to come full circle, claiming that the divorce between Jews and faith in Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah is an insufferable historical transgression which must be remedied for the redemption of the Jewish people and the nations of the world. Israeli Messianic Jews contest and threaten to denature one of the most integral dichotomies and socially constitutive paradigms of the western world: Jew versus Christian.

This dissertation explores the fascinating community of Messianic Jews comprised of Hebrew-speaking affiliated Israeli natives and North American immigrants, men and women, leaders and laypeople, residing in every region of the country, and reflecting the entire gamut of Jewish observance, from ultra-orthodox in Bnei Barak to “totally secular” on the Tel Aviv boardwalk. It is the first anthropological study of the sociocultural construction of identity among contemporary Israeli Messianic Jews.

Chapter one

LITERATURE ON MESSIANIC JEWS

According to historian John Gager (1992:253), in the first century of the common era, there were Jews, Christians, and “the dangerous ones in between”. The very existence of Messianic Jews, the undesirable *tertium quid*, threatened the construction of a clean, mutually exclusive, hegemonic religious dichotomy. Daniel Boyarin, in his deconstruction of the “imagined frontier between Judaism and Christianity” warns, “much human violence is generated simply by resisting the fuzziness of our own categories of sociocultural division... just as certain entities can be tall and short given different perspectives, so too can certain people or groups be Christian or Jewish from different perspectives, or both. Indeed, the determination itself will be a matter of contention” (Boyarin 2004:1,25). Two thousand years later, Messianic Jews continue to disturb comfortable, clean-cut western dichotomies, while religious leaders and scholars continue to contend over who they are and exactly what to do with them.

Israeli Messianic Jewish in-group processes of collective introspection have been primarily enacted through theological debates, discussions of history and politics, or practical and theological struggles over commemorative forms appropriate to the collective memory. In recent years, there have also been efforts towards employing psychological tools to foster self-understanding and provide professional counseling within the community¹.

The few social scientific studies conducted on contemporary Messianic Jews by both in and out-group members, are either ethnographies focusing on specific groups (Feher 1998; Glick 1958; Harris-Shapiro 1992, 1999; Lipson 1980, 1990; Sobel 1974) or histories and descriptions of Messianic Jewish leaders and organizations relying largely upon documentation (Cohn-Sherbok 2000; Fleischer 1996; Nerel 1996; Stanfield 1996). The rest of the available literature is, for the most part, either theological or inspirational (see for example, Berkowitz 1996; Friedman 1970; Rausch 1982; Rudolph 1998). One recent study (Kjaer-Hansen & Skjott 1999) conducted by a Christian study institute located in Jerusalem, surveys Messianic Jewish congregations in Israel according to certain theological and sociocultural parameters primarily concerning congregational organization and group practices, based on a narrow closed-question interview conducted with leaders. It provides statistics on the content of services,

¹ Based on personal conversations during the years 2003-2007 with four Israeli Messianic psychologists and professional counselors.

various beliefs and practices officially recognized by the group, and rough statistical information on attendees, but does not reflect the everyday life, opinions, decisions and identity struggles of the individual Messianic Jew in context.

The limited academic study of Messianic Jews has been dominated by a few sociologists, anthropologists and theologians whose works are conscripted by social or political agendas that have little to do with Messianic Jews themselves. Examples include Harris-Shapiro (1992, 1999), the Reconstructionist rabbi working to exclude Messianics and include her movement within her ideal boundaries of normative Judaism; Cohn-Sherbok (2000) reimagining Reform Judaism as the central anchor of a normative Judaism which includes both Messianics and Humanists; Sobel (1974) attempting to reassure hysterical Jewish parents of 1970's America that their children's encounter with Jesus is a passing, albeit pathological fad; and Lipson (1980, 1990) arguing that active faith in Jesus can be therapeutic for the socially marginalized. Alternatively, Wasserman's (2000) theological evaluation of American and to a far lesser extent Israeli Messianic Judaism, denies any spiritual significance of the Jewish identity of Messianic Jews, and promotes the mission "contextualization" approach of adopting culturally Jewish practices which imitate local normative Jewish trends for evangelistic purposes only, rather than regarding Messianic Jews as a prophetic spiritual vanguard to lead their people back to "authentic" sources, as widely promoted in Messianic Jewish literature and teaching. All of these studies tend to objectify Messianic Jews and subordinate them to the researchers' sociopolitical agendas, presenting a purposefully edited, abridged and often rather homogenous Messianic Jewish "phenomenon".

Some of the academic publications are needlessly patronizing and denigrating to the Messianic Jewish subjects. For example, Sobel (1974:116), who admittedly impersonated an individual earnestly seeking faith in order to gain entrance to a small Hebrew Christian fellowship, takes the 'stupid native approach', claiming to know the "fact" and "truth" about Hebrew Christians of which they themselves are putatively unaware. He goes so far as to categorize Jewish Believers² as Jewish anti-Semites, "The Jewish anti-Semite, and specifically the Hebrew Christian..." (1974:103). Writing as a professor of sociology, Sobel assumes curious theological license declaring that Hebrew Christianity "is in no way Jewish except insofar as the refutation of Judaism assumes a heightened central role in the explication and structuring

² The emic (in-group) term "Believer" with a capital "B" is used throughout the paper to specifically refer to any individual who believes in and claims to follow the teachings of Yeshua (Jesus), except in cases of quoted material where the author uses the small-case "believer"; all quoted texts are left in their original format.

of the participants' Christian faith" (Sobel 1974:83), and again, "The members, it must be remembered, are intensely committed to the *fiction* that they are still Jews..." (Sobel 1974:97).

Likewise, throughout her ethnography, Feher (1998) attempts to reveal hidden "Christian" practices according to her theologically unsupported and academically unproblematic assumptions regarding Judaism and Christianity. Her work consistently adheres to a general assumption that anyone or anything having to do with Yeshua is necessarily "Christian", without a critical discussion regarding the meaning of this term or the political significance of her approach. Among other things, Feher (1998:20) claims that Messianic Jews have "eliminated elements of Christian worship that can't be directly linked to Jewish roots," implying, without substantiation, that Messianic Jews are in some vague manner fundamentally related to and knowledgeable concerning an unspecified body of Christian worship, from which they consciously eliminate elements lacking Jewish roots, ostensibly to create their Judaized version of Christianity. At the same time, Feher employs terminology explicitly offensive to her subjects, such as "converts", "converted gymnasium" and "bringing home the bacon", affectively silencing the emic Messianic Jewish interpretations of who and what is Jewish, the very interpretations she claims to explore.

Sedgwick (1993) implores scholars to seek more openness in our categorical imaginings in order to map out the world more accurately and avoid falling into the trap of convenient dichotomies. A researcher wishing to analyze the complexities of Messianic Jewish identity does the topic a great injustice by predetermining her analytical categories based on hegemonic availability, psychologizing or ignoring the voices under study, and superimposing an establishmentarian historiography. Furthermore, in the west, social sciences stem from the same cultural milieu which social scientists purport to be objectively studying, therefore culturally normative analytical categories seem natural (Billig 1995). But by relying upon taken-for-granted knowledge, these researchers avoid deconstructing the very categories Messianic Jews aim to redefine. Through their uncritical analysis and invocation of academic authority, such scholarly works reify and impose the authority of the existing exclusive religious establishments (Asad 1986:146) to determine who is a Jew at the expense of their Messianic Jewish subjects (Bekerman 2004).

Sobel, in particular, conducts his study as a response to concerned parents whose children have become Jewish Believers in Yeshua. His conclusion is that the children were duped as a result of weak personalities or faulty Jewish education. Thus the onus falls on the parents

themselves or perhaps the local Jewish educational system, but the central Messianic Jewish challenging of the Jewish hegemonic establishment goes ignored. Harris-Shapiro (1999:132), writes concerning the political campaign of American Messianic Jews to overturn the 1989 Beresford case decision of the Israeli Supreme Court denying them citizenship as Jews, “No longer interested in managing their identity through internal reassurances of authenticity, in this instance they sought to change the facts on the ground- the very definition of ‘Jew’.” Harris-Shapiro implies that only an overtly political campaign reflects battle engagement over the definition of who is a Jew. She ignores the entire thrust of Messianic Jewish heterodox discourse and countermemory which is continually attempting to reshape the dominant western religious paradigms of Jew and Christian, something which Glick already recognized to lie at the core of Hebrew Christianity back in 1958.

Historiography of Messianic Jews

Bernard Cohen (1981:228) writes in post-colonial style concerning history’s claim to authority: “The past as history was increasingly related to the definition... and the marking of boundaries... Everything... has a history, and to discover the history of something is to explain it”. Similarly, Eriksen (1993:72) notes that, “history is not a product of the past, but a response to the requirements of the present”. In other words, history in the west, even in academic circles, is often accepted as the neutral definition and explanation of social phenomena.

Historiography may be defined as particular ways of reading, reinterpreting, canonizing and constructing historical records and meanings of the past (Bekerman 2007). Collective memory is perceptions of the past, however real or imaginary, common to a particular group, which help to shape members’ ideas about politics and society (Carl Becker cited in Zerubavel 1995:3). In literature on Jewish Believers in Yeshua, most non-Messianic Jewish scholars employ both establishmentarian historiography and references to Jewish collective memory, tautologically reifying and imposing hegemonic paradigms through their studies to define and explain phenomena of Messianic Jewishness. Rather than the production of “objective truth”, historiography should be viewed as a politically-compelled, compelling social craft involving historians, patrons, readers and subjects, whose texts are interpreted and employed in social interaction.

Two studies in particular which examine Messianic Jews, make socio-political use of history to frame the sticky question of who is a Jew. Sobel (1974) and Harris-Shapiro (1999), in the

introductions to their studies on Jewish Believers in the United States, attempt to present the historical discontinuity of Jewish faith in Yeshua as proof of the foreignness of the phenomenon. The inexplicit underlying assumption being that if enough influences upon Jewish Believers historically have been Gentile, or if modern Hebrew Christianity primarily grew out of the evangelical Protestant mission to the Jews, it can logically be concluded that the phenomenon of Jewish faith in Yeshua is basically foreign to the Jewish people, and driven by questionable foreign motives. Thus these Jewish scholars rationally depict Messianic Jews alternately as weak dupes or lackeys of the evangelical mission or an inauthentic conniving assembly of Christian converts in sheep's clothing instigating identity confusion to lure more Jews into the clutches of Christianity.

All social scientific studies of Messianic Jews today must be read in light of mainstream folk Jewish historiographies and stereotypes of the Jewish Believer (convert, apostate, *mumar*, *meshumad*³, etc.), whether or not these are explicitly reviewed in the studies. Scholars who present or infer such folk historiographies, rather than critically examining them, are employing tautology and dominant religious interpretations of history to reinforce the contemporary hegemonic social categorization of Jewish Believers. In doing so, they take part in the same cultural process that they are studying (Geertz 1975:77). Their major accomplishment lies in violently squeezing the Messianic Jew into the hegemonic paradigm. So contextualized, any such research is like filling out a bureaucratic form, simply affirming the categories that preexisted the subjects (Herzfeld 1992).

For example, on closer examination, Sobel's attempt at reinforcing the Jewish establishment and its values in the wake of the Jesus Movement, seems to affirm the old adage that a good offense makes the best defense. The simplest way to reify the hegemonic status of the Jewish establishment and dismiss the Messianic Jewish threat is, of course, to disqualify Messianic Jews from ever entering the fray over who or what is Jewish, by an *a priori* tainting or denial of their Jewishness. Using the argument that history determines identity, that the past defines the present, it is possible to redirect the blinding interrogation lamp onto the Messianic 'poseur', simultaneously obscuring the question of the scholar's authority to determine Jewishness, and any failure of the Jewish establishment to secure its continuity.

³ *Mumar* is a derogatory Hebrew term referring to a convert, while *meshumad* is used in the same sense but literally means one who is destroyed. Both carry the connotation of betrayal.

The researchers' hegemonic use of historiography against their Messianic subjects is two-pronged because again, as Asad (1986:146) effectively argues in another context, they employ both hegemonic religious historiography and categorization, and western academic discourse to shape and produce an establishment-serving "translation" of Messianic Judaism. Thus, unreflexive use of hegemonic historiographic interpretative schemes risk both tautological conclusions which reinforce rather than deconstruct present power constellations (Appadurai 1988), and perpetuation of power differentials due to stereotypical conceptions embedded within these schemes (Cohen 1981:228; Said 1978).

According to Geertz (1975:88), "the writing of history... is a cultural activity". Recognition of the culturally specific sources of scholars' analytical categories is a first step in evaluating them. In addition to a critical examination of dominant interpretive concepts, both in the field and in the anthropologist's analytical tool kit, Kapferer (1988) insists upon the necessity of critical theory grounded in phenomenological empiricism, that is, the study of discourse in context. He argues that the cultural thinking about social categories and relationships embedded in myth and legend (Leach 1969:96), rather than the historicity of the narratives, forms their primary significance for the anthropologist. Questions of historicity or veracity take a back seat to questions regarding how myth and legend inform memory and shape the meaning of practice (Holland 1997:180). In other words, the anthropologist pursues not *whether* something 'truly existed' at a given time in the past, but rather the stories that people tell one another *about* what was, and how these stories shape contemporary identity.

Therefore, any social scientist studying Messianic Jews who presents a particular historiography of Messianic Jews – hegemonic or otherwise – should be prepared to explain why she is choosing to tell the story that she tells. Rather than joining the fray over whether Messianic Judaism traces its historical roots back to the first century or to 19th century missions (See for example, Harris-Shapiro 1999; Fleischer 1996; Sobel 1974), such arguments should become data for the analysis of the struggle over "authentic" (Messianic) Jewish identity. Thus, historiography is approached as a tool of social identity construction in the narratives of Messianic Jewish subjects, carefully examined, but not wielded, in the narratives of their researchers.

Messianic Jewish emic historiography emplots the long, painful history of Jewish-Christian relations into a narrative presently salient to an emergent collective Messianic Jewish identity (Ricoeur 1971). This paper examines this emic historiography as a means of Messianic Jewish

temporal “return” to an ideal Jewish heritage, calling and praxis⁴; to a Messianic understanding of Jewish birthright, on the backdrop of the struggle against the hegemonic exclusivity of Jewish and Christian historiographies.

Relative Hegemony

We have discussed in general how the unreflexive usage and embedding of hegemonic religious and western paradigms in academe, as well as the invocation of academic authority to further marginalize Messianic Jews, reflect the reification and imposition of these paradigms rather than a fruitful reexamination of the hegemonic status quo. In addition, disempowered groups can attempt to improve their relative standing in the larger Jewish or Christian collective by constructing groups such as the Messianic Jews as relatively more marginalized than themselves. This phenomenon is found in the larger Jewish community as well as in the scholarly literature.

The non-Messianic Jewish scholars who “support” in writing the Messianic Jewish claim to membership in the Jewish collective are few and far leftist. Rabbi Carol Harris-Shapiro (1999:184-189) concludes rather begrudgingly in the last few pages of her book that in light of the identity free-for-all in contemporary American Jewry, Jewish leaders cannot help but recognize that Messianic Jews are indeed still Jews. They are the inescapable carnivalesque other that has succeeded in grotesquely mirroring the unflattering features of streams within the Jewish community as in a funhouse hall of mirrors. Following Bakhtinian logic (1968), Messianic Jews subversively threaten to emancipate all Jews, including Harris-Shapiro’s marginalized movement of Reconstructionist Judaism, from a contemporary mainstream Jewish hegemony which is failing to meet the needs of the disintegrating American Jewish community. Adopting the oppressive hegemonic behavior of the Jewish mainstream toward the Messianics, she attributes hegemonic status to the Reconstructionists by association. Furthermore, the liberal rabbi takes leadership initiative on behalf of all American Jews, doing what the orthodox by definition cannot, in that she openly recognizes the Messianic threat from within. She attempts to rescue the Jewish community from their identity predicament, issuing a clarion call to reconstruct contemporary American Judaism in the face of the threat of Jewry’s common enemy, the Messianic Jews – “bad” Jews, but Jews nonetheless.

⁴ The words praxis and practice carry different meanings in most social scientific literature. “Praxis” refers abstractly to the concept of practical application or implementation of theoretical knowledge, while “practice” is the specific concrete application or implementation. However the meanings greatly overlap when “practice” is used in a religious sense to refer to the practical outworking of faith. This paper therefore reserves the word “praxis” to describe the practical outworking of culture in the broadest sense, including both religious and other cultural practices.

Similarly one year later, Reform Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok in his book entitled *Messianic Judaism* (2000:209-212), argues that non-orthodox Jews are so divided over the central tenets of Judaism that Messianic Jews, too, should be accepted as a legitimate stream in the Jewish community. He promotes a pluralist model in which ultra-orthodox, modern orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Humanist and Messianic Judaism appear as the seven branches of a menorah representing contemporary Judaism. Needless to say, his own branch of Reform Judaism appears as the moderate center of the diagram.

In reference to the Christian establishment, Wasserman argues for the integration of Jewish “converts” into mainstream Christian Church life allowing only for a cultural Jewishness for evangelistic purposes (2000:106). At the same time, he attempts to marginalize Messianic Jews who believe they have a distinctly Jewish spiritual calling, by insinuating that they are weaker Believers (2000:80) or possibly heretical Judaizers (2000:62-65, 83).

Thus, Harris-Shapiro and Cohn-Sherbok are willing to argue for the inclusion but simultaneous extreme marginalization of Messianics within the Jewish community in order to win a more centralized and hegemonically empowered position for the Reconstructionist and Reform movements, and perhaps for female clergy, whom they respectively represent. On the other side of the spectrum, Wasserman argues for the marginalization of observant Messianic Jews in the universal body of Believers, reserving a centrally assimilated position only for those Jewish Believers, admittedly like himself, who reduce their Jewishness to a mild-mannered ethnicity.

Subjectivity and the politics of cartography

Only Castel-Bloom’s novel *Dolly City* (1995, Hebrew), describes a surrealistically perverse Israeli protagonist, graduated from a dubious medical school in an obscure Eastern European country, who adopts an abandoned baby and applies her “professional” training to surgically inscribe a map of Israel on the child’s back. Castel-Bloom’s biting social criticism protests the violation of native subjectivity by unnecessarily violent, politically-driven boundary inscription.

As explored in the literature review above, several Jewish scholars have preceded this work, promoting their various socio-political agendas, contending that Messianic Jews are Christian in this way or Jewish in that. This work, in post-colonial tradition, written by an indigenous Believing anthropologist, endeavors to avoid the importation and violent inscription of

tautological maps of convenient western dichotomies upon the backs of the ‘benighted’ subjects of this study, my mentors and colleagues, family and friends, by affording them subjective status, as much as the academic arts allow, to voice and interpret their own identity issues through their own discourse and praxis. Emic paradigms, the processes and products of Israeli Messianic Jewish self-definition, however clearly or fuzzily demarcated, are far more interesting than a single social scientist’s politically-loaded arbitration of Jewishness or Christian-ness. Anyway, with two millennia of religious boundary-making behind them, today’s Messianic Jews already continually construct their identities in dialogue with hegemonic boundaries.

Meir Shalev’s novel Fontanelle (2002, Hebrew) describes an additional map of Israel. His is a pre-state map of the Holy Land by German Templars charting in detail the geographic terrain and paths connecting various Templar settlements, while entirely omitting any sign of the Jewish *Yishuv*⁵. Shalev’s Templars reveal cartographic disregard of the *Yishuv* in favor of an alternate vision of Israel at best, or an anti-semitic erasure of Jewish vision, presence and production at worst.

Castel-Bloom’s map reifies hegemony through the painful inscription of boundaries, while Shalev’s map imposes a particular social vision through the intentional omission of borders. In both instances, whether through hegemonic inscription or omission, native subjectivity is violated and suppressed. This paper explores how Messianic Jewish historiography, theology and practice actively contests both hegemonic inscription and omission in dominant Jewish and Christian “cartographies”. Messianic Jews exercise their subjectivity through the conscious re-presentation of Messianic faith in Jewish life, and of Jewish faith in Messianic life.

Clearly, Israeli Messianic Jewish identity itself cannot be definitively mapped. This paper attempts to allow the subjects to speak for themselves as much as possible, and to remain true to the intent, content and context of their messages. In fact, the greater the breadth of subjective emic perspectives and internal dialogue presented here, the greater the “objectivity” of this work. Messianic Jewish identity in Israel is better approached, and is indeed natively conceived, in terms of an ongoing journey, as routes, roots and borders. Israeli Jewish Believers follow linear and spiral courses along metaphysical, spatial and temporal routes. All of their routes are natively conceived as journeys of return leading to Zion, the triune nexus

⁵ Settlement.

of roots in the God, the land and the people of Israel. At the same time, Messianic Jews struggle among themselves and with hegemonic others to establish and maintain the tenuous borders of their collective identity. The reader is invited to accompany the interviewees in their journey of identity construction, as they route, root and negotiate themselves homeward to Zion.

Chapter two

THEORY

Identity

It has been argued that identity as an analytical category has become a “flattening rubric” from overuse (Brubaker & Cooper 2000), although we lack a better concept to replace it (Hall 1996:1). This section reviews selective theoretical approaches relevant to understanding Israeli Messianic Jewish identity, on the levels of the individual, the in-group and reference out-group relations.

Theoretician James Clifford takes issue with fixedness in time-space rather than movement through it as the grounding metaphor of ethnography and cultural analysis. When travel becomes a norm, an argument which Clifford favors in his analysis of the post-colonial, postmodern world, rootedness is not a sufficiently dynamic identity paradigm (Malkki 1992), and dwelling requires exposition (Clifford 1997). This study contributes to the contemporary search for analytical models which allow analysis of identity through time and space, rather than rootedness in one time-place.

Other scholars in cultural studies anchor the broad-scale practices of social oppression characteristic of the modern era such as colonialism, racism and ethnic cleansing with paradigms of cultural rootedness and emplacement⁶. Although Gedalof (2000) warns of the danger of rootlessness in real life, these scholars theoretically and empirically explore the potential of the marginalized, the uprooted and the nomad to break free from and undermine hegemonic social forces. Deleuze’s “nomad thought” (1985) is a groundbreaking theoretical paradigm of the critical consciousness emerging from social marginality and displacement, which can lead to the subversion and transformation of settled cultural life by the introduction of heterodox perspectives and practices.

Social Constructivism

Traditionally, identity has been viewed as a fixed essence, genetically conferred or socially bestowed upon and internalized by the group member, so that the individual becomes a simple embodiment of core cultural themes. However essentialist concepts fail to account for identity’s fluid, processual nature, as well as heterogeneity within a sociocultural group.

⁶ See for example Appadurai 1988; Akhil & Ferguson 1992; Braidotti 1994; Malkki 1992; Morley & Robins 1996.

Alternatively, social constructivist theory envisions culture, in general, and identity, in particular, as social processes evolving primarily through languaging (Bekerman 2004). Identity is conceptualized as a fluid process, a continually evolving conversation between social agents in light of contemporary and historical “versions” available to them. As Talal Asad (1986:155) writes, “society is not a [fixed] text... it is people who speak”. Israeli Messianic Jews are in a continual dialogic process of addressing and being addressed, relating to voices within their collective and without, on the levels of the individual and the collective (Holland et al. 1998:169,178). Individual Messianic Jews and their social groupings are thus approached as sites of competing discourses (Holland 1997:176) and praxes.

Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense (1980, 1999), is no longer understood as a descriptive device alone, but as the central tool in the construction of the social world. It is considered to be an institutionalized way of thinking, defining what can be said (and therefore thought) about a specific topic. A fine example is the use of the terms “West Bank”, “Palestine” or “Judea and Samaria”. Each of these terms encompasses an entire historical discourse, that is, a vernacular communication style, particular political perspectives, and sources of information and authority. Thus, discourse consists not only of words, but also of ideologies and power structures which shape and inform them, and are in turn, discursively shaped and informed. Moreover the critical approach to discourse adopted in this paper does not necessarily differ methodologically from other approaches to the study of language and culture, but rather in its radical critique of social relations, which seeks to deconstruct the ideologies and power structures embedded in discourse.

Circumventing predetermined hegemonic taxonomies (Appadurai 1988) which attempt to determine what Messianic Jews *are* or *are not* (Burr 1997), the social constructivist approach to identity focuses on analyzing what Messianic Jews *do*. Social action includes employment of both discourse and practice. Praxes are the means by which culture is constituted by human activity in interaction. As anthropologists, we “know” of and therefore study culture through its enactment in praxis. Culture is perceived as a verb, rather than an autonomous noun. Approaching Messianic Jews as a community of practicing individuals, therefore, allows that identity is not situated in the world or in people, but is rather constantly constructed, negotiated and maintained between people in social interaction (Wenger 1999:54).

Furthermore, the employment of a given discourse or practice does not necessarily reflect the subject's "owning" of the entire web of meaning and structure represented therein, whose ontology is continually contested anyway. So, for example, a Messianic Jew might adopt an orthodox practice (e.g. rabbinic separation of milk and meat), associate it with an unorthodox discourse (rabbinic kashrut for the sake of Messianic outreach), and reject other aspects of orthodox praxis (e.g. the ceremonial washing of hands, or the prohibition of faith in Yeshua, for that matter). Therefore we speak of discursive fragments, which the subject contextually "weaves" into a more or less phenomenologically workable identity.

In summary, according to the social constructivist concept of identity (Jaworski & Coupland 1999:34), individual Messianic Jews subjectively position themselves in everyday interactions according to diverse, sometimes conflicting, and often contested (Nagel 1994:156) collectively evolving fragments of Foucauldian discourses and practices (Bourdieu 1991; Fairclough 1992: 27; Hall 1997:44; Holland 1997:180). Identity is about using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being (Hall 1996:4). Through socially, politically and economically constrained and constraining social interaction, Israeli Messianic Jews author themselves as various mosaicked versions of the collective self (Holland 1997:182). The social group can also act as a collective agent (Ortner 1990; Taylor 1985:287). Furthermore, because the self is the "nexus of and participant in a continuing flow of activity," (Holland 1997: 171-182) rather than a *fait accompli* (Levinson 1978), identity remains an open-ended and unfinalized work-in-progress.

Narrative weaving

Group identity is therefore characterized by a variety of identity mosaics composed of discursive fragments by authoring selves. It is narrativity, in the broadest social sense (Ricoeur 1971), that allows for the weaving together of these fragmented identities into viable collective discourses and praxes (Bruner 1987). Considering the amount of tension between the variety of identity options within the spectrum of Israeli Messianic Jews, it is not surprising that the lives of Jewish Believers are particularly rich with narrative: spoken, written, silenced (Foucault 1999:518), adapted, lyricized, choreographed, prayed and prophesied (evidenced in Cohn-Sherbok 2000; Harris-Shapiro 1992, 1999; Lipson 1980, 1990).

Phenomenology

This study also adopts the phenomenological approach to Israeli Messianic Jewish subjects, in that the researcher makes a Husserlian effort to “bracket” taken-for-granted assumptions (Hill 1991; Ricouer 1967), attempting instead to present the social reality of Israeli Messianic Jews through the subjective discourse and praxis of those that construct and inhabit it (Holstein & Gubrium 1994; Willis 1991). Phenomenology is particularly helpful for the deconstruction of socio-politically marginalized Israeli Messianic Jewish identity and subsequently the societal status quo, in that its analytical perspectives empirically emerge from a position of social challenge and/or Schuetzian strangeness (1944). As in good fiction which compellingly conveys the various perspectives of its often unlikely protagonists, casting social issues in a new and critical light, phenomenologically-oriented anthropological exploration of the perspectives of our non-hegemonic subjects should lead, in the case at hand, to potentially new and alternative critical understandings of contemporary Jewish, Israeli and Yeshua-Believer identities⁷.

Cultural “tool kit”

Lest one nonetheless feel tempted to reduce identity to a static entity, Ann Swidler (1986) helps by more or less translating discourses and praxes into “ideas, values and strategies of action”. These are not cultural “trappings” but “living tools” (Holland 1997:181) from a collective “tool kit”, socially imposed upon and eventually self-administered by the individual. Of the three basic elements in the tool kit, Swidler argues that it is the ways that action is organized which persist – the strategies of action – while the discourses are more likely to evolve or be replaced over time.

⁷ For a comparison of literary and ethnographic genres, see Mary Louise Pratt’s (1986) essay on the poetics and politics of ethnography.

Cultural schemas

Sherry Ortner (1990) offers a helpful, more specific narrative development of strategies of action in her work, which she calls the “cultural schema”. Cultural schemas are strategies of action with a set sequence of events. Schemas are employed throughout a given culture, ordering and constraining social action. They can be applied by subjects both internally, to structure thought and action, and externally, to interpret interactions (Ortner 1990:84).

In several sections this paper rather unconventionally incorporates portions from Israeli literary texts as further illustrations of the nature and use of Israeli strategies of action and cultural schema in the local Messianic Jewish community. The implication is not necessarily that the subjects have read and internalized these literary works, although this is more likely than them having read anthropological texts on social identity, for example. Often Israeli literary “narratives” are simply more intellectually and aesthetically compelling in their social analysis than social scientific “narratives” (Pratt 1986), and better attuned to the specific sociocultural context of Israeli Messianic Jewish discourse and praxis.

Identity layering

Nagel’s concept of “layering” (1994:154-5) further explores the question of agency. Layering refers to the individual employment of a variety of ideas, values and strategies from the Swidlerian “tool box” (which Nagel alternatively imagines as a “shopping cart”, 1994:162) depending on their salience and efficacy in a given social context. Moreover, in a situation of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1999), various and competing discourses are differently valued. The subject chooses her tools by their social caliber in the context of changing social situations and audiences⁸.

Settled and unsettled lives

In addition to analyzing individual identity construction, this work attempts to deconstruct the variety of politically-charged discursive and practical attempts to delimit the sociocultural territory of the Israeli Messianic Jewish community, and the resulting border disputes in the process. Border disputes occur when alternate versions of identity compete for hegemony. Swidler’s theory is also a good place to start in the analysis of struggles within the Messianic community in Israel⁹.

⁸ See examples in the first section of Findings, “An introduction to Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular.”

⁹ For an application of Swidler’s theory to in-group Israeli Messianic Jewish identity struggles, see Chapter nine, “Identity as borders: Returning to the birthright.”

Swidler offers an important distinction between “settled” and “unsettled” lives. In “settled” lives¹⁰, that is communities in which discourse has become common sense without need for explicitly articulated discourses, culture and social structure are nearly inseparable, enforcing the perception of certain discourses and praxes as “natural”. Subjects tend to follow the commonly accepted and available strategies of action, whether or not they are deeply meaningful or compelling (Ortner 1990:92). In general, “settled” social groups avoid cultural “retooling”, and therefore come to the ends for which their means are suited. Even in instances where ideas and values are adapted with cultural change, the change in strategies of action tends to take longer due to the costly retooling process, resulting in what Swidler calls a “cultural lag” (1986:281).

Dominant groups may employ a variety of offensive strategies of action to maintain the “settled” status quo and ensure their ongoing hegemonic status. Included here are brief explanations of a series of such strategies of action inspired by the cited theory and relevant to the research findings. The series increases in intensity from mild to severely proscriptive strategies¹¹. It is important to note that the theoretical implication is not at all that some secret council of elders is malevolently pulling strings behind the scenes, but rather that over time socialized patterns of interaction have developed that constitute a certain “settled” Israeli Messianic Jewish status quo and preserve the hegemony of dominant groups within the community.

From doxa to orthodoxy

The first and main strategy of action of dominant groups is to maintain the “doxic” status-quo which preserves their ideological hegemony. However, if other non-hegemonic groups succeed in disturbing the taken-for-grantedness of “settled” life, dominant groups may have to suffice themselves with the imperfect substitute of “orthodoxy” (Bourdieu 1977:169)¹². Thus in “unsettled” periods, a *Kulturkampf* ensues in which the dominant group promotes itself as the representative of “orthodox” positions, while marginalized groups vie for ascendancy by raising communal consciousness through explicitly articulated discourses and praxes.

¹⁰ Swidler’s “settledness” is compatible with Bourdieu’s concept of “doxic” rule (1977:164-171).

¹¹ These five strategies of action are further developed in the first section of the Discussion, in light of the research findings.

¹² Though the term might be misleading in the context of this study, Bourdieu’s concept of orthodoxy is not limited to religious or Jewish groups, but rather refers to any orthodox versus heterodox or non-hegemonic social group.

Cultural meanings become more highly articulated and explicit among non-hegemonic groups as they seek to contextualize and debate what is taken-for-granted as the natural order of society, while modeling alternative patterns of action that do *not* “come naturally”. Change in praxis becomes highly significant because it has a direct impact by reorganizing taken-for-granted habits and modes of experience, providing the cultural models that people need to learn new “styles of self, relationship, cooperation [and] authority” (Swidler 1986:279).

Deleuze’s heterodox nomad (1985), for example, by his very existence, highlights the deficiencies of mainstream society. Due to his unique perspective, he may easily deconstruct the codes of settled peoples and thereby challenge and threaten present social realities.

The inauthenticity of reform

New discourses (“Why can’t they just say ‘Jesus’, and stop with this ‘Yeshua’ nonsense?”) and praxes (“What is this talit-wearing¹³? Is he putting on a Jewish ‘show’ or something?”) are framed by hegemonic discourse as an “unnatural”, “inauthentic” “putting-on” of cultural trappings belonging ostensibly to “others”, a playing at being someone or something that one is not. Authenticity is used as a political tool to include or exclude people, discourses and praxes, claiming that someone or something is or is not “the real thing”. This work addresses this issue in light of Stuart Charmé’s insightful work on Jewish authenticity. Charmé argues that “authentic” Jewish identity is a never-ending process of social articulation in context. He supports the authenticity of dynamic, fragmented, mosaicked identities; authentic identity is that which “preserves the dynamic instability of identity” (2000:137). Charmé rejects the conceptualization of authenticity as a romanticized essence frozen in time-space, or a static body of “traditional” knowledge downloaded *Matrix*-like¹⁴ into living receptacles. “An authentic identity, therefore, is never an entity or substance that we possess, but rather a project situated in time and space...” (2000:143)¹⁵.

Neutralizing reform through cooptation

A third strategy against Messianic Jewish heterodoxy is the cooptation of non-hegemonic discourse or praxis, as understood in the work of Carolyn Dean (1999). This involves hegemonic adoption of a superficial, scripted version of the subversive discourse or praxis,

¹³ Prayer shawl.

¹⁴ *The Matrix* (2003). The movie depicts a large computer matrix which runs the world. People who have been freed from the matrix can “plug” themselves back in, find a computer program containing whatever body of practical knowledge they may need, and download the information into their brain in seconds.

¹⁵ For a detailed application of Charmé’s work in the body of the paper, see the subsection entitled, “Restoring ‘true worship’: Selective memory and ‘authentic’ expression,” and the following section entitled, “The struggle over subjectivity,” both in Chapter nine.

effectively “vaccinating” the collective against the original discourse’s radical potential to deconstruct hegemony. Thus, the same discourses and practices can at times seemingly be used to legitimate two or more highly differing ideal social orders, since the multivocality of symbols leaves them open to political manipulation (Eriksen 1993:73).

Dean interprets the process of Catholic cooptation of local Andean festivals after the Spanish conquest of the Andes, in which pagan festive forms were divorced from their original religious beliefs, incorporated into the Christian Corpus Christi festival and reassigned Christian symbols and meaning. This syncretism is essentially an extension of the political conquest through conversion of the local culture (by assigning new meaning to old forms) and its incorporation into the “universal” (white western) Church. Old meanings and loyalties were invalidated at the same time that new ones were introduced. Particularism was effaced by what claims to be the universal body of Messiah.

The unspirituality of reform

British cultural anthropologist, Mary Douglas, writes insightfully of the sociocultural meaning of “natural” symbols. She develops a parallel between spirit-body discourse and the relationship of the Believer to society, where spirit represents the Believer, and body represents society (1970a:195-196). When Believers speak in terms of a spirit-body dichotomy or hierarchy, they are essentially advocating rebellion against, segregation from, or in some cases, exclusion of a dominant social reference group. Alternatively, Believers who speak holistically of spirit and body, promote mutual integration, which may include a struggle to articulate particularist identity through the dominant group’s discourse and praxis, or efforts towards social change *from within*. Moreover, subjects may hold differing positions regarding different reference groups. For example, the same Believing party may advocate separation from the religious Jewish body (mainstream Judaism), which putatively opposes their understanding of Scripture, while at the same time promoting integration into the national Jewish body (secular Israeli society), since the Jewish state affirms their reading of biblical prophecy.

Douglas’ theory is particularly helpful in relating to the fourth hegemonic strategy of action which argues that conscious change in praxis initiated by non-hegemonic streams is “unspiritual”, and that Jewish Believers should best invest in “spiritual” pursuits rather than challenging religious tradition and demanding sociocultural re-articulations. This strategy implies that reform is less spiritual than simple submission to hegemonic faith discourses and

praxes. Hegemonic discourse is labeled “spiritual”, while the non-hegemonic challenge is “carnal”, and causes division. The strategy is based upon perception of the spirit(ual) as detached from and warring with the body. Again, the symbols themselves, in this case, of “spirituality” and “carnality”, are multivocal and open to political manipulation (Eriksen 1993:73). Non-hegemonic streams promoting reform may also associate spirituality with their efforts, and carnality with those of the dominant parties resisting change.

Demonizing reform through heresy accusations

Lastly, Mary Douglas (1970b) addresses another interesting strategy of action of “orthodox” parties in her well-known study of witchcraft accusations. The witch in the particular cultural context of her study, is a “bad apple” within a society, introducing social poison from without. In a modern western religious context, a strong parallel can be argued between witches and religious heretics. Accusations of spiritual foul-play flourish where social interaction is intense, but relations are ill-defined, competitive and include significant disparities in ultimate goals, all of which make the Israeli Messianic Jewish community fertile ground. Douglas claims that the accusations are a vent for social anxiety, and an effort to maintain hegemonic social order. In other words, in the *Kulturkampf* outlined in this dissertation, dominant groups may choose to adopt heresy accusations as a strategy of action in order to maintain their dominant position by continuing to marginalize and even ban others holding heterodox positions. Such accusations are an extreme strategy which attempt to deny threatening parties common bonds with any other community members, claiming that these “heretics” are not brothers, but rather a threat to the community, bringing incorrect teachings and division. Accusations are generally accompanied by a subsequent “cleansing” strategy of action, that is, certain religious techniques for conflict resolution or community purging of heresy.

Discourse and praxis often become naturalized “commonsense” to members (Foucault 1972, 1988), particularly those represented by dominant streams. The general goal of our analysis is the “denaturalization” and deconstruction of these instruments to reveal the politically constructed connection between language, in its broadest sense, ideology and power. Our discourse-oriented ethnography explores the discourses and practices presently active in the Israeli Messianic Jewish “tool box”, their operation and their sociocultural implications.

This concludes the general survey of relevant social constructivist, critical ethnography and identity theory. The specific analytical identity model adopted in the analysis is developed in the section on research findings entitled “The reader’s road map.”

Chapter three

METHODOLOGY

Empirically grounded ethnographic research necessarily mitigates extreme versions of constructivist theory by revealing discursive practices, rather than reified discourse, emphasizing the subjective role of agency in social interaction and the tension and struggle between various discourses (Holland 1997). This work explores a number of discursive fields of practice entailing multiple discourses, plural sites and practices of Messianic Jewish identity construction, using three empirical methodologies: in-depth interviews, participant observation and emic literature analysis.

In-depth Interviews

The primary methodology of our study is the semi-structured in-depth interview based on qualitative ethnographic principles (Spradley 1979; Fontana & Frey 2000). The interviews focused loosely upon a number of central issues without imposing a preconceived script (Shkedi & Horenczyk 1995). This approach allowed interviewees to introduce subjects or aspects unexpected by the interviewer, which are connected to their lives as Messianic Jews in Israel. The semi-structured interview schedule, developed and refined during the pilot phase¹⁶, encouraged participants to tell about their journey into Messianic Judaism, and to express their views regarding the practice, boundaries, group perceptions, conflicts, visions and dreams related to their lives as Messianic Jews. All interviews were recorded and carefully transcribed verbatim; analysis of the texts followed the principles of “grounded theory” (Strauss & Corbin 1990), in which analytical categories emerge from the empirical material. Sorting and “boiling down” recurrent patterns and themes from the narratives precipitated forty analytical categories. Subsequently the interviews were read through again and quotes were cut and pasted into the forty category files. These files alone came to over 20,000 pages of coded material (not to mention the rest of the raw material), which consistently “crashed” the researcher’s PC and eventually necessitated the purchase of a more powerful computer.

All interviews touched on the following topics, while leaving room for the interviewee to expound where s/he felt necessary or to introduce other subjects:

¹⁶ See Appendix.

- To date biographical narrative with particular emphasis on the process of becoming a Messianic Jew (including social, religious, educational and professional development).
- History of congregational attendance and organizational membership.
- Relationships with family, friends, acquaintances and co-workers, particularly in light of Messianic Jewishness.
- Definitions and perceptions of and personal identification with “Messianic Jews”, “Believers”, “Jews”, “Christians”, “Gentiles”, or other related terms.
- Self-presentation and others’ perceptions of Messianic Jewishness.
- Beliefs, attitudes, values and symbols associated with being Messianic Jewish.
- Life cycle, holiday, weekly, congregational and home practices.
- Messianic Jewishness and politics, military service, relationship with Arabs, and connection with Israel.

Sixty in-depth interviews, ranging from 1.5 to 3.5 hours each, were held with affiliated members of Hebrew-speaking Messianic Jewish congregations throughout Israel. Efforts were made to interview the widest variety of Messianic Jews from diverse congregations, primarily using the snowball method (Stake 2000). Various individuals or leaders were also singled out for interviews through acquaintance with their activities from observations. The intention was not the compilation of a random representative sampling, but rather “maximum variation sampling”, a sample that encompasses the spectrum and variety within the Messianic Jewish community (Maykut & Morehouse 1994). The general approach was to evenly include within the interviewee sampling men and women, laypeople and leaders, Israeli-born or socialized and North American immigrants, from each region of the country, and a broad spectrum of congregations. In the few cases where a discussion between the interviewer and interviewee is quoted, the interviewer’s words appear in parentheses.

Interview sampling considerations

It is nearly impossible to accurately assess the current size of the community under study; only one statistical survey is available, published in 1999. The Caspari study found 81 Messianic Jewish fellowships (39 of which were Hebrew-speaking) and a mere 2178 affiliated Messianic Jewish adults in the whole country, including all native-born and immigrant Israelis, using the broadest possible phenomenological definition of Jewishness¹⁷ (Kjær-Hansen & Skjott

¹⁷ “We have considered a person who has immigrated to Israel under the Law of Return [whose stipulations only require at least one Jewish grandparent] and regards him/herself as Jewish to be Jewish – even though this person is not Jewish according to halakhah.”

1999:18, 61). By choosing to include only native or nearly-native Israelis (only two of these interviewees immigrated at ages 2 and 10 to Israel, and two others as young teenagers with youth *Aliyah* movements) and North American immigrants, the present study excludes Russian-speaking, European and Ethiopian Jewish immigrants¹⁸.

Hebrew-speaking congregations. Not all Hebrew speakers choose to fellowship in Hebrew, and not all those fellowshipping “in Hebrew” are necessarily even conversant in the language. The approach of this research was to begin study of the community within a more mainstream version of Israeli Messianic Jewish life, the assumption being that any cultural themes or patterns relevant to the Israeli context must eventually be articulated within a Hebrew framework in order to persist, if not today, then tomorrow with a second generation or wave of immigrants. In other words, if the various ethnic groups which meet in Russian, English, Amharic, French, Spanish and Romanian offer alternative discourses and praxes, the fittest will or already do survive (or eventually reemerge) in the Hebrew mainstream. Of course these additional culturally marginalized non-hegemonic voices will not necessarily find their way into this study, but they may emerge in a future one.

The empirical stipulation of affiliation. There are many Messianic Jews who are unaffiliated with specific congregations. Among other things, they may visit several groups sporadically, attend only para-congregational activities or events, or be taking hiatus from organized fellowship after leaving a previous congregation. There are also some “closet” Israeli Jewish Believers, sometimes called “Nicodemians”¹⁹ (Nerel 1996), who do not officially associate themselves with a group, generally out of fear, particularly among the religious, but who are known by affiliated Believers. Some ultra-orthodox Messianic Jews have tremendous difficulty finding viable communal Messianic frameworks which allow them, among other things, to avoid travel on the sabbath. There are probably still other “Nicodemians” who are completely in the closet, and unknown to the wider Messianic community. However, this study attempts to explore a community of interacting members. Therefore it seems most logical to draw the boundaries of the sampling to include those who clearly and consistently affiliate themselves with a congregation or house fellowship²⁰. Although this cannot be

¹⁸ See “Future research on Israeli Messianic Jews.”

¹⁹ Nicodemus was a prominent Pharisaic leader in the New Covenant who met with Yeshua at night (*John* 3), presumably to study with him without being seen by other religious Jewish authorities who opposed Yeshua’s teachings. *Nicodemian* is a term used to refer to Jewish Believers who secretly believe but do not publicly confess their faith in Yeshua.

²⁰ The Caspari study distinguishes between congregations, house groups, home groups and fellowships. A fellowship is a more general term used by the researchers to refer to any of the other three types of groups. Whereas a congregation is called such by its leaders (although they may also use the terms “church” or

empirically confirmed, it seems that concerns similar to those informing the segregative decisions of “Nicodemians” are voiced by affiliated Messianic Jews, who are, for the time being anyway, willing to subordinate them for the sake of communal fellowship.

Empirically-defined leadership. Additionally, it is important to have a good representation of leadership as well as laypeople in the study for a more balanced perspective. The question is how to define a leader versus a layperson, since almost all interviewees regularly attend and are generally quite involved in and lead the various activities of their local congregation, and often additional para-congregational activities or organizations. Involvement may include payment but is often on a volunteer basis, and may include: helping the poor, teaching children, visiting and making meals for sick, reaching out to lonely people, helping young mothers, counseling, discipling new Believers, leading youth groups, participation in worship teams, organizing conferences, professional services (legal, counseling, accounting, administrative, gardening, construction design and management, healthcare, translation, editing, public relations, artwork, graphic design, etc.), philanthropy, fundraising, traveling abroad to teach, leading home groups, serving on boards of NGOs, Arab-Jewish Believers’ reconciliation activities, hospitality, outreach, writing, etc. Counting only those who work “full-time” for a particular ministry is also problematic since this would include administrative, outreach and maintenance staff, while excluding many other leadership positions. In the end, a narrow definition of “leader” was chosen for the purposes of this study, including only full-time congregational leaders or teachers and their wives. There are no female congregational leaders or full-time teachers included in the study, as their number within the Hebrew-speaking community is negligible. However, wives of leaders often have great community leadership responsibilities themselves, and are therefore included in the leadership count.

In the “Table of Interviewees by Characteristic” below, the interview sampling is broken down by characteristic and further by gender. The numbers can speak for themselves, but a few notes are in line. First, there are two interviewees included under “Israeli” who are exceptions to the rule. Both immigrated as teenagers. One fled Nazi Germany and represents an older war refugee generation of Believers that has almost passed away, and rarely left behind a second, let alone third generation of Believing children to continue their faith. The

“assembly”), and a home group is a smaller division of the congregation which meets in members’ homes. A house group, on the other hand, is an independent fellowship which is usually small, meets in a private home, and may eventually develop into a full-fledged congregation (Kjær-Hansen & Skjott 1999:17).

second teenager came from North Africa with a youth *Aliyah* movement²¹ shortly after the establishment of the State.

Of the interviewees who remarried, the two women did so after the passing away of their husbands, and the two men married for the second time after their non-Believing wives divorced them when they came to faith. Of the intermarried interviewees, 3 out of 5 of the women and 6 out of 11 of the men are leaders, a total of 9 out of 16. That is, a full 56% of the intermarried interviewees are leaders, although they constitute only 30% (18 out of 60) of the interviewee sampling. The three categories in italics are 2007 statistics, whereas all other statistics reflect the status of the interviewee at the time of his/her interview, in 1999 and 2004, respectively. The category “Left the Faith” refers to two women who have since stopped associating themselves with the Messianic faith or with other Believers since their interviews were conducted.

²¹ *Aliyah* literally means “ascension”. It recalls the three Jewish pilgrimage holidays of ascension, and is used to refer to Jewish people who immigrate to Israel. *Yeridah*, meaning “descending”, is a rather derogatory reference to the act of Israeli Jews leaving the country for an indefinite period of time, and perhaps forever.

Table of Interviewees by Characteristic

Characteristic	Women	Men	Total
Interviewees	31	29	60
Israeli	15	17	32
North American Immigrant	16	12	28
Interviewed in English	20	18	38
Interviewed in Hebrew	11	11	22
Full-time Congregational Leader/Teacher or Wife	4	14	18
Layperson	27	15	42
Married (first-time)	20	23	43
Single	8	2	10
Divorced	1	2	3
Remarried	2	2	4
Convert	2	0	2
Married to Convert	3	1	4
Intermarried	5	11	16
Actively Considering Inter-marriage	2	1	3
Child of Inter-marriage	4	1	5
<i>Left the Faith</i>	2	0	2
<i>Left Israel indefinitely</i>	4	2	6
<i>Died</i>	0	2	2

The “Table of Interviews by Region” below summarizes the numbers of both interviewees and congregations represented in the study according to their region of the country. The study began in Jerusalem, the city with the greatest number and variety of Messianic Jewish fellowships. 35 interviews were conducted in the greater Jerusalem area (Jerusalem, Maale Adumim, Mevasseret Tzion, Yad Hashmona), representing 13 different congregational groups. Almost half (48%) of those interviewed in the Jerusalem area had spent significant time living in other regions of the country where they were previously affiliated with other

congregations. In the center, Tel Aviv, Kfar Sava, Yafo, Bat Yam, Nes Tziona and Modiin area, there were 7 interviews, representing 5 congregations. In the coastal north, Haifa, Krayot and Acco area, there were 9 interviews, representing 5 major congregations. In the northeast, Tiberias, Nazareth Illit, Karmiel and Poriya Illit, 6 interviews were conducted, representing 4 congregations. In the Negev, including Beersheva, Omer and Arad, there were 3 interviews, representing 3 different groups. Eilat and the territories including Ariel and smaller settlements in Judea and Samaria, were not covered for practical reasons of distance and since the Believing populations there are relatively very small (Kjær-Hansen & Skjott 1999), far apart and peripheral in their greater communal influence. Of the 39 Hebrew-speaking fellowships described in the Caspari study, a full 30 (78%) are represented in the interview sampling.

Table of Interviewees by Region

Region	Interviewees	Congregations represented
Greater Jerusalem	35	13
Center	7	5
Greater Haifa	9	5
Northeast	6	4
Negev	3	3
Total	60	30

Language

This research was conducted simultaneously in Hebrew and English. Most interviewees were interviewed in their native tongue, apart from a few exceptions. Early on, native Israelis were also interviewed in English to give them the freedom to choose their self-expression in the language of the dissertation rather than having to be translated by the researcher. However, after several interviews it became quite apparent that more was lost in freedom of expression by this approach than gained in freedom of translation. From that point onward all interviews were conducted in the native tongue of the interviewees, apart from the case of one immigrant who requested to be interviewed in Hebrew. Hebrew texts including interviews, correspondence or other publications, have been translated by the researcher unless preexisting translations were available, in which case, the translations are cited. Where the

original wording is particularly significant or ambiguous, it is placed either in brackets beside the translation or in a footnote for longer texts.

Names and pseudonyms. Real names are used in this paper when the individuals or organizations openly published materials or led open public discussions or conferences. The use of real names, when quoting authors of published or publicly posted materials, is not intended to either promote or disparage individuals, but simply to further facilitate discussion of the sociocultural processes and principles under study. When individuals wrote or spoke in closed forums, were observed in social interactions, or shared personal conversations or interviews, pseudonyms are employed. Even place names are changed which could serve to identify narrators. The rule followed is that anonymity is preserved wherever possible. No pseudonym is the real name of any other interviewee or specifically observed individual. However, a serious effort was made to preserve the nature of each name: the language of origin (i.e. Hebrew or foreign), the traditional or secular nuance, political leanings, generational association, etc. For example, Gamliel is a traditional Jewish name, Zechariah is a Scriptural Hebrew name, Robert is a North American Jewish male name, Uzi is more of a secular Israeli nickname, Golan is an Israeli name which hints at a particular connection to the land of Israel, and Shoshana is a name from an older generation of Israelis. Similarly, for example, Wisconsin carries different connotations as a place name than New York.

Participant observation in sites of identity construction

In order to more fully comprehend Messianic Jewish discourse, it is helpful to supplement in-depth interviews with participant observation. Participant observation focuses upon interactive social practice in context, involving contextualized usages (Maykut & Morehouse 1994:76) of subtly nuanced 'Messianese'. On a theoretical level, due to the multi-functionality of utterances, the hearer cannot always be sure she understands the speaker's intended meaning (Jaworski & Coupland 1999:12), making identification of contextual frames (Goffman 1974) necessary for the disambiguation of communication.

In addition to the two full ethnographies and one ethnographic essay of Messianic Jewish congregations in the United States (Feher 1998; Glick 1958; Harris-Shapiro 1999), there is indeed a rich literature of Jewish sub-group ethnographies, which combine ethnographic observations with in-depth interviews. Kugelmass' collection of ethnographic essays presents a broad spectrum of American Jewish life (1988), while Ariel Segal (1999) and Barbara

Myerhoff (1978), for example, offer more focused studies of peripheral Jewish communities in the Amazon or an urban jungle in Southern California.

Punch notes (2000:186) that ethnographic observation can focus more holistically on larger patterns of cultural behavior, which might otherwise be rendered invisible by more structured methodologies, such as closed-answer questionnaires. Due to the adaptive nature of participant observation, the focus and structure of the research is allowed to emerge through the process of fieldwork (Spradley 1980), as the researcher's ideas evolve and are clarified in her research journal (Maykut & Morehouse 1994). In addition, ethnography opens the door for interpretive discussions with key informants participating in experiences alongside the researcher (Punch 2000:189).

This research has extended over a period of 8 years, although the desire and concept behind it is more than twice as old. Fortunately, many events took place within the Messianic Jewish community in Israel during the research period which actually dealt directly with in-group identity issues and greatly informed this study. All throughout, observations were made in a wide variety of sites including: weekly and holiday congregational services, worship and prayer sessions, lifecycle celebrations, family gatherings, home meetings, fellowship gatherings, women's prayer and fellowship meetings, a variety of national conferences, Arab Christian and Messianic Jewish reconciliation meetings, bar/bat mitzvah lessons and ceremonies, children's classes and activities, outreach events, multi-media concerts and performances, etc.

Practically speaking, due to the intimate, faith-centered orientation of most meetings, as well as justifiable concerns of over-exposure opening the door to persecution, the latest technology of audio or videotaping observations (Punch 2000:187) would be deemed inappropriate or even offensive to the subjects. However, manual writing, and even typing directly on a laptop computer when technically possible, were generally acceptable and unobtrusive methods of note-taking, the latter being more appropriate in study sessions and conferences.

Emic literature analysis

As in the analysis of in-depth interviews, texts generated within the community, as well as texts rendered from observations, were analyzed using the principles of "grounded theory", looking for patterns and thematic issues of relevance and subsequently coded for further analysis (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

Emic texts analyzed for this research in Hebrew and in English include: published books, pamphlets and articles in Israeli Messianic periodicals; study curricula from a variety of adult education programs; song lyrics; western Christian literature translated for local Hebrew Messianic Jewish consumption; e-newsletters, e-articles, e-flyers announcing local Messianic Jewish events and Israeli Messianic Jewish internet site postings, fundraising and forums; and a series of critical and self-reflexive essays and creative writing projects assigned to Messianic Jewish students within the framework of a course which the researcher taught on Israeli Messianic Jewish identity.

Additional texts analyzed include American Messianic Jewish texts which constitute the other side of an ongoing dialogue between Israeli and American Jewish Believers. These texts are mediated not only through a variety of tangible media (literature, music, dance, etc.), but also through the immigration of North American Jewish Believers to Israel, their integration with the Hebrew-speaking Israeli Believing community, and the continual back and forth travel and relations between Believers in the two sites of America and Israel. American Messianic Jewish texts reviewed include inspirational literature, books, pamphlets, articles, internet postings, photographs, fundraising drive literature and advertisements, and song lyrics.

The advantage of multiple methodologies

The combination of methodologies not only provides a far thicker description, but also a kind of checks and balances system to fine-tune research findings. The following narrative can help illustrate this point:

I had a girlfriend this year. She's Russian, she's Jewish, she's a Levite... She knows some Yiddish, her mother speaks Yiddish, and all that, but the religion was gone. They're secularized Jews, ethnic only... Jewishness means nothing to her. She would like to move to America. She's a Christian now, that's the way she sees it... Yulia fasted once or twice a week, every week, all year long. Come Yom Kippur, "You fasting?" "No." "Well why not?" "Because we don't keep Law anymore." "Well, what do you mean, we don't keep Law?" "We are free from Law, we are Christians now, we don't keep Law." And I go, "But you fast already at least once a week, and sometimes twice a week. Why don't you fast on this day?" "Because, this is day to fast, we don't fast." The irony is that she used to be very good about keeping Shabbat, not to work on Shabbat. "No, no, we don't wash up now, it's Shabbat, we do that tomorrow... because it says somewhere in Bible. It's different. There's still Shabbat, rest of Law there's not." And then, it finally dawned upon me, the reason she says it 'cause she was a Seventh Day Adventist [in Russia]. She's keeping Shabbat 'cause she's a bloody Seventh Day Adventist, not because she's a Jew. So, a few months later I see her and we're talking, she goes, "You know, you made me think about when you said about Yom Kippur holiday, and what you said about Shabbat and Yom Kippur and Law, and I'm thinking, you are right, it's the same thing. Why I keep Shabbat if I don't keep Yom Kippur? So now I don't keep Shabbat." (Richard).

Even a superficial analysis of Jewish Believer discourse will show that “Messianic Jew”²² means one thing to some Israeli Believers and something very different to others. In practice, as well as in discourse, as well, things are not always what they seem to be. Had Richard continued assuming that Yulia’s apparent observance was a harbinger of her reorientation toward greater observance in the future, he would have been sorely disappointed. By checking his observation against Yulia’s discursive past and her own narrative explanation, he received a more balanced interpretation.

²² See “An introduction to Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular”.

Chapter four

BACKGROUND

Exposition

Messianic Jews take a fundamental approach to Scripture but also believe in personal revelation, and are influenced by a great variety of religious and secular systems of thought, making them an extremely diverse group. This work does not attempt to represent every variation on the theme of Messianic Jewishness, but rather to present and analyze major themes, schemas, trends and dynamics within the community, often providing specific examples as concrete, but not in any way comprehensive illustrations.

This is a paper written by a social anthropologist, based on a variety of social theories and anthropological methodologies, as outlined above, and original empirical research. It does not presume to be doing theological work, nor to systematically lay out the various theological positions of Israeli Messianic Jews, but rather deals with social and cultural aspects and ramifications of theology.

The researcher was careful to explain the nature of the study to all interviewees, record their assent to be interviewed and recorded, and subsequently have their interview transcribed verbatim, analyzed, translated into English by the researcher where necessary, and quoted in such a manner that would mask personal identifying features as much as possible. All raw material remains solely in the hands of the researcher and will not be made available to others in the future without the express consent of the interviewees themselves. The only other persons to have seen the raw material, were the few transcribers who listened to the tapes and typed up the texts. The quality of the recordings was not always ideal, and there is also room for human error in interpretation.

The researcher's membership within the community is a subject necessitating exposition for two reasons. Historically, the tradition of anthropologists has been to seek out foreign "natives" from more "primitive" cultures than their own. In the past few decades, however, it has become much more acceptable for anthropologists (yes, even Jewish ones) to do what folklorists have been doing all along, which is to study their own societies and even their own specific cultural groups within those societies, such as the Jewish community (Kugelmass 1988; Myerhoff 1978), or to search out "other" Jewish groups elsewhere (Segal 1999). On the other hand, anthropologists also maintain a discourse concerning the difficulties of entering

into foreign societies (the need for extensive language training, preventative medical treatments, key informants, etc.), or of remaining within closed societies or cultural groups in conflict, for any length of time. And of course, no one gets to read all the possible ethnographies which are never written as a result of failed entries into the research field.

It seems fair to say that no non-Messianic Jew and probably also no non-Jewish Messianic would have the extensive access to individuals, groups, personal, public and leadership events, publications and personal exchanges, that a group member has, nor would she have the same depth of knowledge and background understanding to interpret these narratives or observations. Many Israeli Messianic Jews tend toward suspicion of social scientific research, concerned that it is incapable of recognizing the authority or value of “spiritual” endeavors²³, and may even serve to undermine them. Much of this tension is mitigated, I believe, to no small degree, by years of trust built up between fellow community members. Throughout the years of research, I have met with willingness and some level of interest on the part of most leaders and laypeople in both the interviews and observations.

At the same time anthropology and cultural studies provide a distancing “outside” perspective to balance insider knowledge, which has been further challenged by the comments and guidance of two wonderful advisors, Professor Gabriel Horenczyk, social psychologist, and Dr. Zvi Bekerman, social anthropologist, and the responses of various scholarly groups within the Melton Centre of Jewish Education and the Rothberg International School of the Hebrew University before whom I have been privileged to present various stages of this work.

Would one question the appropriateness of a Jewish scholar researching Jewish identity? On the contrary, one might suspect that a Gentile doing so wouldn’t necessarily be capable of grasping all of the nuances of Jewishness, particularly if he is, God forbid, a Christian. This brings us to the second reason why one might question a Messianic Jewish anthropologist’s study of Messianic Jews. It is related to a particular hegemonic prejudice. When speaking of the study of a marginalized identity, why is it that an anthropologist belonging to a dominant Jewish stream might be assumed to do a better job than one coming from within the community under study? Eyebrows are raised for two reasons. One, because there is an underlying expectation of “objectivity” which is supposedly compromised by an in-group scholar, and two, because of the even deeper threat to the present scholarly and religious

²³ Particularly among Believers who hold to a dichotomous spirit-mind paradigm.

hegemonic establishments which generally demand to be reified rather than fundamentally challenged through scientific research.

In fact, a “disengaged” anthropological inscription seems much more problematic in comparison, when keeping in mind that there is no such thing as pure scientific objectivity, and considering the potential violence that such supposedly “disengaged” work has already administered against its subjects (please see critiques of uncharitable works on Messianic Jews above under “Literature on Messianic Jews”). The very knowledge that this dissertation is subject to contestation by the academic community as well as the community under study, as ideally it should be, leads the researcher to strive for an accuracy and balance of perspectives which must necessarily be far greater than classic western academic treatises on illiterate, non-academically socialized societies of the third world, subject only to academic supervision.

Many Israeli Messianic Jews have asked the researcher during the years of fieldwork what is the bottom-line that I have to say about or recommend for the Israeli Messianic Jewish community. The study was indeed continually shaped by a deep concern and love for the subjects, and a desire to contribute a dimension of critical social analysis generally absent within the community. The paper is also written with a candor which may be painful at times. However it is not a position paper or a social program to be implemented by the community, although it can form the springboard for many. It is the broadest dynamic anthropological analysis that the researcher could possibly muster of the sociocultural discourses and praxes at work in this highly complex, heterogeneous community, and also a starting point for dialogue.

At times the art of comprehensible writing seems to require the clear definition of discursive positions and strategies. This clarity comes with a certain risk that the text may convey a misleading sense of fixed dichotomies, rather than broad spectrums and fields. It is my hope that the reader takes home a certain clarity regarding the spectrum, discursive complexity and fluidity of real Israeli Jewish Believer identity work.

My goal in this work is to translate, explore and explain the internal coherence of Israeli Messianic Jews, the sociocultural group under study, not to justify or judge it (Asad 1986:150), although at times questions of sociocultural expediency arise in reference to particular practices in light of theory and empiricism, and I do not hesitate to address them. Nor is the intent to judge, sully or promote any individuals or specific organizations. It is my sincere hope that the internal voices within the community will be heard by others and by one

another in a clear and orderly manner, and will thus be enabled, through the mediation of pseudonyms and stories, to challenge one another in unprecedented ways. Although I am pleased if the non-Messianic reader is able to see various aspects of the community in a positive light, this is not my goal, nor have I withheld the most difficult of dilemmas to artificially make-over the community for public exposure. As I argue throughout, Israeli Messianic Jews are essentially issuing a challenge to the generally accepted and hegemonically enforced paradigms of established Judaism and Christianity, and it is this challenge, both to the establishments, and to the scholars that study them, that should resound throughout this work.

Researcher's Background

It is customary in contemporary social science research today for the researcher to share about her background and personal perspective to shed further light on what is necessarily a subjectively interpretative work.

First a word on the background of this research. In 1998, several Messianic Jewish leaders from Israel and the United States approached two university lecturers with a research proposition to study Israeli Messianic Jewish identity. The leaders felt that the community of Messianic Jews in Israel was approaching a crossroads. In the words of Ilan Zamir, “How is the Israeli body of Messiah²⁴ to continue to build, without destroying ourselves in the process?” (Zamir, telephone conversation, 15.12.99) With growing numbers of Jewish Israelis coming to faith in Yeshua as the Messiah, joining indigenous Messianic congregations and choosing to maintain some form of Jewish identification, these leaders asked to examine what constitutes contemporary Messianic Jewish identity, to equip them to better understand their heterogeneous community and consequently pave an informed and unity-seeking course for the future. Having grown up as an insider to the community, and specializing in the social anthropology of identity, I was first hired to coordinate the research, and later agreed to take on what promised to be a rich, empirically and theoretically fruitful doctoral research project, through the Melton Centre for Jewish Education, in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In 1989 I graduated as valedictorian (and only member) of my high school class in *Chalutzim* Academy, an experimental Messianic Jewish day school associated with *Beth Yeshua*, the

²⁴ The terms “body of Messiah” or “body of Believers” are used interchangeably to refer to all Believers in the world, Jewish and Gentile. Messianic Jews infrequently use the term “the Church” in this manner, the way that Gentile Christians might. On the contrary, “the Church” is often used as a term to refer to *Gentile* Believers or, in some contexts, to the Gentile Church establishment and its anti-semitic heritage.

Messianic Jewish congregation which I attended by choice from age ten until making *Aliyah* at age twenty-two. My studies continued with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania *cum laude* which concentrated in Jewish, Israeli and immigrant cultural studies, and a Master of Arts degree in Social Anthropology and Sociology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem *magna cum laude* focusing on Israeli society and identity. These studies culminated in a Hebrew thesis on how immigrant university students from the early 1990's wave of immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union employ spatial narratives of their old and new countries to secure cultural capital and construct an intellectually elite "place" for themselves in Israeli society. This present study was already well underway in 1999 by the time my MA was complete, and continued until the submission of this dissertation, apart from several personal hiatuses, including two academic year-long periods of child-leave, and one full year of intensive Arabic study with my family in Amman, Jordan. Throughout the studies my husband and I have been very involved in three Messianic Jewish congregations, and to a lesser extent with two Arab evangelical congregations, in the Jerusalem area, and I have worked as a researcher, lecturer and grantwriter, and managed my own professional translation and editing business.

A brief historical and theological prelude

Who is a Jew?

Historically throughout most of the common era, Judaism has represented a religion, a culture and a nation (Ben-Rafael 2002:xxi). The cultural practices of the Jewish people were inseparable from their religion; being Jewish was, and still is in many communities, a comprehensive communal way of life covering all aspects of the holy and the profane. To this very day in Hebrew, there is no commonly used word equivalent to "Jewishness". Faith, culture and nation are intertwined conceptually and linguistically in the one word "Judaism". Judaism is not only what you believe; it is what you do and who you are by blood and affiliation. That is not to say that all Jews were always faithful practitioners. There could always be "bad" apples in the bunch, but they were just that- bad Jews still being measured by the same religious Jewish scales as every other Jew.

The Jewish people had succeeded in preserving a Jewish culture and community inseparable from the Jewish religion for centuries in Diaspora, until the Enlightenment, the granting of equal civil rights for Jews in Europe, and the beginning of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. Legal authority once attributed to the rabbis shifted to the civil state. The intellectual, political and social boundaries that traditionally defined a Jewish "Us" against a Christian "Them", and

vice versa, were officially removed or became prodigiously porous (Cohen 1999:344-5). In the west, Jewish identity began to be interpreted through the taxonomies of modern nation-states, both by the state and by the Jewish subjects themselves. In France, Jews became Frenchmen of Jewish religious persuasion, regardless of the degree of their observance (Charmé 2000). Over time in the United States, religion was a private matter and being Jewish primarily came to mean displaying certain ethnic characteristics (e.g. business sense, neuroticism, creative and intellectual excellence). In the former Soviet republics, “Jewish” became a nationality like Ukrainian or Polish (Markowitz 1988). Jews at times were also characterized by certain racial or physical characteristics such as a large nose, dark hair, short stature and even black features (Gilman 1986:6-12), an approach taken to the extreme by Nazi pseudo-scientific propaganda.

Jewishness, like every other social identity, had always been imagined (Anderson 1991; Cohen 1999:5). People simply began imagining it differently than before. “Judaism” became undone. It was no longer a comprehensive three-stranded cord of faith, culture and nation; it could be any protean combination of the above. This is not to say that the holistic paradigm of rabbinic Judaism disappeared, but rather that with the ideological movements and freedoms introduced from the Enlightenment onward in Europe, other more particularistic paradigms also became available for Jewish self-definition (Neusner 1987). “Identity” is the name given to these new-fangled paradigms of Jewishness. In fact, in the postmodern era, we discuss “Jewish identity” expressly because there are so many ways to define what was once encompassed under the grand term “Judaism” (Bauman 1996:19). As a result of Judaism’s undoing, Jewish people today are much freer than ever to sift, choose and interpret the components of their Jewish identity.

Who is a Messianic Jew?

Indeed, at the turn of the 21st century, the interviews in this research are replete with stories of sifting, choosing and interpreting religiously, politically or socially-active Jews, doctor-lawyer-Indian chief professional Jews, JAP-joke²⁵-telling-kosher-style-deli-eating cultural Jews, persecution-fearing assimilating Jews, hippie left-wing liberal Jews, secular or national religious Israeli Jews, *baal tshuvah*²⁶ Jews, ultra-Orthodox Jews, and Jews “by choice”. At least two-thirds of the interviewees actively explored Judaism consistently or at various times throughout their faith journeys, before and after accepting Yeshua, by attending yeshiva, consulting rabbis,

²⁵ JAP stands for “Jewish American Prince or Princess”, who becomes the butt of a series of jokes about materially-spoiled, haughty nouveau riche American Jews.

²⁶ A Jew who has renounced his secular ways and returned in most cases to orthodox Jewish observance.

studying Jewish subjects in university, reading independently, attending synagogue, praying from the *siddur*²⁷, observing various holiday practices, etc. All found themselves asking questions about truth, God's existence and his nature, the purpose of life, the significance of being a Jew and how these things should meaningfully effect their lives. Except in stricter Orthodox circles, up until this point, their search for truth and existential meaning was considered legitimate. But here is the rub: all of the interviewees eventually violated one of Judaism's most fundamental and constitutive taboos: they found their answers by coming to faith in Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah.

Even more egregious, all remained identified as Jews or eventually made their way back to their Jewish identity after some process of wrestling with what it means for a Jew to believe in Yeshua. A Yeshua-Believer's Jewish identity becomes controversial vis-à-vis the mainstream Jewish community the moment he continues to identify himself as a Jew, rather than accept normative Judaism's and Christianity's clear-cut paradigm in which the Jewish Believer has violated his faith and culture and willingly separated himself from his people by converting to Gentile Christianity. The Believer's decision to reject this normative interpretation and to "remain Jewish", by definition, challenges normative Jewish concepts regarding who or what is or is not Jewish or Christian.

Historically, generally scripted as a story of ignominy and betrayal, Messianic Jews were predestined for assimilation into the Gentile Church. But with the onset of the Enlightenment, the rise of the nation-state concept of national identity, the liberation of Jews from European ghetto life, Jewish and Christian Zionisms, and the increasing efforts of evangelical missions to the Jews, Jewish Believers in Yeshua began to see themselves, and to be seen by various Church movements, as possessing a legitimately unique national, and at times spiritual, "Messianic Jewish" identity. Thus, the same historical changes which brought about an unraveling of Judaism, also opened the door for the phenomenon of Yeshua-Believing Jews.

Furthermore, as Messianic Jews began rereading New Covenant accounts, troubling questions arose. Who is actually converting to what? Initially it was Jews following a Jewish rabbi and Messiah. There were hardly any Gentiles at all in the picture, and certainly no "Christianity" as it is known today. In fact, the book of *Acts* records a debate regarding whether the Gentiles

²⁷ Traditional Jewish prayer book.

that come to believe in Yeshua need to convert to Judaism in order to receive salvation²⁸. If the Jews remained Jewish, the Gentiles remained Gentile but free to draw nearer to the roots of their faith, and both were free to follow the Messiah, why should Jews who come to believe in Yeshua today be made to convert to another, man-made religion, and abandon their birthright? And if Jews do not have to convert to a Gentile Christianity, how then should they practice a faith whose vast majority of known practitioners have been Gentiles for the past 1600 years?

Secular Zionism

Secular Zionism promotes the right of the Jews as a nation to build a territorially-sound state of their own in their historical homeland of Israel. Most early Zionists were secular European Jews who associated the suffering and apparent underdevelopment of Jewry with a religious emphasis on intangible matters of spirit and minute points of law, rather than on productive occupations and a Romantic connection with the land. They were interested in the physical and cultural liberation and national restoration of the Jewish people (O'Brien 1986).

Secular Zionism was a national movement, modeled on other western national movements of its era, led by idealistic youth, rebelling against, replacing and repairing the Diaspora Jewry or Judaism of their fathers (Ben-Sasson 1976). Secular Zionists often constructed Judaism as its Doppelgänger, a ghostly remnant of Diaspora life to be displaced by Zionist ideology, culture and commune in the Homeland, beginning the secular process of healing and restoration of the Jewish people. In fact, the Israeli was called the “New Hebrew Man”, a secular attempt at the rebirth of the Hebrew nation (Zerubavel 1995:21). This New Hebrew, elected by his self-sacrifice in the performance of physical labor rather than his innate propensity for learning, was “reborn” through service to the Motherland, creating a mythical mother-son dyad, replacing the Jew’s Father-Creator and Old World parentage, as in Shlonsky’s poem “Labor” (Shlonsky 1971:15, Hebrew):

Clothe me, worthy Mother, gloriously in a coat of many colors
And at dawn take me to labor...
Thus the lovely city prays to its creator
And amongst the creators
Is your son Abraham
Poet, road builder in Israel.

²⁸ In *Acts* 15, it was decided that a version of the Noahide laws sufficed, but that Gentiles were free to study the Torah as it is read weekly in the synagogue.

The Hebrew Scriptures were used as a map and textbook to orient returning Jews in their ancestral land (Almog 1997:254, Hebrew), and to equip them in the reestablishment of an authentic agrarian society, turning the clock back to a pre-Diaspora biblical golden age. Biblical holidays were observed in their agricultural contexts, and biblical texts provided the cultural and political history of the regional peoples, as well as the greatest historical justification for the return to Zion of the dispersed nation. Nevertheless, not all Zionists were atheists or secular in practice. In fact, religious national movements existed even in the pre-State period, believing that God is regathering his people as part of their process of redemption.

With the establishment of the State of Israel, Israeli ideology began shifting from a rejection of the *Galut* and the *Golda*²⁹ to a paradigm of Diaspora Jewry as Israel's partner, a pragmatic shift in light of the fact that the majority of Jews chose not to "redeem themselves" through *Aliyah*. The Israeli Zionist movement transformed into a cult of localized nationalism, a civil religion, characterized by "... the ceremonials, myths, and creeds which legitimate the social order, unite the population, and mobilize the society's members in pursuit of its dominant political goals. Civil religion is that which is most holy and sacred in the political culture. It forges its adherents into a moral community" (Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983:ix).

The Protestant Christian mission and Christian Zionism in Israel

Although Messianic Jews claim Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah, faith in him has nonetheless been fostered in exile mostly among Gentile Christians for nearly two millennia. An exploration of why Protestant Christians rather than Catholics have played so significant a role in the modern revival of Messianic Judaism is well beyond the scope of this present paper. Two possible reasons are that Catholicism was historically occupied with theologically superseding, rather than "saving" the Jewish people, and the Catholic practices of praying to Mary, widespread use of iconography, prominent crucifixes, formal clerical garb, monastic celibacy, Latin language and ritualized services known only by the initiated, as well as the difficult collective memories that these arouse in the Jew, generally were and remain far less appealing to Jewish people than the more popular forms of Protestantism.

The classic Protestant mission to Israel simply believes in spreading Christianity to all nations, and sees no reason to target the Jews, Israelis or Arabs any more or any less than other people

²⁹ Diaspora and Diaspora Jewry, respectively.

groups³⁰. Interestingly, the same historical developments which unfettered the Jews of Europe and allowed for the development of Zionism, also influenced missions to the Jews. As the Protestant missions to the Jews grew, particularly in Britain and the United States, many Christians were not only willing to accept the socio-political concept of a Jewish nationality and its Romantic connection to the land of Israel, but also saw in Zionism early signs of the return of the Jewish exiles prophesied in Scripture, preceding the imminent return of the Messiah to reign as king from Jerusalem. These Christians therefore began to support Zionism, and became known as Christian Zionists (Nerel 1996; Stanfield 1996). Over time, some even began to support the idea of passing on their mantle to indigenous Jewish Believers.

Today among Christian individuals or organizations active in Israel, there is what can best be described as a spectrum from classic missionaries to pro-indigenous Zionist Christians. Christian Zionists continue to visit, study and work in Israel, lobby in their respective countries to support their vision of what Israel should be, and financially support the State and even some settler initiatives. They have their own mission organizations, churches, foreign financial support and social networks in Israel. Some also take on leadership roles in Messianic Jewish circles, intermarry with Jewish Believers, speak fluent Hebrew, and even claim to represent the body of indigenous Yeshua-Believers. A small handful have even converted out of identification with the Jewish people. However, many if not most of the Christian Zionists are supportive of the State of Israel, at least initially, because of their understanding of Scripture, and not necessarily out of knowledge of, relationship with or love for the Jewish people, their history, faith or culture.

The dominant religious model informing the classic mission to Israel elaborates the Greek spirit versus body (or mind) dichotomy. It is to some degree a reaction to ritualistic “religiosity” associated with the traditional observance of Catholicism or Orthodox Judaism. The body is both an earthen vessel containing the practitioner’s spirit, externally distinguished by social or national identities “of this world”, and a potential carnal enemy of the spirit which it carries. For Jewish Believers, the dual corporality of national belonging and carnality becomes a two-edged sword. On the one hand, the mission accepts and even encourages Jewish national identification, in today’s terms, Israeli national identity, just as Christians may see themselves as belonging to and representing, perhaps even in an intercessory prophetic role, any other people or nation in the world. On the other hand, the Jewish body (or mind) is

³⁰ For detailed descriptions of the complex relations between the mission and Jews in pre- and early state Israel, see Ben Meir’s accounts (in publication).

secondarily conceived as potentially carnal and at war with the spirit of the Believer. This carnality, perhaps unsurprisingly, has very often become associated with Jewish religion and culture. Therefore, the spirit/body cultural dichotomy informing much of mission thought and praxis creates a practical dichotomy for the Jewish Believer, encouraging Israeli national identity with a religious fervor on the one hand, but zealously proscribing Judaism or Jewish culture³¹ as carnal and at war with Messianic faith, on the other hand.

Thus, according to the spirit/body dichotomy, one may have an amalgam of Messianic faith (i.e. Christianity) and Jewish nationalism in the same way that one might combine Christianity and French national culture. One can be a Protestant Frenchman, but one cannot possibly be a Protestant Jew, except in the sense of a member of the Jewish people (hence the term “Hebrew Christian”) or a national Israeli (hence “Israeli Christian” or “Israeli Believer”). Therefore one can be an ardent practitioner of the Zionist cult of nationalism and a Believer in Yeshua, however, the Jewishness of a “true” spiritual Believer must be limited to national or unobtrusive cultural identity elements.

Since true faith, an internalized matter “of the heart”, eschews “religion”, it follows that embodied practice, particularly in the context of Jewish Believers, is viewed suspiciously as nonessential “religious trappings” bordering on “Jewish pride”, spiritual “bondage” to the Law, or even as man-made religious attempts to work out salvation in the flesh, i.e. carnal “Judaizing”. According to this antinomian position³², any adoption of traditional Jewish religious observance must be intended solely for evangelistic purposes, but not intrinsic to the Jewish Believer’s spiritual identity. It is logically expected that these traditional,

³¹ Although there is little room to elaborate here, in the interviews and observations, elements of Jewish culture such as body language, speech patterns, culinary and hospitality traditions, bodily aesthetics, etc. are often treated as inferior, rejected and judged to be carnal according to this cultural paradigm. In these cases, white western Christian models of behavior and aesthetics are held up as the local Israeli Messianic Jewish standard (See Gilman’s 1986 analyses of the Jewish body in the eyes of the Christian west). As feminist scholars of identity (ex. Delaney 1995) might expect, these cultural standards seem to be particularly pronounced and enforced in regards to standards of femininity.

³² Antinomianism was an early Christian theological movement to stamp out the Law, by constructing law and grace as a dichotomy and forcing the Believer to choose between the two, either numbering himself among the “faithful” or among “heretics”. Today antinomianism manifests as a theological position that rejects the keeping of the commandments found in the Hebrew Scriptures for any other than cultural or evangelical reasons. The antinomian position rests on Christian interpretations of New Covenant verses such as *Colossians* 2 – that the Law was nailed to the cross; *Galatians* 3:28 – that Jewishness no longer carries significance in the Messiah; *Ephesians* 2:8 – that works are no longer significant in the New Covenant; and *Hebrews* 8 – that the Temple system and its sacrifices are passé. Though beyond the scope of this anthropological work, for several decades Messianic Jews have worked to establish a theological school of thought which offers entirely different interpretations to these and other passages, concluding that Yeshua confirmed rather than negated the Law for his followers (see *Matthew* 5:17), not for their salvation, but as a guidebook for holy living (see *Romans* 8:4).

evangelistically-oriented practices would be dropped in “Believer-only” in-group gatherings such as conferences, insular home groups, seminars or retreats.

One can, however, hold to Messianic faith and be a good Israeli by faithfully keeping civil practices such as observance of pilgrimage to the graves of fallen soldiers, solemn moments of silence in memory of terrorist victims, customary civil feasts and fasts on holidays such as Tu B’shvat, Passover and Independence Day, the latter of which traditionally involves animal sacrifice (barbecue) in public shrines (parks)³³. Yet one cannot, according to the classic Protestant mission paradigm, be a Messianic Believer and a religiously observant Jew, or even observe various Jewish religious practices for spiritual rather than cultural reasons³⁴. Messianic Jews who adopt this paradigm necessarily bar themselves from traditional Jewish faith expressions historically developed by the Jewish people. Having rejected potentially “spirit-less”, “Yeshua-less” Jewish religious observance, they are “freed” to draw their faith expressions from Gentile Christianity or secular Zionist culture, for what other choices remain?

Zionism also reveals a similar rejection of the image of the old Diaspora Jew, living an inauthentic, fruitless life cut off from his land, and impotent in his religion to bring about his own redemption. Both the Protestant and Zionist paradigms suggest the supersession of Judaism, through spiritual and national rebirth respectively. For the purposes of this research, the main difference between the Jewish and Protestant models of identity is that the Jewish model allows the individual to expand or contract identity to include any or all of the multiple spirit-soul-body facets of Jewishness, whereas the Protestant mission model sets up a spirit-flesh dichotomy between Messianic faith and traditional embodied observance, in which the faithful are led to spiritualize Jewish national identification and repudiate Jewish religious or cultural identification. Allying with the historically mainstream Zionist rejection of Diaspora Judaism, the Protestant mission model promotes the disdain of Jewish thought and practice, framing the observant Jew as the antithesis of a Believing Israeli.

³³ The point being that Jewish service and ritual are often held suspect for competing with Messianic service and ritual, while national Israeli service and ritual are venerated and perceived to be complimentary. Our model which details the dual role of the Jewish body explains differential treatment of Israeli and Jewish observances.

³⁴ For example, one should not build a *sukkah* because the Jewish people are commanded to do so in Scripture, but rather because one chooses to be one with the people during *Sukkot* “as a testimony” and perhaps because the kids enjoy hanging their school-made ornaments inside it and making a camping site out of their balcony once a year.

Findings

Chapter five

AN INTRODUCTION TO ISRAELI MESSIANIC JEWISH VERNACULAR

Words have great power. What words can do... A person can take one word and make from it a big to-do. (Yitzhak qtd. in "This is the Covenant." June 2004).

Before delving into an analysis of identity construction within the narratives and observations, it would be helpful to set the stage by introducing the emic³⁵ idiom, the most common terms of Messianic Jewish discourse in Israel. For the purposes of this paper, these terms are called "the Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular"³⁶. Language is a major site for sociocultural struggle in the Israeli Believing community, and one which will surface time and again in this paper. This chapter attempts to equip the reader with a basic introduction to the terms and polyphony of the Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular. Terms were teased out of the narrative and observation materials and presented here in their multivocality.

Defining Emic Terminology

There are many connotations to the words Christian, Jew and Messianic Jew. Is "Messianic" simply a culturally-sensitive or politically-correct way to say "Christian" to a Jewish audience, or does it suggest a fundamental paradigm shift in the self-identification of Jewish Believers in Yeshua? Moreover, who is a "Jew" anyway?

Every interviewee is aware of the multifaceted connotations of these terms, yet *each Messianic Jew has his own personal working dictionary of Messianic Jewish terminology*. With all of the linguistic options laid out before them, each interviewee personally compiles and justifies her individual terminological preferences in differing ways, for differing reasons. For example, one interviewee may use the term "Messianic" to mean one who believes in Yeshua as the Messiah, while another might claim that "Messianic" refers to a specific worldview which affirms the maintenance of Jewish identity for Jewish people who believe in Yeshua. What is

³⁵ "Emic" is the in-group way of organizing or expressing something, as opposed to the "etic" ways and expressions of other groups, which may include the hegemonic mainstream or even academicians.

³⁶ Please refer to "The struggle for subjectivity," for a nuanced discussion of the role and uses of language in Messianic Jewish identity construction and political in-group struggles.

certain is that the debate within the Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular touches upon deep identity issues among Messianic Jews.

This section provides a comprehensive summary of the most basic terms circulating in Israeli Messianic Jewish circles, and their various connotations as mentioned by the interviewees, followed by quotes to give the reader a sense of the highly developed Messianic Jewish discourse of terminology.

Jew/Jewish – 1. A nationality, belonging to the people of Israel. 2. A member of or something belonging to the Jewish religion, Judaism.

I think I have a heightened sensitivity so I'm like the word police. What do we call ourselves? To some people, I would just say, I'm a Jew who believes that Yeshua is the Messiah and I believe in the *Tenach* and the *Brit Hadasha*³⁷. That's how I explain myself, because to be a Messianic Jew to most people doesn't mean anything. So you say I'm a Believer, I'm a Messianic Believer. What does that mean to people who don't know? So it gives you an opportunity to explain it. But I'll always say that I'm Jewish. I will never allow anybody to call me anything but Jewish because I believe that being a Jew is a people... [But] Judaism is a religion... So its hard to say what I'd call myself. If I had to define myself... an Israeli Messianic Jew with an American passport and an Israeli passport, something like that. Not a passport, but that's who I am, that's my citizenship, my culture. (Carol)

For non-observant Carol, being Jewish means belonging to a people and not necessarily to a religion. Shoshana and Benjamin (below) simply call themselves a “Jew”; any additional qualifier might imply that one is a B-grade sort of Jew. From their perspective, Messianic faith is inextricably woven into their Jewish identity. Yet Shoshana's concept of a Jew as a native ex-kibbutznik Israeli is far from Orthodox Judaism, while Benjamin's concept, as a strictly observant American immigrant, includes belonging to a people and a faith:

I am a Jew. I don't recognize, don't even believe in this concept “Messianic Jew”. Yeshua was Jewish. I'm Jewish. If people ask me if I believe in the Messiah, I'll tell them. But I don't call myself a “Messianic Jew”. I don't hide my faith, but I don't label myself, either. I am an Israeli Jew; that's what I am. What I believe, that's what I believe, but it doesn't give me a different label. That's the way it should be. That way Yeshua is our Messiah. He is a Jew; we are Jews. We don't need to be anything else. (Shoshana, Hebrew)

We have to get our identity straight. I am a Jew. (And the fact that you believe in Yeshua as the Messiah, you don't feel that you have to state that?) We have to get over that, well, I mean I can say that I have a certain perspective and that maybe makes my direction somewhat different than others, but I'm Jewish. I'm a Jewish person. And we have to get away from this mindset that other people try to create for you. They create for you, for

³⁷ *Tenach* is an acronym for the Torah, Prophets and Writings which compose the books of the Hebrew Scriptures. The *Brit Hadasha* is the Hebrew term for “The New Covenant.”

us, some kind of B-grade [Jewishness] here. The New Testament defines that's an integral part of being Jewish, being a real Jew is that faith has to be an integral part of your life. (Benjamin)

Christian – 1. Gentile, non-Jewish in culture, or those who adopt Christian cultural practices. 2. Belonging to the nations, not apart of the Jewish people. In this sense, “Christian” or “Christianized” can be used as a label for a Jewish person who is seen as having cut themselves off from their people by believing in Yeshua and subsequently rejected Jewish culture and/or community. 3. Any individual ascribing to Christianity. 4. “Real” or “True” believing Christians as distinguished from “nominal Christians”.

I guess I started calling myself a Messianic Jew. Or ‘Jewish Believer in Messiah’... When I went to face the rabbinate, they said to me, “Are you a Christian?” And I said with an absolutely completely clear conscience before God, “No, no. I am a Jewess”. Never in all our years that we’ve been Believers, nobody had ever called us Christians. We have never thought of ourselves as Christians. We used the term- ‘I am a Believer’. A believer in what? In Yeshua. And the Rabbis never asked me what I believed in. They just asked me for labels. (And do you call yourself a Christian today?) Generally not, although sometimes I do, in some contexts, I might. When I’m around a bunch of Gentiles, I can just be a Christian. I feel like we cross over the boundaries. And we’re not bounded by the boundaries... that other people like to place on us. (Wendy)

I was born into a Jewish heritage... Yeshua was a Jew... There’s been times when people have said to me, “Oh so you’re Christian?” And I’ll say, “No, I’m a Jewish person who believes in Yeshua,” so that might fall into the category of having a Christian belief system. But I believe that the root of Christianity was Jewish, because the root is Yeshua and Yeshua was Jewish. (But when you say Christian, you’re thinking of a Gentile believer.) Yes. NO! I mean, that’s why I wouldn’t really call myself a Christian...Yeah, and I know that there are Jewish Believers who consider, who’ll call themselves Christian. In fact I had a friend with me two days ago, one of my really dear friends, who calls herself a Christian, and when she does, it’s like I hear it, and I totally understand what she means, but it’s just not how I would label myself. (Tamar)

In Jewish contexts, the percentage of Messianic Jews that might call themselves Christian is very low due to all of the negative and misleading connotations the term can arouse. At the same time, in certain Gentile Christian contexts, almost exclusively in foreign languages, most Jewish Believers seem willing to call themselves “Christians” without qualification, if they know that their audience is “true” Gentile Believers in Yeshua that simply do not understand what it means to be a *Jewish* Believer in Yeshua:

If I come before a church in America, those are Gentile believers in a church in North Carolina. Do you see what I mean? Pini, what you are? I’m a Christian, of course I am. Now what do they understand? They know where I come from. They know me personally. They know that I am of Jewish descent. But when I say I am a Christian, they mean, that’s his descent, but he believes that Jesus is his God and Savior... Now I go to speak with my friend from school. He speak only Hebrew [sic]. For him a Baptist church is like Hitler convoy. You know what, he doesn’t know the differences within Christianity.

Everything that looks like a cross, it's Nazism, okay? And he tell me, "Pini what you are [sic]? Explain what you are." So I tell him, "I'm a Messianic Believer. I'm a Jew who believes in Jesus as his Lord and Savior." And then he says, "What? How can it be?" So for me it opens a five minute explanation of how and why. I would just drop it and leave it only for someone who knows me... it's always like explaining what you mean. (Pini)

However, most interviewees claim that they do not see themselves as Christians and would refer to themselves as such as a last resort or not at all:

Depending on who the person is, I want to communicate the right thought to them so I might start with someone who is very ignorant of even what a Jew is or what a Messianic Jew is with, 'Yes, I'm a Christian'... To introduce myself as Christian to anybody, it would be like a last resort to communicate to what I feel my identity is. (Gamliel)

For Beth, Jewishness is a religion and an entire sociocultural world that exists in tension with the surrounding Gentile Christians. In fact, the word "Christian" in her idiom is associated with white-haired church-going white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans who live in the "other" neighborhood:

I would want someone to say that I was a Messianic Jew... (And do you consider yourself a Christian?) No. [laughs] Definitely not. [laughs] Definitely not and I'm not going to have white hair, I'm not a Gentile, either... I was from a Jewish neighborhood, there were no Gentiles in our neighborhood and the rest was Catholic over here, the Italians, the Poles and the Gentiles, I mean, the WASPs³⁸... We were very Jewish, all our friends were Jews, I couldn't even invite a non-Jew to my Bat Mitzvah, we were very, very socially Jewish. Everything we did was only Jews, everything, we had no non-Jewish friends. (Beth)

Messianic Jew – 1. A believer in a messiah, to include the Chabad followers of the Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, followers of Rabbi Nachman of Braslav and some settler groups. 2. A Jewish person who believes in Yeshua as Messiah. 3. A Jewish person who believes in Yeshua as Messiah and affirms the significance of and seeks to maintain a Jewish identity and lifestyle. (Non-Jews that fit this description are referred to as "Messianic Gentiles").

Yisrael calls himself a Messianic Jew, whereas Yoni does not. Both recognize the need for additional explanations regardless of the terminology.

(How do you refer to yourself?) A Messianic Jew who believes in the Tenach and the New Covenant. Now, of course, if it is a Messianic Jew, they would understand that. A person in the street won't understand what that is. So I simply explain. (Yisrael, Hebrew)

If I say "Messianic Jew", there are also messianic Jews in Hebron that identify themselves that way. (Yoni, Hebrew)

³⁸ An acronym for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

However, as Yael and Alon point out, the term “Messianic Jew” covers A to Z without fleshing out the content of that identity. For Leah, true Messianic Jews are Jews who both follow Yeshua and respect Jewish culture and traditions. How exactly one expresses being a Jew who believes in Yeshua is left to individual interpretation:

I mean, Messianic is basically just Christian and using the Hebrew word instead of the Greek, and they mean the same thing. And “Jew” is just something I was born with whether I wanted to or not. I had no choice in the matter, okay, so I’m a Messianic Jew, but does that make who I am? Does that decide what I believe? (Yael, Hebrew)

A Messianic Jew is a person who is aware of two things mainly, of his Jewish background and Jewish heritage, and he believes in Yeshua as being the Messiah that the Jewish people is waiting for. Now, that’s very simple and that’s basically A and Z. There is nothing else except that this creates a lot of problems. Because of the history, because of Christianity, the way that Christianity have developed it [sic], because of Gentiles believing the same thing and the same Messiah, it creates a lot of confusion and a lot of problems... (Alon)

A Messianic Jew to me is someone who is both at the same time, completely committed to Judaism, to learning more about their Judaism, more about their traditions, more about their beliefs and where they came from, and I mean from Sinai on down, and yet someone who is also completely committed to Yeshua as the Messiah and to living the lifestyle that He lived, as close as one can do, being an imperfect human. And it’s hard, it’s not easy being both at the same time, especially here in Israel - [being] committed to Judaism and committed to the idea of Yeshua as the Messiah. (Leah)

Rather than have to explain strange terminology, Osnat prefers calling herself a Believer:

Believers. We are Believers. I never knew what to call myself. Messianic Jews. Apart from Messianic Jews, I don’t think that anyone else would know what that is. You always have to explain it. I remember when I told my parents, I wanted to begin to explain to them about it, so I said to them, “Have you ever heard of Messianic Jews?” That’s how I began... They didn’t know what that was. We needed to explain to them... I think that the Messianic Jews invented it themselves. We aren’t traditional Jews. We aren’t secular Jews. Messianic Jews. I don’t really like that definition even though sometimes I do use it among Believers. I don’t even know where the definition comes from. What are Messianic Jews? I mean if I try to get to the bottom of it, what is a Messianic Jew? Jew, okay. And what is “Messianic”? I myself can’t succeed in understanding the definition. I prefer defining myself as a Jew who believes in God and in Yeshua the Messiah... Or many times I say that I believe in the fullness of the Old and New Covenants. I’ve heard myself say that several times. Look, to explain what we are you certainly need more than one word. It’s pretty complicated. So... to make a long story short, I’m a Believer. (Osnat, Hebrew)

“Hebrew”, “Israeli” or “Jewish” Christian – 1. A Believer in Yeshua who comes from Jewish descent. Suggestive of a person of Hebrew nationality – a member of the Jewish people

– who holds to the “Christian” faith. The term was used more commonly before the rise of Messianic Jewish congregations and communities, when Jewish Believers continued to attend churches and fellowship in addition to a “Hebrew Christian” para-church fellowship, as many Jewish Believers continue to do to this day in Israel and the Diaspora. These terms are often used to indicate a national, but not a religious, identification as a Jew.

The Israeli Christian position is well-represented by Reverend Baruch Maoz of Grace and Truth Ministries³⁹, who teaches that:

It is wrong for anyone to celebrate the biblical feasts now if he does so as a matter of religious obligation *or as part of his worship* of God. The feasts have found their fulfillment in Christ. We have the substance and ought not engage ourselves with the shadows. (Italics added.)⁴⁰

Rather than seek some means to integrate Messianic faith with various forms and teachings of historic rabbinic Judaism like many of his contemporaries, Maoz claims that “Judaism is not Jewish”⁴¹. At the same time, he values and maintains certain Jewish expressions for their cultural value:

I celebrate a *Kabbalat Shabbat*⁴² in my home every Friday evening, I do not eat leaven at Passover, the congregation I serve celebrates all the holidays in Israel (*though not as part of our worship of God*), the many new immigrants amongst us have learned from me to cherish the *traditional culture* of Israel... I simply do not turn my Jewish identity into the central issue or focus, because I see my identity as a Christian to be of utmost importance. (Italics added.)⁴³

In her interview, Harriet describes her family’s rejection by her orthodox immigrant Jewish community as a result of their heterodox faith in Yeshua, as well as their limited fellowship with other Jewish Believers, her grandmother and mothers’ marriages to Gentile men, and the weakening over time of their social and cultural Jewish identifications. The quote from Harriet below illustrates how three generations of Believing Jewish women maintained some form of syncretic Jewish-Christian identification in Jewish mission and church contexts as Hebrew

³⁹ Grace and Truth Ministries located south of Tel Aviv is self-described as “A Christian Congregation in Israel” and “a Reformed and Baptist church among the Jewish people” (<www.graceandtruthbulletin.org>). Baruch Maoz, the pastor of the congregation, one of the founders of the International Jewish Evangelical Fellowship (IJEFF), has served for years with the missionary organization, Christian Witness for Israel (CWI), and is highly respected and influential in Israeli Messianic circles.

⁴⁰ Excerpted from responsa written by Maoz. Responsa. <www.graceandtruthbulletin.org>

⁴¹ See Maoz 2003.

⁴² Friday night welcoming of the Sabbath home ceremony which may vary greatly in content from family to family and depending on one’s ethnic background.

⁴³ Excerpted from responsa written by Maoz. Responsa. <www.graceandtruthbulletin.org>

Christians, until her mother's Jewish expression became reduced to eating two traditional Jewish foods and singing American Jewish jazz around the house⁴⁴:

My grandmother also accepted Jesus. So for years and years my grandmother and my mother practiced a mixture of Judaism and Christianity together with the holidays... So my grandmother kept somewhat traditional Judaism but it became more Christian in the atmosphere... It was a mission house... She just called it a house where they went to learn the Bible. So she never used that terminology – a church... My mother took us to a Lutheran church. But also my mother's identity as a Jew is that she's Jewish but because of the rejection that she had accepting Jesus, she was always told that she was no longer a Jew, because she lived in an orthodox Jewish community, which completely rejected you at that time if you accepted Jesus. So the only terminology we knew was that we were Hebrew Christians, that's the terminology. I was born and raised in that neighborhood, twelve years knowing I was Jewish but not a Jew... I was very aware that I was a Jew and that I was a Christian... When I went to my aunts' house for Shabbat of course I ate a kosher meal but we didn't keep a Jewish home. After my mother got married and started having children, the only thing Jewish that she did was eat gefilte fish and matza. Until about twenty years ago, my mother would always light *yahrzeit*⁴⁵ candles... And then she sang Al Jolson. Well, you know there's the religious part and then there's the American Yiddish culture. (Harriet)

Most interviewees agree that the term "Messianic Jew" describes themselves better than "Hebrew Christian" or "Christian Jew" in a Jewish context. However, most feel that the term is unclear to the average non-Messianic Jew. For this reason, interviewees tend to take two approaches. One is to use the unclear term "Messianic Jew" as an opportunity to stimulate conversations which allow them to share the contents of their faith and to challenge the religious establishments' stereotypes about Yeshua and Jewish Believers in him. The second approach tries to avoid misunderstanding and mutual alienation by using more ambiguous terminology such as a "Believer", a "Jewish Believer in God" or a "Jewish person who loves God" until further prompted by their conversational partner to expand their definition.

The above two approaches to idiomatic language are also applied more broadly to other insider terminology when speaking to non-Messianics:

A Jew that believes in Yeshua. It's hard to say it in one word... I think about how to say it clearly so that people will understand. Sometimes I say that I am a Messianic Jew, and they don't really understand what I'm talking about. (What about "Jewish Adherent of

⁴⁴ American black-face jazz singer, Al Jolson, is an ironically interesting reference figure, in light of Harriet's mother's identity struggle. According to Michael Rogin (1992: 417-454), the film *The Jazz Singer*, released in 1927 and based on Jolson's life, depicts Jolson revolting against his failed immigrant father by finding his own, uniquely American, voice, pursuing upward mobility (by essentially identifying with the despised American "negro" and intermarrying. The film touches on the guilt involved in rebellious assimilation, as well as the toll on the family and immigrant community.

⁴⁵ A memorial candle lit in memory of a deceased loved one.

Yeshua” or “Jewish Disciple of Yeshua”?) That sounds good. But I would say that more traditionally observant Jewish Believers use those terms. I think that in Hebrew it would be hard for an un-Believer to understand what a “Disciple of Yeshua” is. We have terms in our Hebrew, the language that we have created within our community, about which un-Believers would have no clue. For example *hitchabrut* (used for the English term “fellowship”). What is *hitchabrut* anyway?! Or there are people that pray, “Lord, cover me with Your blood”. Like, what is that?! Cannibalism? It’s important for me to use words that I know they will understand. So I prefer a “Jew who believes in Yeshua”. Then that opens up a conversation with people. (Yoni, Hebrew)

The word “mission” refers to Christianity. It’s *meshumad*, and it’s something not good, okay? Because it is associated with anti-Semitism. People associate it with pogroms against Jews. So there is a problem. Also the “Trinity”, for example. That’s a word that if you don’t have to use it, then it is preferable to refrain. It alienates people, causes them to withdraw. (Yosi, Hebrew)

In addition to the above terms, Israeli Messianic Jews may or may not use the Hebrew names of Jesus and the disciples and apostles when speaking in English as well, such as Yeshua, Shaul (for Saul-Paul of Tarsus), Yohanan the Immerser (for John the Baptist), etc., to emphasize the Jewish identity of the early Believers and of the New Covenant itself. In the same way, Israeli Messianic Jews are more likely to use the term “congregation” or “assembly” for their faith community and house of prayer rather than “church” or “synagogue”, though there are some that use those terms as well on either end of the spectrum. Other examples of terms include “*drasha*”⁴⁶ or “message” for the teaching at the weekly meeting; “*kiddush*”⁴⁷ or “the Lord’s supper”⁴⁸ for the breaking of bread and blessing over the wine; and “*brit*”, “*zeved bat*” or the curious Israeli invention “*brita*” for a baby dedication party after the birth, while others will have a “shower” (translated literally into Hebrew as “*miklahat*”) before the birth with Believers, and a more traditional religious *brit* ceremony for a boy with a *mohel*, nothing for a girl, and/or a special prayer and “laying on of hands” by congregational leaders during a service to dedicate and introduce the baby to the community after the birth.

It is clear that Israeli Messianic Jews are conversant in the connotations of their relevant terminology, and that their idiomatic choices are context-contingent and for the most part politically conscious. The lack of a comprehensive, comprehensible Hebrew vocabulary available to Jewish Believers, while perhaps reflecting a lack of cogent social identity and corporate maturity, actually affords a flexibility in communication within a heterogeneous community seeking unity. According to Eriksen (1993:73), all identities remain flexibly

⁴⁶ A Jewish sermon.

⁴⁷ A Jewish ceremonial blessing over the wine and bread.

⁴⁸ The Lord’s supper, or “communion” is a tradition in memory of Yeshua’s last supper where he commanded his disciples to continue to break bread and drink the fruit of the vine together.

ambiguous because they are connected with a negotiable history and cultural content. Accordingly, in language, as well as in other cultural media, Messianic Jews can negotiate themselves between the various versions of their history and culture and their layered identifications (Nagel 1994:154-5), in a variety of social contexts and interactions. Thus, for example, Israeli Messianic Jews speaking with their local co-religionists from different congregations or different ideological streams, by using relatively ideologically neutral (or vague) terms such as “Believers” rather than “Christians” when referring to themselves, or again the inclusive “Believers” rather than “Messianic Jews” in situations which include both Jews and Gentiles, can preserve a sense of unity, despite differences of theology, ethnicity, nationality or praxis. This sense of unity and commonality is particularly helpful in inter-group initiatives such as national music conferences, age or status-specific conferences (for children, youth, soldiers, singles, etc.), or regional or national outreach efforts. Alternatively, a Jewish Believer calling himself an Israeli Christian in the presence of observant Messianic Jews, may be interpreted as either a challenge to duel, or a strategy of exclusion of undesirable others.

This relative fluidity and permitted lack of specificity within Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular also facilitates communication between vastly differing faith communities. Thus the languaging in encounters with secular or religious Jews, nominal or believing Christians, co-workers, friends, family or passing acquaintances, in Hebrew or English, may vary considerably. The liminal position of the Messianic Jew necessitates proficiency in a variety of socio-religious idioms, since the onus falls upon the outsider to bridge the understanding gap. At the same time, this liminality strategically orients the Messianic Jew to subversively deconstruct hegemonic religious discourses. For example, by using Messianic Jewish terminology, Messianic Jews imply that it is the Gentile Christians who have converted to a Jewish faith in the Jewish Messiah, while Messianic Jews are simply continuing on the straight and narrow path of their forefathers as laid out in Scripture and fulfilled in Yeshua:

I believe in the Messiah who came to Israel, in Yeshua. (So they say, “That’s Christian. You converted to Christianity”. And what do you say?) I didn’t convert to Christianity. If somebody converted, or someone took on a different religion, then it is all of the Christians in the world that took on the Jewish faith. They are the ones that chose a different religion. (Nimrod, Hebrew)

In the same vein, note Pini’s argument below that the rabbis changed Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple, whereas Messianic Jews have remained true to biblical Judaism by affirming the fulfillment of the sacrificial system in the Messiah rather than replacing it with rabbinic Judaism. He argues that rabbinic Judaism has coopted his

terminology, labeling themselves as the true Jews and excluding Messianics. Despite his argument, like many others, Pini, chooses not to enter into a political struggle, preferring to focus his energies on teaching and evangelism. He allows Jewish orthodoxy to determine by default that he is not Jewish, and Christianity to label him Christian⁴⁹:

I was born into a Jewish nation. No one can change this fact. I do believe that to be a Jew in the eyes of God is to continue the faith that Abraham, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel had. They had the same faith. I do believe that I have the same faith they had. So actually, I didn't change. Do you see what I mean? I didn't change. If there would be no other religions, no one would kill the best terminologies. If someone would come and say what are you, I'd say I'm a Jew. Because I'm continuing the same faith as the prophets had... (But the rabbis changed.) Absolutely. They took my terminology. They took my name. So what do you think I'm going to quarrel with them? That's the last thing that I am going to do... So if you want to call me a Messianic Jew, call me a Messianic Jew. If you want to call me an animal, call me an animal. I don't care. As long as you know that the term itself is concerning someone who believes in Jesus as his Lord and Savior, it doesn't matter what kind of name you give me. (Pini, Hebrew)

The lack of a well-tailored Jewish Believing Hebrew idiom reflects two basic historical facts. One, the nearly two millenia absence of Jewish Believers from the historical stage while rabbinic Judaism and Christianity established the mutually constitutive and dichotomous hegemonic religious vernaculars of the west⁵⁰; and two, the limited mainstream Hebrew-language development of a country of immigrants only beginning to revive their ancient spoken tongue after a two thousand-year slumber.

The process of drafting new terminology is ongoing in many Messianic Jewish circles. For example, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel during their annual meeting in 2001, asked attendees if they would like to consider changing the name of the organization, using other terminology more recently in circulation. Terms suggested were “Jewish Adherents of Yeshua”⁵¹ or “Jewish Disciples of Yeshua”⁵² (“Our Jewish Identity.” 2001). Most interviewees when asked felt that both alternatives sound either too orthodox or too antiquated to the modern, non-orthodox ear. The overwhelming intention is to be relevant and understandable

⁴⁹ In Chapter nine, “Identity as borders: Returning to the birthright,” the struggle (or lack thereof) for self-definition is discussed in greater detail.

⁵⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, one of the earliest Christian writers, exorcised the very concept of a Messianic Jewish idiom, “It is monstrous *to talk of* Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism” (in Boyarin 2004:xii). On the other side of the mutually constructed fence, rabbis silenced figures like the legendary Rabbi Eliezer, who could be seen as bridging the sectarian gap between Pharisaic and Messianic Judaism (Boyarin 2000).

⁵¹ יהודים חסידי ישוע

⁵² יהודים תלמידי ישוע

to the average Israeli. The most common default self-designation is “Messianic Jew”, or the more generic “Jewish Believer” (sometimes adding “in Yeshua the Messiah”).⁵³

Research Terminology.

The reader will surely agree that “Messianic Jews” is a term that loosely hangs on the body of Israeli Jewish Believers, engulfing and obscuring the silhouette of its diverse members like an enormous over-worn, ill-fitted suit. Not all Jewish Believers in Yeshua are willing to use the term to describe themselves for the reasons outlined above, however in order to talk about this extraordinary group of people, an overarching term is nonetheless a necessity. One might argue that by calling all Jewish Believers “Messianic Jews”, this paper creates the sense that they share a common platform, culture or lifestyle, when this is not the case. The Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel has adopted the term “Messianic Jew” despite the broad spectrum of Jewish Believers that it represents in the country. Although every term requires definition, “Messianic Jew” has nonetheless received greater exposure both in Israel and abroad in recent decades, and it is not a term belonging to a specific organization like “Jews for Jesus”. It is also the most commonly used term in scholarly publications concerning Jewish Yeshua-Believers. Our approach will be to use the term “Messianic Jew” interchangeably with the terms “Jewish Believer (in Yeshua)” and “Jewish Yeshua-Believer”. However the terms “Hebrew Christian” and “Israeli Christian” will be reserved for Jewish Believers who identify themselves as such. Although such terms specifically express national identification with the Jewish people, they give greater semantic weight to attachment to Christians and Christianity than Jewish culture or Judaism, a value judgment beyond the scope of this work.

This chapter has introduced the reader to the multiple and at times conflicting connotations associated with basic terms such as “Jew” or “Christian”, and the context-contingent, politically-potent nature of the Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular. It has also begun to touch on the flexibility in cross-cultural communication afforded by the liminal position of Messianic Jews, and the unique identity work accomplished through Messianic Jewish language, including the reification or subversion of hegemonic western religious paradigms. This identity work is attested to by the heightened awareness and the prolific discourse of language of most

⁵³ It is very important to note that many Israeli Messianic Jewish leaders and professional teachers spend months every year traveling abroad speaking and teaching, and countless hours corresponding or speaking on the phone with Christians abroad or missionaries in the region. This analysis of Israeli Messianic Jewish terminology is based on interviews and observations in Messianic Jewish contexts in Israel, therefore access of this research to these out-group self-presentations and bridging idioms is very limited.

Messianic Jews, including laypeople, and the intense battles fought within Messianic Jewish circles over words, presented in the coming chapters.

Chapter six

THE READER'S ROAD MAP

The Place said to him return to the land of your fathers.

– *Midrash Rabbah Bereshith Parasha 77* (on *Genesis* 31:3).⁵⁴

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God... [Our forefathers] confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth... For here we have no fixed city, but we seek the one to come.

– *Hebrews* 11:8-10, 13b, 13:14.

In rabbinic, New Covenant and Zionist literature (Gurevitch & Aran 1994a, 1997:202), the name Israel variously and often simultaneously signifies the God, the land and the birthright⁵⁵ of Israel (Ben-Rafael 2002:xxi; Doleve-Gandelman 1987:259). We see in the *midrash* quoted above that the Place (God) tells Jacob (a.k.a. Israel) to return to the land of his fathers, which is at the same time a return to the God of his fathers, in accordance with Jacob's oath at Beth El. God, the land and the heritage of the fathers are inextricably intertwined. Jacob embarks on a route of return to his roots and borders, which while promised, are continually contested. Yet it is during this constitutive journey of return that he struggles with God and enters into his prophetic identity.

The Patriarchal faith described in *Hebrews* 11 is also characterized by sojourning, longing and a journey to a promised land never to be fully actualized on this earth. "Judeo-Christian culture is, at its very *roots*, about experiences of spiritual dislocation and homelessness" in this world (Sennett qtd. in Bauman 1996:20. Italics added). God, the land and the birthright, also conflated in Messianic Jewish thought, together form the concept of home – of Zion – the ideal destination longed and labored for but paradoxically never fully realized under the present world order.

⁵⁴ "אמר לו המקום שוב אל ארץ אבותיך." - מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה ע"ו על בראשית ל"א 3

⁵⁵ Birthright here refers to a genetically and socially conferred connection with the Jewish people and heritage. As with Jacob and Esau, a birthright cannot be taken for granted. Transferred to the Jewish child at birth, birthright rights and obligations are often contested in adulthood, by the individual, his community or others.

Most of our interviewees narrate their faith journeys as a process of returning⁵⁶ home to Zion – a composite unity of God, the land and the Jewish birthright. No one claims to have fully arrived. A number of observance-oriented Jewish Believers, while discussing their stance on various *halachic*⁵⁷ issues, claim that they are “in process”, indicating this same sense of perpetual returning, drawing nearer and nearer, ever homing in, but never fully attaining the ideal (Gurevitch & Aran 1991, Hebrew). Several of the interviewees also speak of sojourning here on earth until the Messiah returns to reign from Zion as triumphant king, repairing the world and bringing all things to fruition.

Returning to Zion is phenomenologically conceived and variously articulated in the narratives. For example, returning for one Messianic Jew may culminate in a deep, practical commitment to the State of Israel, while for another, it may mean delving more deeply than ever into aspects of Jewish culture and tradition, or even traveling abroad for a season to study in a Christian discipleship program. One Jewish Believer’s phenomenological experience of returning might be perceived by another in-group member as a departure or tangent, a distancing of herself from Zion.

Israeli writer Meir Shalev, in his novel, *A Pigeon and a Boy* (2006:200), describes a conference of pigeon keepers arguing over how a homing pigeon knows to fly by some mysterious internal compass. The young protagonist explains very simply to the more experienced adults, that try as we might to chart, label and analyze the pigeon flight courses as east, west, or north northeast, the pigeon herself knows only one direction – *homeward*. So, too, Messianic Jewish narratives offer a variety of metaphysical, spatial and temporal travel routes through the Far East, South American mountain villages, Indian ashrams, European Baroque cathedrals or cheap Christian guesthouses, across the United States to Woodstock or a hippie commune in the southwest, and up to orthodox Israeli yeshivas in Jerusalem or vegan communes north of the Galilee. All of the narrators describe having eventually found the Jewish Messiah promised in Scripture, and through him, claim to be returning home to Zion. Israeli Messianic Jews narrate their identity as the closing of a circle, as a homing pigeon returning to her source and destination: returning to the God of Israel, re-rooting in the land of promise and re-defining the borders of the Jewish birthright.

⁵⁶ In this paper, in order to emphasize the ongoing process of return, the gerund “returning” is employed rather than the finalized noun “return”.

⁵⁷ *Halacha* is instructions for how to practically interpret legal commandments in Judaism.

The analytical model of identity-as-travel

The tri-fold return to Zion through three identity paradigms of routes, roots and borders, emerges from the narrative material through the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990). That is, the extensively narrated travel experiences of the interviewees, as well as the emic use of route, root, border-crossing and border dispute metaphors, have inspired the analytical model of identity-as-travel used in this paper. Routes, roots and borders are helpful in an anthropological analysis of identity in the same way that they are helpful to the subjects themselves in narrating and interpreting their own sociocultural identity processes.

This identity-as-travel model proposes that identity construction is performed through routing, rooting and border work. Rather than a concept of identity fixed in a time-place, this model allows for metaphysical, spatial and temporal travel in identity construction. Accordingly, the following three chapters of the Findings accompany Messianic Jews metaphysically routing their way back to God, spatially rooting into their land and temporally struggling to reclaim and redefine the borders of their birthright.

Chapter seven explores identity as routes through the empirical analysis of Israeli Messianic Jewish journey to faith narratives. First, travel is the subject of the narratives, but it is also used as a metaphor to describe and interpret faith experiences. The second sub-chapter explores how Messianic Jews reinterpret their travels as stories of returning, upon “coming to faith” in Yeshua. Lastly, in “Linear and spiral courses: Newness or renewal”, the narrated courses of Israeli Jewish Believing identity routes are analyzed as either spiral courses emphasizing spiritual renewal, or linear courses emphasizing spiritual newness. All Messianic Jews structure their faith journey narratives as a spiral course of return, but in some instances interpret their journeys as a linear break from an unredeemed past. It is argued that the linear interpretations of faith testimonies emerge when narrators articulate a position of antinomianism.

Chapter eight analyzes the identity as roots paradigm by exploring the ways in which all Israeli Messianic Jews in this study narrate and interpret returning to the land and cultivating indigeneity. Through a deconstruction of widely employed arborescent metaphors, the subchapters examine major discourses and practices constituting varied visions of Messianic Jewish rootedness.

Finally, Chapter nine discusses identity as borders, by exploring Israeli Jewish Believing struggles over the borders of their birthright. The first sub-chapter follows historiographic

efforts to inform the Messianic Jewish restoration of their Jewish birthright. The following subchapters on subjectivity, theological autonomy and spiritual authority, deconstruct the three successive border disputes which constitute the heart of the contemporary Israeli Messianic Jewish birthright struggle.

Chapter seven

IDENTITY AS ROUTES: RETURNING TO GOD

The journey to faith

This present chapter examines the narrated faith journeys of Israeli Jewish Believers “coming to faith” in Yeshua. Travel routes in the narratives can be physical and/or metaphysical, variously traversing space and/or time. A majority of interviews tell of physical travel, which becomes worthy of narration due to the metaphysical significance assigned it by the interviewees. No one tells of a relaxing visit to the Dead Sea for a long weekend or about last week’s day-trip to the Jerusalem Zoo with their kids. The travel in our narratives serves higher purposes, identity purposes.

The vast majority of our interviewees, a full 46 out of 60, describe their pre-faith selves according to one or more of four categories: spiritual seekers, social activists, alternative artists or some version of conscientious societal drop-outs. Regarding the rest of the interviewee population, nine interviewees are second-generation Jewish Believers who consciously chose to continue in the faith path of their parents, a few taking only minor detours along the way. The narratives of second-generation Messianic Jews tended to contain a much shorter “faith journey” narrative and more critical examination of issues of faith doctrine, praxis, Jewish identity questions, leadership issues, thoughts on children’s education, creative outreach ideas and visions for the future growth and development of the Messianic Jewish community in Israel and abroad. An additional five interviewees are children of intermarriage, four of whom were raised as Believers, while the fifth came to faith at a later age on her own. All five described their paths of discovering their Jewish identity, choosing to identify with their people and to make *Aliyah* to Israel. One additional interviewee is a native Israeli who married a Messianic Jewess and through intimate familial and communal ties, eventually came to faith himself.

Jewish faith in Yeshua is something which is evidently in no way taken for granted by the interviewees, who narrate, often in vivid detail, the milestones of their spiritual journey back to God, even if it took place decades ago. Jewish people still need to cover quite a distance in order to come to faith in Yeshua. It is likely that the route metaphor is particularly salient in the majority of the narratives since the socio-historical schism between Jews and Yeshua is still

commonly perceived as an unbridgeable divide. One would imagine that if Yeshua were perceived by the Jewish mainstream to be one of many great rabbis, for example, the path to his court might commonly produce a much shorter faith journey narrative.

The non-establishmentarian critiques of the majority of interviewees, expressed themselves, among other things, through drug “trips”; radical politics; crossing of established sex and gender lines (through cross-ethnic, cross-racial, inter-religious, inter-class, same-sex and non-monogamous relationships); protest against the professional and educational “rat race” by dropping out of school and taking blue collar jobs or “living off of nature”; protest against urban anomie⁵⁸, crime and pollution by the formation of utopian, often organic and vegetarian, agrarian communes; or protest of established religion and religious hypocrisy by the exploration of alternative spiritualities and eastern religious paths.

There were out-of-body, out-of-society experiences *in situ*, but most of the North American interviewees traveled across their countries and abroad, and generally framed their search or “dropping-out” as an attempt to achieve both personal and societal redemption of some sort. Many “hippies” sought release from the bondage of modern social maladies and a return to more “authentic”, natural, peaceful existences.

In some cases, the interviewees veered to the east, to eastern religious paths, or even as far as Zion, their national homeland, and occasionally to a colorful and needy third world South America. In other cases, interviewees journeyed westward to Europe, the seat of western culture, or toward the western United States- New Mexico, Oregon, Montana and California, which promised a clean slate and virgin spaces, in other words, fertile ground for utopian communes and social rebirth:

We were living in the mountains of Oregon. No running water, no electricity. 20-30 of us at different times living in 2-4 buildings... We were all living together- couples and singles and children... No partitions, no curtains, you know, some drugs, but not much because we couldn't afford them. We raised our own food... We were trying to live in community. We were trying to live a lifestyle that we thought was better than what was outside in the world. Finally I thought that this wasn't cutting it, so I said, I'm a Jew. I'm going to go to Israel. You know, where else? I mean I was already living in commune, so commune, kibbutz, you know? ...I tried the Diaspora Yeshiva [in the Old City of Jerusalem] for a little bit, but it really didn't speak to me. I mean the orthodox lifestyle with its rigid framework, was not exactly the kind of thing I wanted to jump into as a hippie... so I

⁵⁸ Anomie can be defined as the alienated feeling (sense of not being a part of or responsible to society) of an individual or class, resulting from a breakdown or lack of values, norms or structure in a society.

went and lived in Amirim... which was a vegetarian, very occult moshav⁵⁹ below Safed up in the North... I remember going to the *Kotel*⁶⁰ on LSD... tasting the tears that had been shed, cried on the wall... And I remember getting elbowed by an older lady who still had the tattoos on her arm from the camps and just aggressively, kicking me out of the way to get on the bus. And my thought was that my people have learned nothing from their experiences, they're still aggressive, just nothing... I was looking for something better here... At one point I had gone to the Jewish Agency... and said, I represent a community in America- which was all true- and we want to start a kibbutz here, an organic, spiritual kibbutz. I mean I had hair down past my shoulders and a big, bushy beard. And they didn't ask me for a psychometric test. They said, "How many live bodies do you have? Twenty people, that's a *garin*⁶¹, we'll set you up. And if you are willing to go to the Sinai or the Golan, 10 will do..." Eventually I decided I had to get out of this place... Again, back to the land... and living in a part of the US where there's more animals than people. (Zechariah)

Even traveling a few hours outside of a large east coast city in the United States was sufficiently far away to make a world of difference in Benjamin's previously upper-middle class suburban existence:

After graduation, before I went to college, my sister had been involved in some kind of peace movement. This was a new thing, in 1967, and she was involved with Quakers and they had a farm in Pennsylvania where they teach non-violence and where they used to bring... black children that were in poverty areas to give them an experience of being away from the city life... So when I was seventeen, I went there for about a month and a half and I enjoyed it very much. They just had kind of a community farm that was run by these Quakers and there were some black people... They were around our age and so everybody kind of lived together. It was actually kind of a very positive experience, we liked it very much... There were a lot of Jewish people involved with the camp... This was the great hope of 1967, people were at that time, it was correspondent to the liberation of Jerusalem, 1967, Six Day War. I think there was a kind of spirit of new hope in the world. It was something of a new age was dawning... So, I think everybody came away from this experience very idealistic... I suppose it changed my life to a certain extent. It gave me a kind of vision of a better world than what we live in. And I think as we look back on it, it's a little bit of a glimpse of the Messianic era that I think this is what we are progressively moving into today. There was certainly a hope to see that people can live together with each other that are from different backgrounds, different types of people. (Benjamin)

Many interviewees hoped that they could achieve personal and social redemption. They seemed to be rejecting the self-centered individualism of American culture through attempts to return to some pure source and way of life. The impassioned yearning for an alternative existence was often framed as a journey back in time and human "development" or "progress" to a pure, simple, peaceful, more natural, authentic life - the return to the Garden of Eden. Physical travel becomes only one venue in the interviewees' spiritual quest:

⁵⁹ An agriculturally based Israeli commune of shared ideals, but individual rather than communal ownership of the land.

⁶⁰ The Wailing Wall.

⁶¹ Core group necessary for starting a commune.

I went [to college] and then I really began to freak out. It was the summer afterwards that I went to Woodstock... And then I just really began my descent into pure total chaos, anarchy, rebellion... I thought it was really great to like steal things from the bookstore and have a black boyfriend... One teacher got me into taking lots of speed. Another teacher was heavily into all of the riots... I'd realized I couldn't be in school anymore. And I lived with some lesbians... and it was the hyper-feminism... And my boyfriend was just kind of was bombing out, changed his name, became Samuel Shooting Star... So he was trying to be born-again without being born-again... a new creation. (Carol)

The theme song of Woodstock was "We've got to get ourselves back to the Garden," by a group called Crosby, Stills and Nash. That was like all our goals – getting back to the Garden of Eden, getting back to this life of bliss and nirvana... The philosophy and the ethos of the spiritual thing that we were dealing with is that we want to become like Christ, we want to become like the Messiah... Basically we were trying to evolve ourselves to a state of enlightenment... It was like a mix and mesh of eastern and western theology and spirituality kind of mixed together, it was kind of all a mess. But we were all trying to seek to find something and the idea for me if I could somehow enlighten myself enough or somehow jump out of the reestablished reality and get into this place of oneness with the universe, I would be like Christ himself, like Jesus. (Shimon)

The exposure to difference, to the other and even new aspects of one's self serves as a mirror, inviting the traveler to explore existential problems including more specific questions of Jewish identity, often triggering subsequent quests. From the American Jewish elite to her national homeland to the South American third world to a vegan ashram, everywhere Devorah goes she challenges the status-quo seeking truth, love and a meaningful place in life:

I became engaged to the right kind of guy. He was an electrical engineer. He was from a very wealthy Jewish family from New York City. But we decided six weeks before the wedding not to get married... I started... just exploring other alternatives in my life... I got involved with transcendental meditation and from there it seemed to progress to things deeper and darker but I didn't know it at the time. I thought I was going higher... macrobiotics... In the meantime I came to Israel. My mother and father wanted my younger brother and I to get a little bit of religion I guess, so they sent us to Israel for the summer... We started out in Amsterdam, we hitchhiked all through Europe... He got busted for dealing hashish. This was our religious experience right here (laughs) and I had to bail him out of jail... I ended up trotting down to Peru and I stayed there for almost a year... I just really didn't know what to do with my life and I was seeking so hard... I was seeking truth in my life and direction... When are you going to get married? Just the pressure and stuff.... And I was seeking really an identity... The next six months I couldn't settle in any one place... Some of my friends had been living for a while on communes. Other friends were living affluent lifestyles in Montreal. It's all this dichotomy sort of. And I said, "Where do I belong now? What, who am I?" (Devorah)

Many narratives include multiple types of physical and metaphysical travel. Iris describes her "spiritual" journey beginning with an interest in drugs, politics and "free love", and leading to an exploration of Eastern religions, spiritism and Christianity, until she comes full circle around to explore her Judaism and then faith in the Jewish Messiah:

I guess the spiritual journey kind of started out in the late '60's. ... The drug culture really attracted me because it was this thing that was so different from myself, and it was the height of the Vietnam war and all this other stuff going around, the free love movement... Then I got into Eastern religions for a little while... and a little bit on the tarot cards and I read, William James' Varieties of Religious Experience. People that actually had a relationship with God, and then it was at that point, I think, that I had to stop myself in my tracks and say, look, I'm going off on all these tangents, eastern religions and Christianity and I don't even know really what my own religion is. So I took the Bible off the shelf that I'd gotten at my *bat mitzvah* and I started reading it. Well, things started to fall into place. All the prophecies and things that I read and, I saw a lot of what the Messiah was supposed to be some through the Torah but mostly through the prophets... I was reading it and these things popped out that reminded me of what my father had taught me, when we were sitting and looking at Renaissance paintings and Gothic paintings and stories from the New Testament, of the life of Yeshua (on a family trip to Europe) and this is, well, I'm reading it right here in the Old Testament, this is what was supposed to happen... Jesus Christ Superstar had just hit the Broadway scene and they'd come out with a record... that's what made me go out and buy one. It was during this point that I started praying every night, just asking God if He was real and forgives sins. You know in Judaism you have a consciousness of wrong-doing, willful sin and sin that you're not aware of and, the whole Yom Kippur thing became more real every year to me... (Iris)

The theme of disillusionment after the failure of social or spiritual attempts at redemption is recurrent in both American immigrant and native Israeli narratives. Experiences of ideological disillusionment often trigger a search, sooner or later culminating the encounter of an alternative plan for spiritual salvation and redemption in Yeshua. Shiraz's husband, evicted from the Sinai in the wake of the Camp David accords, carried the scars of the collapse of his community's vision to redeem the land and realize the Zionist dream:

After the eviction from the Sinai, people were very broken. Many values were shattered in people. My husband... simply wiped out his past... it caused him great pain in life and also bitterness... He was raised on very Zionist values and suddenly it was shattered... People invested their entire lives there... They [the Israeli government] really entirely wiped out these settlements... So evidently God prepared his heart to receive salvation, to understand that he is in need of God. Because he was very open, and when this man said to us that Yeshua is the Messiah, that He is the only way to God and showed us a few prophecies, then my husband said that's it! I know that this is the truth. It took a day or two... He didn't really have to think about it. (Shiraz, Hebrew)

After a childhood of poverty and neglect in a large traditional Israeli family, Nurit begins her journey by briefly attempting a *bazarah b'tshuvah*⁶², moves on to more individually-centered new

⁶² Repentance from secular ways and return to a more orthodox form of Jewish observance. Interestingly, the Hebrew phrase *bazarah b'tshuvah* is rarely used in the narratives to describe the initial experience of repentance and faith in the Messiah. It is more commonly used to express regret and repentance for specific significant sins after the salvation experience. It seems that the phrase may be overwhelmingly associated with Jews who embark on a path of becoming more orthodox, even ultra-orthodox in their worldview and praxis, and therefore doesn't easily lend itself to the salvation experience of Israeli Messianic Jews. On the other hand, had the research been conducted by non-Messianic Jews, it is entirely possible that interviewees would have used the expression *bazarah*

age seminars, and finally travels on sabbatical to the west with her family where, away from judgmental, gossipy neighbors, she comes to a personal faith in Yeshua:

I simply searched for the basis. What is the meaning of life? I began joining seminars.. The motto of the thing was you are in the center of the universe, and you can change the world... It was essentially about destroying all of the divisions and walls that you have built, the defenses that you built up your entire life, to arrive at the center of your “self”. During this seminar, people are supposed to build their new self, which is supposed to change the world. Very simply, in other words, [the self] took the place of God... They supposedly give you the tools, but many people were broken there, because they actually left good, established work positions and decided to make changes in their lives, or they divorced, left families. People simply left their other frameworks... We left everything and traveled for a sabbatical year. And then my story essentially began, our story, of faith. Because already the first week we met the woman that spoke with us about the Messianic faith... (Nurit, Hebrew)

Shuki, one of 13 second-generation Jewish Believers interviewed⁶³, represents a trend of second-generation Believers making journeys of their own. Of the thirteen, only three strayed for a time from the faith of their childhood, like Shuki, but each spoke of eventually finding their own “faith walk”⁶⁴. Among the native Israelis, theirs was a generation which witnessed a gradual shift in authority from foreign mission-based groups to more indigenous leadership and a significant growth in the numbers and recognized presence of Messianic Jews in Israel. Being raised in the Messianic faith still required them to seek new ways of making their faith real and relevant within Israeli Jewish society in their generation, which in some cases included an exploration of Jewish identity and praxis, yet to a much milder degree than among the American immigrants. The faith journeys of the American immigrants tend to include more of an active exploration of Jewish identity and the dramatic step of *Aliyah*.

Shuki describes the Jewish Believing summer camps for children and other child-oriented teachings which presented a cold, sterile faith disconnected from down-to-earth Israeli Jewish life. There were do’s and don’ts without concrete examples of their implementation, and strict standards of faith expression which, for example, required the children to sit up straight with their hands folded, rather than standing, clapping or dancing in worship. After being

b’tshuvah more often, as a way to explain to out-group members the process that brought them to faith, and to emphasize their understanding of it as the experience of a Jew returning to the God of Israel and his ways.

⁶³ Six of the second-generation Jewish Believers come from Israeli families and were raised from a young age by Jewish Believing parents. Three interviewees are North American immigrants raised by Jewish Believing parents. Four interviewees come from mixed Jewish-Gentile parentage in the United States and were raised with some form of faith in Yeshua.

⁶⁴ “Faith walk” is a term used by Messianics to refer to living out one’s faith, and should be distinguished from the “journey to faith” coined in this paper to refer to the path of the Messianic Jew leading up to his “coming to faith” in Yeshua.

disappointed with trying to follow God and failing to be holy according to this extramundane, puritanical model, Shuki decides to take his own path, until he comes full circle around:

I asked God to let me stop being tempted and it never happened before so I thought I must be so terrible God doesn't work with me. It was years until I figured out that everyone is tempted, including Yeshua was. But we were never taught that, we were just taught, if you sin, you go to hell. Boys sleep in this building and girls sleep in that building, in summer camps and all this. And anyone caught in between was sent home and later to hell. It was very black and- but no practical how do you live it... So it just didn't work for me and two years later I figured well its not working, I'm still tempted... I have my reservations in hell. So might as well enjoy the journey. You know, I'm wasting my best teen years being in the middle, not here not there. On the one hand, I'm trying to be a Believer but I have no relationship with God, and I'm not living up to his standards because I'm still being tempted, so I'm a terrible sinner. On the other hand, I don't want to live as a non-Believer but I'm terribly tempted so I practically am... and I went and sinned for two years... According to my motto of my life, it's not the best thing for me to go to hell. I need to focus into the best thing that will be constructive for me. And so it was the same motto that got me away from God that finally full circle brought me back. And I figured because of my motto I owe it to myself to find out does God really exist because if he does, I need to find out how to get on good terms with him. And I started just opening myself to the possibility and once I did all the defenses crashed down... I went in my room, and I locked the door, and I got on my knees and I said, okay, Lord, I hear you. Thank you that you are willing to work with me. I understand. I get it... (Shuki)

Our final example of native Israeli Jewish Believers' journeys to faith is Golan, a young man raised traditional, who becomes national orthodox (knitted yarmulke) in his teen years. The national orthodox are the moving force behind the push to realize "Greater Israel" by pioneering settlements in Judea, Samaria, the Israeli periphery and formerly in Gaza. Golan remembers avidly watching old episodes of Little House on the Prairie and feeling inspired by the characters' similar love for their land and their pioneering efforts to redeem the frontiers, as well as challenged by their interpretations of Scripture. He describes his hunger for the Messiah, and how his journeys to the American frontier and back, mediated by the screen, opened his heart and mind to broader concepts of God's children and the Messiah than he had previously known:

One of the things that really changed my life is American television shows, all kinds of series. Are you familiar with Little House on the Prairie?... So I loved that program also. Believe it or not, there I heard about the Hebrew Scriptures and the Children of Israel when they preached [in their church], and I said, "Wait, but how does that connect with their experience?"... It gave me questions that I asked the rabbi afterwards. I always had all kinds of question about the Messiah (Golan, Hebrew).

Not only are the narratives teeming with descriptions of routes and border crossings, but as we have seen throughout the sample narratives above and in the two examples below, travel is

also by far the overwhelming emic metaphor *used by the interviewees* to describe and interpret their spiritual journeys:

I went to college... and it was there that I began to pursue some of my *spiritual quests*.
(Michael)

I was hitchhiking one day... And this woman picked me up and she had on the back of her car “Christ died for your sins and guess who’s coming again?” And I got in the car and I said, “Is He really coming?” And she said, “Yeah”. And she really was into prophecy... Israel over the Old City and, and Jerusalem being returned to the Jews and the prophets and I just remember I said to her, “I’m Jewish”. Like okay, that’s enough...
And I began the journey. (Carol)

Returning

Theological returning

The following theological narrative of “salvation” will give the reader a sense of how the quintessence of Messianic Jewish faith is narrated as the story of God restoring man back to communion with himself. Messianic Jews agree that the spiritual seeker eventually recognizes his sinful nature as a son of Adam, and *returns* from his sinful ways to God to receive atonement and forgiveness. However, the only way for sinful man to be *restored* into communion with the holy God, is through the atoning work of the Messiah, whose perfect sacrifice, an exchange of life for life, redeems the Believer. Accepting this sacrifice, the Believer is *reborn* and receives eternal life through faith in the Messiah. But how then shall he live this life? Messianic Jews believe that they are to live according to the Hebrew Scriptures as they were interpreted and walked out by Yeshua himself, as expounded upon in the New Covenant. God also sends his Spirit to dwell within the Believer and testify to the way of the Messiah. Thus, in short, the work of Yeshua is described by Messianic Jews as *reconciling* and *restoring* mankind to God⁶⁵.

In addition to the widespread Messianic Jewish theological narrative above, all of the interviewees describe experiencing personal physical and/or spiritual journeys which eventually lead them to God. Although it is not always stated in so many words, the faith journey narrative essentially chronicles the closing of a circle⁶⁶, with the narrator eventually returning from humanism, eastern mysticism or even Gentile Christianity, home to *his* God, the God of Israel.

⁶⁵ See for example, “The Suffering Messiah.” 15 February 2006; “Statement of Faith.” 15 February 2006; “B’nai Chayim: Statement of Faith.” 8 March 2003.

⁶⁶ See the sub-chapter below entitled “Linear and Spiral Courses: Newness or Renewal”.

The discourse of identifying with and returning to the God of Israel is not an evangelistic spin. It is a constitutive element of Israeli Messianic Jewish identity, with many of the interviewees dedicating significant portions of their narrative to the process or moment of revelation in which they come to know that they have indeed returned, rather than abandoned their God and people by “converting” to another religion. A revelation of themselves as returning Jews, however sophisticated or primitive in its development, and a belief that their Jewish birthright remains significant (nationally and/or spiritually), is the dominant driving force behind Messianic Jews’ maintenance of Jewish identity. This revelation of returning and its discursive and practical articulations are what distinguish Messianic Jews from Believers of Jewish descent who break with their Jewish identity and assimilate into Gentile Christianity.

Personal returning

Israeli-born Alon describes a traditional childhood and a brief exploration of orthodox Judaism earlier in his narrative. He leaves Israel on a long journey through Europe in search of the truth, which he assumes is distinct from God. This portion of his faith journey ends with the realization that truth resides in God, and that the way to return to communion with God is through the Messiah Yeshua. Alon’s narrative both employs the theological paradigm of repentance-rebirth-restoration, and describes his personal spiritual experience of returning:

I finally realized that I am looking for the truth... but the truth is not a philosophy hanging up in a cloud somewhere or a way of life of a commune of a bunch of people that is separated from the rest of humanity. The truth is in God. It’s the first time that I realized that actually the two coexist... [Someone] showed me in a very eloquent way the plan of God upon humanity from Genesis till the end of the book of Revelation and how... they flow perfectly together and show a beautiful picture of God restoring man back to himself, after the fall, and that everything that happened in the New Testament is just a gradual continuation of the Old, just further revelation of God to mankind about that plan of restoration. And Yeshua himself is one of those steps towards restoration because by believing in him you are really being restored back to a proper relationship with God that was prior to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden... and being nourished from the tree of life... and that’s what eventually brought me to faith (Alon).

The individual Messianic Jewish faith journey is not only a generic returning of mankind to God. It is narrated by Jewish Believers as the process of a Jew returning to the God of Israel. For some interviewees like Robert, an understanding of their calling as Jewish people and the Jewishness of returning through faith in Yeshua, is key to their acceptance of Yeshua:

He began to explain to me why we were the chosen people and it was a positive thing, and I understood that he understands something that we ourselves didn’t understand... It rang true and it was positive. So while he’s talking to me about it, I’m saying to myself finally, that Jesus Christ must be who he is, and God gave me his Spirit and everything

changed in a moment of time. Right there... I knew... that Jesus was the Son of God, he died on the cross for us, was the Lord, the Bible is true, the whole Bible is the Word of God... I was still a Jew, and nothing had changed there, my nose hadn't changed, my parent's hadn't changed... and the Lord said, go to Israel (Robert).

The very moment that Robert believes, he both comes to a deeper understanding of the spiritual calling of the Jewish people and knows that he is to make *Aliyah*. For the North American immigrants or Israelis abroad, there is often an immediate link between returning to the God of Israel and returning to the land and their heritage, again emphasizing the Messianic Jewish perception of the three-stranded cord of Zion – God, land and birthright.

The interpretive schema of returning

In addition to the popular theological and personal faith-experience narratives of returning, many interviewees also explicitly employ “returning” as an interpretive schema to describe their spiritual coming to faith. Key words used are *restoration*; *coming*, *going* or *being restored back*; *returning* and *coming home* to God. Many narratives clearly articulate a personal sense of God as the Place, and returning to him is interpreted as a homecoming:

After I prayed with them I felt this tremendous feeling of like that I was home, spiritually speaking. I felt something like I would finally come back to the place that I was supposed to be, or meant to be, or something like that. There was something in it that was spiritually speaking very comfortable. I think it was like the presence of God in my life. (Maggie)

I said, okay, you can be a Christian, you can believe in Jesus. I know it's the same God as the Jewish God but don't expect me to believe this stuff... I struggled with this thing that Jews can't believe in Jesus but I had this sense that he had something that I didn't have... [So I] got down on my knees and said, Jesus if you're real, come into my heart. That's all I knew. I knew that you were supposed to ask Jesus into your heart. And he did. I felt like heaven opened up and God said, “Welcome home, daughter.” And I felt just bathed in light and hope and joy. (Shelly)

For others, the schema of returning affirms the Jewishness of their faith convictions. Beth, who felt deeply convicted of her sin and convinced of the reality of Yeshua's messiahship, accepts Yeshua with a heavy heart feeling that she is violating her Jewish identification. She even buys a Christmas tree, thinking that she has become a Gentile Christian in her affirmation of truth. After hearing a modern, culturally Jewish version of the New Covenant story of the prodigal son (*Luke* 15:11-32) told by another Jewish Believer, she adopts the story as an emic metaphor (Ortner 1990:84). The retelling, a schematic shift from a “Gentile Christian” cultural schema to a Jewish cultural schema, helps Beth to see and accept herself as

a Jewish person coming home to her people through the Messiah, rather than one who has denied her particularist identity to follow a universal (Gentile) truth:

I said, “Well, I don’t have any questions... I’m a Jewish person, I don’t want to do this. This is wrong to do this.” Like, it seems clear that Yeshua died on the cross, ‘cause I’d come to believe that... ‘cause I saw my sin, but I didn’t want to believe. But then he said, “What have you got to lose, if you have no more questions, why not?” So it was the first night of Hanukkah and I just prayed to receive Yeshua into my heart, like that... But it was because my heart was so broken... and then I did something really stupid, I thought it meant you had to be a Christian, so I bought a Christmas tree because it was right before Christmas, because I didn’t know what it meant... The very first time I ever went to a Christian church... the preacher was Moishe Rosen... this big heavy Jewish man, and he told the story of the prodigal son, but he told it about a Jewish girl, her name was Lisa. I’ll never forget it, it was twenty-five years ago, but he talked about this girl *who’d been so far away* and her parents had forgotten about her and *she came back to her parents*, and her mother had the light on, and *she just walked in* after all these years of waiting for her and says, “You’re Lisa”. And when I heard it, it was like he was speaking to me. I started weeping in the front row. (Beth)

In conclusion, the Israeli Jewish Believers are a well-traveled population. Travel, whether physical or metaphysical, is a commonly described experience in the narratives. It is also a metaphor widely used by the interviewees to narratively structure and interpret their “journey” to faith in Yeshua (Ortner 1990:84). This paper therefore contains three levels of travel: travel as narrated experience, travel as an emic interpretive metaphor, and travel as an analytical model of identity. More specifically, once Messianic Jews “come to faith” in Yeshua, their spiritual travels are interpreted as routes of returning. The theme of returning to God informs theological and personal faith narratives, as well as provides a cultural schema for Israeli Messianic Jews to interpret their faith experiences.

Linear and spiral courses: Newness or renewal

So, I really felt that I was the wandering Jew if I’ll use that phrase cause born in [one country] and moved to [North America] and I just didn’t really feel strong nationalism to either country... It was a formative experience for me being in the Sinai in the late seventies thinking of the motif of the children of Israel... We had a *Havdalah*⁶⁷ service there overlooking the sunset of Jerusalem... my reformed Jewish experience didn’t open that aspect of the richer tradition sort of spiritual experience to me. So that prompted me to think well there’s more to Judaism than I’m aware of; I should consider finding out about it. So then I really felt strongly about Israel more on a sub-conscious level perhaps that this is part of my destiny... Gamliel was not a name I picked, it was a given Hebrew name... but I was never called Gamliel until I came to Israel. My identity is much more Gamliel... if I go overseas and my family calls me Greg, it feels very strange to me. I don’t feel like Greg anymore. For me I’ve kind of had these congruent streams of identity – the Believer experiences as well as the back to roots, back to Israel, the land, the language, those identity issues (Gamliel).

⁶⁷ A ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath and the beginning of the new week.

The classic western conversion paradigm portrays a Jew who transgresses his boundaries, crossing the Rubicon into Gentile Christianity. He becomes the weak link that breaks the long chain of Jewish continuity. His name and memory are consequently banned and “forgotten” by the Jewish community. He is reborn a *tabula rasa* “new creation”, a Gentile Christian neophyte, for whom “old (Jewish) things are left behind, all things have become new” (2 *Corinthians* 5:17). The hegemonic western discourse of “conversion” is inflected with a history of Jewish rejection of Christianity and Christian anti-Semitism. When a Jewish person comes to faith in Yeshua, both the mainstream Jewish and Christian camps militantly insist on cleanly severed ties.

In the narrative above, Gamliel’s name had previously existed primarily on paper to vaguely connect him to his ancestors and give him a place in his rarely attended Reform synagogue. If by accepting Yeshua, Gamliel believes that he is cutting himself off from his people and becoming a Gentile, why does he then seal his newly chosen identification by embracing his Hebrew childhood appellation?

Gamliel’s adoption of his Hebrew name symbolically represents his Messianic Jewish perspective on the “born-again” experience. Rather than a self-excommunication from Jewish life, coming to faith in a Jewish messiah becomes a “return” in the sense of a re-creation of a formerly dormant, nominal identity: not a revival of what he once was, but a personal “return” to an ideal of what he as a Jew should be.

Like Gamliel, Israeli Messianic Jews, regardless of religious upbringing, generally describe an initial state of disconnection from God, and distance or dissatisfaction from aspects of Jewish faith, or at least a hunger for more than they had experienced. Coming to faith in Yeshua is characteristically depicted as a restoration to God and to an authentic Jewish identity. In his narrative, Gamliel refers to this process as “congruent streams” of returning to his Jewish roots, the land of Israel and faith through the Jewish Messiah.

It is interesting that Gamliel’s narrative is limited to boundaries between Jews: Israel and Diaspora, Hebrew and English, observant (or “in process”) and secular, Jewish Believer and Jewish non-Believer. Fittingly, his constitutive spiritual experience among family friends in Jerusalem is the *Havdalah*, a division between holy and profane. After years of wandering, Gamliel’s *Aliyah* was another step in his decision to embrace his Jewish identity in a more

meaningful way. Now when he crosses the seas to visit his family in Diaspora and they use his other name he feels “strange”.

On the surface, the themes covered in Gamliel’s narrative appear to reflect binary thinking, describing his linear crossing from one side of a boundary to another: Diaspora to Israel, Greg to Gamliel, secular to religious, nomad to settled, holy to profane, day to night. However at second glance, we see that he presents a retrospective narrative of returning. Returning to what? In actuality, his move from Diaspora to Israel is a move that began with his ancestors in Israel, albeit 2000 years ago, to Diaspora, then back again to Israel, his “destiny”. What began as a linear search for “truth” through time and space, after finding this truth, becomes in retrospect a spiral course of returning to the God, land and people of Israel.

In a spiral paradigm, axes run across the middle representing polar tensions which are complimentary and necessary for progress within the spiral. The process of return is about negotiating the tensions of opposing, mutually constitutive axis poles. Thus, Gamliel’s lineage originates in Israel; he is born into exile, then visits Israel where he understands that he is part of a greater historical process of return (round one). He returns to Diaspora where he feels out of place, and eventually makes his way back to Israel on *Aliyah* (round two). Since then, he has made various trips back and forth to continue his studies and maintain family ties, but round after round, his identity is transforming such that his old name, Greg, hangs on him strangely, like an ill-fitting suit. We find later in Gamliel’s narrative an expressed desire to continue his process of drawing near to his roots, through study and thoughtful observance. He is continually returning to Gamliel, to God, to Jerusalem, to his Jewish roots (round three and beyond).

In the same way, Gamliel’s additional narrative tropes may be plotted circularly, a narrative strategy characteristic of the interviewee stories. The Children of Israel in Sinai began their journey in Israel generations prior to the Exodus, dwelt in exile, and returned to Israel. The Sabbath, which is holy, moves into the profane work week at *Havdalah*. Thus the seven-day cycle, which began in Genesis, continues spiraling on through history. On each round, we see Gamliel drawing ever closer, then seemingly farther, and returning, round after round spiraling back to his sources. As the Sabbaths wax and wane, although he has already come to faith in Yeshua, and made *Aliyah* to Israel, Gamliel admittedly is still in the process of returning.

Both Gamliel's narrative structure and his discursive interpretation indicate his conceptualization of Jewish faith in Yeshua as spiralic continuity rather than the hegemonic Jewish and Christian models of linear rupture. In the classic Jewish model of "conversion", as mentioned above, the Jew, due to personal or familial spiritual or mental weakness, or motivated by material want (interpreted in America as failure), abandons his people to join the dominant camp of the Christian enemy (interpreted by Judaism as betrayal and by Zionism as a lack of ideology). According to this paradigm, the only reason why such a Jew would strive to maintain her Jewish ties in any way would be out of guilt, identity confusion (attributed again to her weak mental constitution), or in order to lead other Jews astray into the Christian camp; Gamliel's story could only be interpreted as instability or missionary deception, hence the foundation for Sobel's book on Hebrew Christians (1974).

In the Christian model, the un-Believer is in darkness and she moves into the light, period. She was ignorant of God in her unredeemed state, and after the born-again experience she is transformed into a new creature, so much so, that her old language, including Jewish theological concepts in indigenous Hebrew, is incapable of sufficiently expressing her new life of faith in Yeshua⁶⁸. This is a linear model of "conversion", a "before and after" model, in which returning to what one was "before", or to one's previous lifestyle and unredeemed (synonymous with "Jewish") culture, is tantamount to backsliding into sin, reverting to an old life in the flesh rather than new life in the Spirit. The linear "conversion" model interprets returning to one's past identity as reverting to un-Believing sources out of the weakness of the flesh, which constantly wages war on the Believer to hold her back from walking in the newness of life in the Spirit. However, Gamliel's spiral model of the faith journey "returns" to his roots to regroup and renew himself, each time enriching himself with another level of reconnection and revelation.

Interestingly, there is only one interviewee, Nurit, out of sixty in this research project who interprets her own faith journey according to the linear "conversion" model. Every other interviewee, even the least observant and most secular-styled Israeli Messianic Jew who is quite at home in Gentile Christian circles, depicts himself as "a better Jew than ever before". At the same time, the linear model is used by some Israeli Jewish Believers to describe the general coming to faith narrative, particularly in some evangelistic discourse. Nurit's narrative

⁶⁸ For an example of this paradigm, see its usage by the native Israeli editor and missionary translator below in the section of Chapter nine entitled "The struggle for subjectivity."

is examined below to better understand the role of the linear conversion model in Israeli Messianic Jewish discourse.

Through a deep, pre-faith involvement in international self-help movements, secular Nurit became accustomed to western dichotomous introspective evaluations along the lines of “before (our self-help seminar)-and-after”, old and new, meaningful and superficial, fulfilling and empty, etc., and the teaching of learning to love oneself first in order to be able to love others. In her quote below, the Old Covenant⁶⁹ is portrayed as mechanical and loveless (implying that one can keep the Law while hurting and disrespecting one’s neighbor), complicated, impossible to keep and focused on external, physical elements, in contrast with “today’s” New Covenant which is simple (only two commandments), manageable and spiritual. Unlike some of our other interviewees, Nurit does not describe a continuity between the covenants, nor explain Yeshua’s teachings as his *halacha* on the Hebrew Scriptures which empower the Jewish person to actually keep covenant with God. Although she doesn’t explicitly say so, her concept of the New Covenant is one which essentially replaces the Old with something better, simpler, more user-friendly:

All 613 commandments, those were the commandments contained in the Old Covenant. Today [in] the New Covenant, Yeshua is essentially speaking mostly about, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”. That is the commandment and the Law and the Prophets... If a Believer says to me that he chooses to live according to these 613 commandments, be my guest. If it is good for you, then wonderful. But only to the degree that you also keep the commandments of the New Covenant of “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”, and you respect people, and don’t hurt them... everything together. Now we know that it is impossible to keep all 613 commandments. That is really the reason why Yeshua gave us two commandments: “You shall love God” and “You shall love people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself”. He gave us two commandments. Throughout the entire New Covenant he speaks about them. And that’s it. It has spiritual meaning, and none of the commandments of the New Covenant have physical meaning... Milk and meat we don’t separate in our food- that is religion. That is not what makes a person purer, cleaner. We know that what makes him purer and cleaner is repentance. It is asking forgiveness. Not physical things. Let’s just say that religion speaks more about physical things and faith speaks about spiritual things... The New Covenant doesn’t speak at all about [keeping kosher]. In the New Covenant there are essentially new things. [Yeshua] says that it is not what enters one’s mouth that pollutes the person, but what comes out, whether it’s gossip, libel, curses and things like that. (So if the New Covenant doesn’t address an issue, then it is no longer valid from the “Old Covenant”?) Essentially, yes... Because I see the New Covenant as the last word of God (Nurit, Hebrew).

⁶⁹ Note that Nurit uses the English term “Old Covenant” (*Brit Yeshana*), which immediately stands out as a Christian concept when used in Hebrew. More common expressions include “the *Tenach*” (an acronym for Torah, Prophets and Writings, the three major sections of the Hebrew Scriptures), “the Hebrew Scriptures”, or simply, “the Scriptures”. She also refers to the 613 commandments with a past tense verb, while using the word “today” to refer to the immediate relevancy of the New Covenant.

Nurit's faith journey begins in her secular self-help seminars (which are themselves often modeled on secularized, eastern-influenced Christian concepts of new birth, as she acknowledges in her interview), and culminates in faith in Yeshua. In Yeshua, Nurit finally becomes equipped to carry through the principles of self-transformation that she so diligently sought, and finds the ultimate support-group in her local Believing community. She relates how her husband, who was willing to read the New Covenant before her, exclaimed, "Parts of our (self-help) seminars are in here! 'Do not worry about tomorrow, but only about today', 'Love your enemies', 'Love one another'". She later describes how she continually returns to the skills learned in her seminars as a Believer: using drama therapy in teaching the children in her congregation and writing a guidebook for other Israeli Messianic Jews on paths of inner healing. Her dream is to live off of working the land and open a healing center in the desert for weary Believers to come rest and be refreshed. This doesn't sound much like a clean break from her past, a culture-free *tabula rasa* approach to faith, eschewing the ways of her carnal "old" nature. Interestingly, the only thing deemed "old" in her narrative is the Hebrew Scriptures and a Jewish observant lifestyle.

Returning to our analytical model of identity, we see in Nurit's narrative a disparity between the narrative structure and her discursive interpretation. The structure of her narrative describes a spiral of continual returning to the cultural schemas and strategies of action of her previous secular Israeli self-help haunts on ever deepening levels, and their renewal and realization through her Messianic faith. Why is it then that her discursive interpretation emphasizes a linear course and the classic "before-and-after" dichotomy?

The formerly secular Jewish Nurit speaks of how the old Jewish religion of the commandments is discarded, superseded by a streamlined new, spiritual version. In Nurit's case, the "before-and-after" conversion model, conveniently adopted by her self-help seminars from the hegemonic Christian and Jewish conversion models, curiously does not directly disparage her personal, self-help past. In actuality, her linear discourse is not describing her actual personal experience. She is simply repeating the hegemonic discursive line, and in doing so, reveals the ideology inherent in the linear conversion model, namely, that belief in Yeshua and Jewishness are polar opposites.

Versions of the classic linear "conversion" model are utilized at times in Israeli Messianic theological explanations⁷⁰. However, on the basis of empirical evidence from this research, the

⁷⁰ See Chapter nine, the section entitled "The struggle for subjectivity."

linear conversion model is *unsupportable* as an emic structural model for the personal faith testimony of the Israeli Messianic Jew. Israeli Messianic Jews, from the most secularized to the most observant, continue to narrate their own lives as spiral courses moving forward and looping back around to deeper or higher planes, whether this resonates with their expressed theology or not.

The linear model is used most conspicuously in discourse concerning Jewish observance. The black-and-white character of the model seems to lend itself as potent ammunition in identity politics, as in Nurit's example, or in the example at the translators' conference discussed below⁷¹. In other words, some Jewish Believers, in an attempt to portray their new faith as something inherently different and entirely distinct from Law-based Judaism, construct a Boyarian strawman (2004), a foil or Doppelganger, who is the quintessential observant Jew (Believer or non-Believer) embodying everything old, man-made, carnal and obsolete. Haunted by the figure of this unredeemed Jewish Doppelganger, many Israeli Believers are at times audibly engaged in an intense *Kulturkampf*. This ominous Jewish caricature was likely born of the Christian Zionist union between certain Gentile Christian traditions which demonize a works-based rabbinic Judaism and perhaps Jews themselves and Zionist discourses which demonize Diaspora Jewish life in favor of the New Hebrew Man reborn in the motherland (Almog 1997:128, Hebrew). Diatribes against religiosity and the keeping of the Law are not against the narrators *themselves* and their pre-faith lives; they are directed against the imagined *other*, who happens to be of their flesh.

Antinomian narratives, quite popular in Israeli Jewish Believing discourse, are therefore interpreted linearly through time and space, away from the constructed image of Jewish unbelief. Linearly progressing narratives emphasize newness. To adapt Pierre Nora (1989:16-17), narrative emphasis on newness rather than renewal articulates a sense of historical discontinuity and separation from a previous group, whereas spiral courses, such as Gamliel's, emphasize themes of continuity and renewal (Zerubavel 1995:7). The dichotomous idiom actually reflects an attempt to sever ties with established Judaism in order to undermine rabbinic spiritual authority – in effect authorizing the Christian-Zionist fusion of redemption through grace-based faith and service to the motherland. Rather than reclaiming spiritual authority over Jewish Scriptures and identity by reinterpreting their spiritual significance in light of Messianic faith, just as secular Zionists offer an authentic reinterpretation of Jewish

⁷¹ Ibid.

national significance, through the linear faith narrative, Jewish Believers essentially retreat, abandoning Torah and Jewish tradition to the rabbinic Jewish hegemony. Therefore, discursive interpretation of the faith journey as a linear course, reifies the hegemonic model of Jewish faith in Yeshua as an historical rupture rather than the spiritual continuity and renewal of Jewishness itself. This discursive interpretation of linear rupture is consistent with those Jewish Believers who interpret their Jewish identity according to a spirit-body dichotomy, seeing themselves in hierarchical order first as spiritually Messianic and only second as nationally Jewish (Israeli).

At the same time, *all* Israeli Messianic Jews are quick to mention their Sabbath and holiday celebrations (most often out of national or sociocultural identification rather than commandment observance), which reflect spiral courses of Jewish renewal (Zerubavel 1981). This can mislead many into thinking that all Israeli Jewish Believers are actually much more observant in practice than the popular antinomian Israeli Jewish Believing discourse implies. How can it be that *all* Israeli Jewish Believers celebrate at least some spiralic recurring elements in the Jewish tradition, when we have just explained that a significant number seem to discursively reject Messianic faith as Jewish continuity?

In secular Zionist adaptations of holidays and birth celebrations, “the links between the people and its land preserved and symbolized (precisely) through religion” are ritually maintained to illustrate the “redemption of the uprooted Jew” in the land (Doleve-Gandelman 1987:264), at the same time that other traditional elements are often silenced in favor of Israeli newness. That is, some elements found in Scripture, particularly those most strongly related to the land and agriculture, have been integrated into Zionist civil practice to essentially offer a practical secular alternative to the spiritual redemption traditionally awaited by rabbinic Judaism. By celebrating the feasts as agricultural festivals, Zionists are reclaiming national authority for the Jewish people from the rabbis and re-infusing Jewish tradition with the message of national and self-redemption through working the land (Almog 1997:255, Hebrew; Doleve-Gandelman 1987:261). Israeli Jewish Believers, the vast majority of whom are strongly Zionist, follow the Zionist paradigm, adopting Jewish traditions which have been transformed through Israeli civil religion. These practices serve a dual purpose for the Jewish Believer, both proving his loyalty to the Jewish state and people, and reifying his freedom from rabbinic concepts of salvation. Traditional elements of Judaism, silenced by secular Zionism, are also generally ignored in this Israeli Jewish Believing paradigm, since redemption is not sought in “rabbinic works”. By coupling Messianic faith with secular Zionist praxis, these Israeli

Believers replace both the rabbinic concept of works-salvation and the secular concept of self-redemption with redemption through faith in Yeshua as the Messiah. Thus, even the most anti-rabbinic Israeli Jewish Believers may surprisingly appear to be more observant than many observance-oriented Diaspora Messianic Jews, however, this should be interpreted as civil praxis, and often has little to do with the observance of Scriptural commandments as spiritual service to God. Thus, the secular Zionist concept, the New Hebrew (Christian) Man is both a renewal – a redeemed and more authentic incarnation of the (Diaspora rabbinic) Jew – and an entirely “new creation”.

In summary, as in Gamliel’s narrative, Israeli Jewish Believing faith journey narratives can reflect a personalized renewal, emphasizing spiralic Jewish continuity and return in both narrative structure and interpretation, and challenging the hegemonic concept of “conversion” as an historical rupture, or, as in Nurit’s narrative, they may reveal a spiralic structure of renewal while offering a discursive linear interpretation of newness in opposition to a rabbinic Jewish foil. While Israeli Messianic Jewish faith journey narratives do not support the classic “conversion” paradigm of a clean break from Judaism to Gentile Christianity, the paradigmatic linear “conversion” discourse is nonetheless employed in various contexts by many Israeli Jewish Believers as part of a larger discourse of antinomianism.

Chapter eight

IDENTITY AS ROOTS: RETURNING TO THE LAND

This chapter explores the treatment of identity as roots through the Messianic Jewish return to the land of Israel. The chapter opens with a discussion of how all Israeli Messianic Jews return to the land, whether immigrant or native, and how the land signifies the physical destiny of their faith journey, the place of the unraveling of God's prophetic plan for the Jewish people and the nations, and the homeland which nurtures and preserves the Jewish people and safeguards their identity. Next, "Aliyah" discusses the practical challenges for Messianic Jews who immigrate to Israel, and how the local community perceives the process, while "Yeridah" explores the pull on Israeli Messianic Jews to uproot themselves and seek their destiny in the west. The next section illustrates how the narratives employ a variety of arborescent metaphors to describe a digging in toward indigeneity through the organic functioning of the local community.

The following sections reflect a dialogue with western Christians in light of the drive of Israeli Messianic Jews to return to the land and to cultivate indigeneity. "The primacy of the land" introduces a local Jewish Believing discourse of the land which makes Israel accessible and marketable to all Believers, Jewish or Gentile, as the "Holy Land", at the expense of a spiritually-distinct, indigenous Jewish Believing identity. "The Messianic body in the land" describes the composition and dynamics of the Hebrew-speaking Believing population in Israel, which includes many non-Jews, mainly from the west, leading to the following three sections which discuss foreign presence, foreign imports and foreign evangelism. The section called "Foreign fundraising" explores the classic Zionist tension between the desire to build a local indigenous body and the putative need to finance much of the work through fundraising and ties abroad. Lastly, "Bridging between Israel and the nations" examines the vision of indigeneity together with a concomitant vision of apostleship to the nations through two Israeli Messianic Jewish models of Israel-Diaspora relations.

Returning to the land is a theme addressed by all interviewees, across the board, native and immigrant, "secular"-styled or observance-oriented, perhaps because it is such a dominant theme in both the Bible and Israeli civil religion (Almog 1997, Hebrew). Returning to the land, whether through *Aliyah*, the repatriation of Israelis or a reconnection of resident Israelis to

their homeland, fulfills three functions in all of the narratives. Firstly, the return to the land is part of the overall process of returning to God in the faith journey of the Jewish Believer:

I just floated around America, hippie, hitchhiker, just drifted. I had no real purpose to my life. I was trying to find some kind of meaning to my life... [I was rejecting] I guess the whole concept of becoming successful in this society. Entering this society that I had been brought up in, to take my place within it and to be successful materially, what people strive for in their lives at least in America. Reach some level of status in that society, be a contributing member of that society. I saw myself as not a part of that society. I saw that people were really chasing nothing. As far as I was concerned, what was the meaning of their lives? What does it mean that you can gain the world... All my cousins were very successful people in their field, people that make a lot of money, they're tops in their field. My cousin is the top man in the theater in America, on Broadway. I look at his life, what is it? What does it mean? I didn't see that. I wanted to know more why, who I am, what is the deeper meaning of life, it's not there... I began to realize that I would never fit into that society. Then something began to speak to me about maybe try Israel. I was so far away from Judaism that I began to discover that maybe that was what was missing in my life. I could never be a part of them, of the Gentile society, even though I had become totally disconnected from Judaism. I was never going to become a part of their world... So, I think at some stage God brought me back like the prodigal son in a sense. So, I began making the journey back... (Benjamin)

Secondly, the act of returning to the land is a fulfillment of prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures which speak about the ingathering of the exiles in the end of days, a sign of God's continuing covenant relationship with his people, and one of the harbingers of the Messiah's imminent return. Life in Israel thus becomes a privilege of the individual Believer who thus participates in a down-to-earth practical way in the realization of God's prophetic plan:

This was my first visit to a Messianic congregation ever. And the first person I met... told me in the first five minutes that I walked in there, that there were something like over six hundred scriptures in the Bible that say that all the Jews will return to Israel. And I went, six hundred? And I said, well, one actually should be enough because I really believe in God's word, but six hundred? I get the picture. And I committed in my heart that I would be making *Aliyah* some time in my life from that moment (Linda).

Thirdly, returning to the national homeland of the Jewish people is believed to be one of the wisest steps a Jew can take to insure the preservation and maintenance of his Jewish identity and the identity of his progeny. Interestingly, this third function of returning to the land in our narratives, challenges the claim of Diaspora Messianic Jewish leaders that the Messianic Jewish movement, particularly in the United States, offers a vibrant Jewish lifestyle and faith expression, and sufficiently promotes Jewish generational continuity (See, for example, Chernoff 1990; Cohn-Sherbok 2000; Rudolph 2003).

The theme of physically returning to Zion to reinforce one's connection to the God, the people and the ways of Israel, is a common thread regardless of the immigrants' degree of observance, even among former heads of Messianic Jewish congregations in the States, like Shimon:

I was challenged early on in my walk with the Lord when this cantor friend who's not a Believer, he looked at me and said the second generation of Jewish Christians are Christian Christians. And I said to myself that won't happen in my family's case and so we moved to Israel... It was the desire of my heart to give my kids a Jewish heritage and let themselves have *bar mitzvahs* and *britot* and different things as much as I could... I could do it in America... but Israel was to me the most authentic step you could to saying you're Jewish. I mean throw yourself with the Jewish nation, putting your kids in the Army, and all, what more can you do? (Shimon)

One might expect for North American immigrants like Benjamin and Shimon to conceive of Israel as a meaningful place, and associate *Aliyah*, the spatial return to Zion, with a significant life that includes a deeper connection with God and his purposes, their people and their culture. But what of the native Israelis? Is life in Israel something which they take for granted, a second world existence they wish to escape, or is it a life infused with national and spiritual significance?

Hough (1990), in his study of native landscapes and human perceptions, distinguishes between natural habitat and cultural landscape, which is habitat manipulated by man. A natural habitat of sandy lands bordered on one side by the ocean, for example, may be read by outside visitors as "the beach", an ideal cultural landscape for vacationing. The prized beach vacation, claims Hough, is made by people who do not live there. Additionally, "modern man has suffered from a deepening condition of 'homelessness'," writes Berger (qtd. in Morley & Robbins 1990:457). In light of the current state of global travel and cultural fluidity and exchange the world over, indigeneity is a mere shadow of what it was once assumed to be, a mundane rootedness in one's homeland and almost a sure guarantee of local continuity (Peck 1996; Malkki 1992). In other words, Israelis might just take the "holy land" for granted, and in this global age, choose not to continue their lives in the land.

Whether following the global trend of homelessness/cosmopolitanism or perhaps a post-Zionist itch to realize themselves abroad, 61% of the native Israelis interviewed in this study traveled, studied and/or lived abroad for significant periods of time as young people. Had these young Israelis lost faith in or wearied of the Zionist construct of Israel's cultural landscape, they renew their faith and commitment within the framework of this newly-found

Messianic faith. In fact, several interviewees commented that had they not come to faith, they would have likely remained abroad. All of them made a decision at some point to return.

In the case of Israel, the framing of the land as the national and spiritual Place – as Zion – and not simply a common place, is shared by native Israelis as well as Diaspora Jews (Gurevitch & Aran 1991, Hebrew). Zionism and Israeli civil religion have always related to the land of Israel as a cultural landscape, which prevents native Israelis from ever becoming a prosaic indigenous people, mundanely rooted in their land like every other nation on earth. The Zionist relationship with the land is mediated and justified by the constitutive text of the Hebrew Scriptures. The moment that the Israeli eliminates this textual mediation, is the moment that he loses the significance of and justification for his national presence and distinctiveness in the land of Israel.

We see from Naomi's example below, that the Israelis abroad were continually, if remotely, aware of the call to return, and were always somewhere in the process of returning. Naomi's heart is changed once she develops a relationship with God through Yeshua, and returning to the land becomes an integral part of her faith journey. The return to Israel, even for a native Israeli, becomes infused with new significance in the wake of returning to the God of Israel and his Messiah:

When I got saved, I didn't want to separate from the Believers [in America]... I knew nobody, no Believer, in Israel... God then told me, I have to go back to Israel... Yeah. Boy, I didn't like to hear it at all... It was very hard, I wanted to go back to America. And I didn't want to live in Israel, and I argued with God, and then He just changed my heart very quickly afterwards. And it became like, that's the only thing I wanted to do, is go back and live in Israel... In fact, I never bought a TV, or any electrical appliances because I knew that I have to live in Israel and cannot bring that. I always lived like I know that I have to pack soon and go, and it took... fourteen years... And I have to say that, ever since I was a Believer, all my visits, I never wanted to leave Israel. It was always so hard after the vacation in Israel to go back to America. Israel didn't look that way before I was a Believer, but now I saw Israel in the eyes of a Believer, that Israel was so exotic, so beautiful, it was so special, and going back to America afterwards was like too sterile for me... I felt like I was a person that fell asleep and after, like, twenty years you wake up... I wasn't in Israel for over twenty years and all I wanted to do is just fill that gap to have everything that I missed here (Naomi).

Shuki offers an interesting narrative of a second-generation Israeli Messianic Jew. He grew up in a small town in the outer periphery of Israel, further marginalized by his family's faith and lack of Messianic fellowship in the town. After experiencing persecution as a child due to his faith, he grew to hate life within the borders of Israel. It is not until he travels to Europe for a Bible school course, and returns with his Gentile Christian schoolmates on a journey to the

“Holy Land”, that he begins to see the beautiful landscapes of his homeland and appreciate Israel for the first time as the Place.

Note Shuki’s mention of touring the land, a theme of constructed indigeneity, which we will explore in the next chapter. Not surprisingly, years later Shuki becomes a professional tour guide in Israel as if to permanently fix himself in that liminal place of insider-outsider which once so movingly afforded him the opportunity to “return” to Israel the Place, “the land of milk and honey”, instead of Israel the place that “devours its inhabitants”:

At that time I hated Israel... during the army it just became worse and worse. I just never related... Also the tax authority got on to my parents, decided that were actually hiding millions of dollars that they didn’t declare... That was because someone from one of the synagogues wrote an anonymous letter and said they’re actually hiding millions because my mother was going very regularly to a Conservative synagogue... They all loved her but she was also witnessing to people who were interested in hearing... So someone wrote and they foreclosed on my parents’ bank accounts, they froze the car, the bank accounts, which were all in minus anyway... They broke into the house one day and they took the video. They send thugs and a policeman and one tax representative to reclaim property for the state... and my mother... just felt so abused. And they were shouting at her, if she would have paid, it wouldn’t have happened. And all this because we were Believers... And eventually it turned out that we didn’t owe them anything... We had to go to Haifa and pick up the video from where they stored it, and we had to pay them storage money for storing the video that they shouldn’t have taken because we didn’t owe them the money. I just hated this country on all fronts... And you had to pay travel tax to leave... You ask permission to leave and you pay ransom... I went to Bible school... I came back to Israel... I was traveling with my friends, and having been... where it really rains and rains and rains, and always when it’s not raining its heavily cloudy, coming back to Israel was really nice because it was the end of March. Israel at its absolute best. Israel was looking gorgeous. And all the friends of mine had also been through the ugly winter [abroad] so everyone was like gasping at everything about Israel, loving everything and I was too... And because my friends were here I was actually proud of Israel for the first time in my life. So that was very strange. It was the first time I had a very strong good experience of Israel coming from the outside. And I liked it. I mean it sort of stayed with me (Shuki).

Also a second-generation Jewish Believer raised in Israel, Daniella lived for many years as an adult in the United States but eventually got to the point where she realized she didn’t want to live out her days in just any place. She wanted to reconnect to the Place, to her own people, identity and calling and build her future family in her own land. While she lived a good life among Gentile Christians, it entirely excluded the Jewish side of herself which she felt had gone neglected for long enough. For the sake of her Jewish identity and the identity of her children, it was time to return to the land:

I was missing something. That just wasn’t it. I didn’t want to wake up one day and say, “I lived my whole life in the State of Nebraska.” And I also got to the stage where I really

wanted to get married. I really wanted to draw near to Jewish values, to Jewish identity. And it was totally lacking for me, there was nothing there. And no one that I knew there understood. I began to pray and simply beseeched God to show me. And at some point I felt that God really showed me that the time had come to return. I returned to Israel... (Daniella, Hebrew)

What of the 39% of native Israelis who for the most part remained living in the land? Is Israel just another place to live like any other country, or do they also speak of a deeper significance of the Place? Interestingly, our narratives reveal the same three readings of the land observed in the immigrants and the traveled Israelis.

Yishai, a second-generation native Israeli Believer waxes eloquent of the local Believers' need to connect to the biblical landscape and ancient ways of the Jewish people in the land, as an active part of their "walk" with God:

What I would feel led to contribute to the [Israeli Messianic Jewish] congregations is much more of a knowing of the land⁷², the sense of where you are placed, to become familiar with the land... Bible stories that are connected with the place. All of the stories: Gideon and Barak... Gideon threshing the wheat.. how to thresh and what does it mean to sow seed, the axe and the root... drawing water, wells, everything that is associated [with the land]... including biblical cooking, plants, biblical herbal remedies... biblical garb and what and how... (Yishai, Hebrew).

In Ariella's narrative we see that living a Law-observant lifestyle enables the Jewish people to live well in the land of Israel. The land becomes a prophetic place of testing and potential blessing if the Jewish people choose to follow God. Life together in the land by its very nature also forges the Jews into a people, preserves them and provides them the opportunity to live peacefully as a nation before God:

We look at the whole Torah in general as a way of life that was given to the Jewish people... My salvation isn't dependent upon it, but... this is the way that God wants the Jews to live... The reason for all this is so that it will go well with us, "So that it may go well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you". It is all for us as a people... So that we can truly settle in the land and live the life of a nation... And that is how God brought the blessing, as a people... This is also God's way to preserve the people of Israel (Ariella, Hebrew).

⁷²“ידעת הארץ”- knowing the land” is a Zionist concept promoted by early settler-pioneers and integrated into the Israeli school curricula to this day, including an array of subjects such as ecology, conservation, geography, Israeli flora and fauna, archeology, military history, history of colonization and settlement, etc. Most significantly, this kind of “knowing” implies an intimacy which can only be achieved through direct physical contact through hiking, field trips and hands-on activities in nature. The name itself implies the same biblical Hebrew intimacy laced with sexual double entendre (Zerubavel 1995:120-121).

Ami, although belonging to the group of traveled Israelis, speaks for many of his more staid brothers and sisters in a description of a semi-traditional Jewish *Erev Shabbat*⁷³ service in the forest. The forest is a Zionist setting for hiking, camping, bonfires, scout bonding, military maneuvers and informal family barbecues, a site inferring intimacy with the land, brotherly solidarity and national Jewish liberation in and through the land⁷⁴, echoing Romantic images found in European folktales. Ami feels some need to show Jewish identification, but as a self-proclaimed “secular Messianic”, also wishes to insure his freedom from religious compulsion. Therefore, the forest becomes the perfect backdrop for a not-too-religious Shabbat service:

I see this *Erev Shabbat* meeting as an evangelistic meeting... Some people in Israel, like I said before, when you speak about God, they need to see some Jewishness in it. Now an *Erev Shabbat* meeting is a perfect time to show some Jewishness. And now, but to do it Israeli, we do it in the forest [laughs] we don't do it at home... and have it kind of easy (Ami).

Yishai's biblical Zionist approach of knowing the land emphasizes a down-to-earth returning to the biblical cultural landscapes – knowing the land to know God; Ariella's Torah-observant textual approach reads the land as the context for the realization of God's covenantal blessings; and Ami's secular-style Zionist approach constructs the land as a primordial source of national identity, and returning to the land, as a romantic process of national and personal liberation.

In summary, all three groups of Israeli Jewish Believers, immigrant, traveled and sedentary, raise all three points regarding returning to the land of Israel. The land becomes the physical destiny of the faith journey, the place where the individual partakes in the fulfillment of end-day prophecy, and the home which safeguards and exercises the Believer's Jewish identity and that of his progeny among their people. Therefore, even to the most landlocked of Israelis, the land is not a mundane place, but rather the Place – Zion – and the Jewish Believer is depicted taking an active part in the conscious, ongoing challenge of returning to and knowing God by spatially returning to and knowing the land.

Aliyah

Aliyah and the passion of even native Israelis to return to the land of Israel, do not negate the well-publicized Israeli Supreme Court decision in the Beresford Case, ironically released on

⁷³ *Erev Shabbat* is the Sabbath eve, which is Friday night. Jews traditionally welcome the Sabbath on Friday once the sun is setting, with the cessation of work, a festive meal and special prayers and songs in the home, in addition to an evening synagogue service.

⁷⁴ See, for example, the writings of A.D. Gordon cited by Oz Almog. Gordon writes, “In nature and in relation to nature, man feels himself completely liberated...” (Almog 1997:255, Hebrew).

December 25th, 1989. On the basis of previous decisions in cases regarding Hebrew Christians, Judge Aharon Barak's opinion interpreted the Law of Return to continue to exclude Jewish Believers in Yeshua (even Torah-observant ones like the Beresfords) on the premise that such Jews have withdrawn from Jewish society and community:

Thus is the meaning and content of the Law of Return, in that it grants rights founded on membership in the Jewish people to persons accounted part of the Jewish society and community, and not to someone who has withdrawn therefrom – which is how the convert is referred to, seeing as he has withdrawn from the ways of the Jewish community, and is no longer reckoned “your brother”... and he is certainly not included in the Prophet Jeremiah's vision: “And your children shall return to their own border” – which is the cornerstone and the foundation for the State of Israel's Law of Return (Stern 1990).

Twelve years later, the bar mitzvah invitation for a son of a leading immigrant family opens up to the boy's picture with the very same verse in Hebrew and English used by Judge Barak to exclude Messianic Jews from the community of Israel, cited in full:

“And there is hope for your future,” declares the Lord, “And your children shall return to their own border” (*Jeremiah* 31:16, Hebrew).

One would expect the Israeli Supreme Court decision to cut off the hope for the future of Messianic Jews in Israel by declaring them outside the community of Israel and legally disqualifying them from claiming their right to make *Aliyah* as Jews. However Messianic Jews continue to exercise what they believe is part of their God-given birthright to return and to lay stake to the homeland of the Jewish people, as the grounded hope for their future. The fact is that since the 1989 court decision, and despite its administration by the Interior Ministry, hundreds of Messianic Jews from the former Soviet block, Europe and North America have returned to Israel and received citizenship under the Law of Return.

Despite the 1989 Israeli Supreme Court decision, widely discussed in Jewish-Believing circles the world over, most Israeli Messianic Jews agree that far more Jewish Believers in the Diaspora should be making *Aliyah*. Among native and many immigrant Israelis, most think that Believers should be making *Aliyah en masse*, on the one hand, yet on the other, are concerned that the immigrants not import their foreign Believing cultures and praxes, or their different concepts of Judaism and Jewishness, and expect to transfer them on to the Israeli Believing scene. Moshe states this position rather bluntly below:

I want all the American Jews to make *Aliyah*... because they should be here. They talk a great Zionist lingo... They give money, they do functions, but the bottom line is they're not going to come here to live. So first I want to see the American Jews coming to live here... [On the other hand] basically they're bringing a pagan, Pentecostal, charismatic religion with them and in the name of Messianic Judaism... We have our own problems already here. We don't want to import more problems from America... First of all, most of the congregations [in America] are majority non-Jews, A. B, most of the leadership of the Messianic Jewish movement is not Jewish. C, their teaching and their doctrines are not Jewish and not biblical, they're taken straight out of the repertoire of Pentecostal, charismatic churches. D, they talk very Jewish but they live very Christian. (Moshe)

Among immigrants, we find an even more nuanced discourse regarding Messianic Jewish *Aliyah*. While there is general agreement with the native Israelis that far more Jewish Believers should be immigrating, there is disagreement over the conditions under which *Aliyah* should take place.

Jackie describes how she had wanted to return to Israel from a young age, greatly motivated by a passion and call to live out the dream of the countless murdered Jews of the Holocaust. Her entire life she fostered the dream of returning, and over a period of approximately ten years, studied Hebrew and saved money to help ensure a successful transition. In her opinion, if American Messianic Jews do not have a passion for returning to Israel, and they don't prepare themselves to the best of their ability to succeed, they may as well remain in the States, because in all likelihood, they will live out the rest of their days in a marginalized Diaspora-ghetto life:

I've always wanted to make *Aliyah* since I was very little... when I started to be exposed to the Holocaust and learn about it... There's one scene (in a Holocaust-genre film) when they're in the Warsaw Ghetto and there's people on the other side of the wall being executed and the main family of the movie is the Weiss family and Dr. Weiss says to his wife who's trying to look over the wall to see this horrible site says you don't have to look, you know this is terrible, don't look. And she says, No, we owe it to them to be their witnesses... And then there was another movie, QB-7. There's one part where these people are giving their testimony and they're in the camps and they sit this guy in this seat where he's about to testify in court and they say what's your name and he says his name... And they say why don't you use the name you were born with and he says I took the name of the man who was killed out of respect for him. These two things showed me that I'm living and there's a lot that didn't get a chance to live and I'm gonna live their dream for them... I want to be an extension of something they never got to live out. It's a responsibility, it's a charge so to speak that through me they get a part of this... It's not just for me, it's for many faceless, nameless people who died with the word Zion on their lips. They never got to live out that dream. I'm doing it in part for them, I'm doing it in large part for me too, 'cause it's something I wanted and guess there was just something in me just born that way... I've always had these leanings towards this and felt my destiny was calling me here... I think that if you come here with less than a burning desire and less than the proper resources you don't have much chance succeeding and if you don't have much chance of succeeding then it's a pity... I came with tools, I came with the language, I came with money, I came with everything in place to succeed and so I did

succeed and also a burning desire to be here... Not just coming here and living in an enclave of your own culture. But really being part of the landscape. 'Cause to me, you ask me should Americans come here, no if they're coming here to speak English and to duplicate a lifestyle they had there. That's not what it's about. (Jackie)

According to Leah, western Believers need to do more than dream and sing about Zion. Despite the Messianic Jewish discourse of fighting on the spiritual front lines in the Diaspora, Leah believes that the real front lines are drawn in Israel. Jewish Believers need to pay more than just lip service to Zion; they need to take the step of faith and come to live in Israel themselves:

The difference between Messianic Jews there and Messianic Jews here, the biggest difference I think is that the Messianic Jews in America are very comfortable... And we're suffering... we're living through overdrafts and sending our kids to the army... But those of us that live here are really, really committed... Coming to Israel is like having your identity shattered into a thousand pieces and being put back together... The kind of people that come here have to be chance-takers, have to be the kind of people who will close their eyes, hold their nose and jump off a cliff, not knowing if there's going to be a net down there... You have to be a little crazy, you have to be a little brave, and you have to be willing to cling to God with all ten fingernails and not know whether He's going to come through or not, and that's a hard kind of person to be... You're not really on the front lines until you're here... It's very nice to sit in the United States in your congregation... and sing Hebrew songs and long for Jerusalem in your heart, I was part of that, I know... To sing about Jerusalem and get tears in your eyes. It's very nice... (Leah)

For Nehama, the Hebrew root ע-ב-ר (*avar*) meaning to cross over, lies at the root of being a Hebrew (*ivri*). The process of following God's call to the point of crossing over the border into the land of promise, is the constitutive experience which forges an authentic Hebrew identity. America, on the other hand, serves as a prison holding the Jew back from his full potential, despite its illusive wealth and promise of self-realization. While he may feel challenged and fulfilled, a Jew in Diaspora is not truly free to realize his spiritual potential:

You talk about people wanting to come here and contribute, have jobs, learn the language. That's all wonderful if that's possible. But what is God saying? He says, I'll bring you back. It's him doing it. And it is a testimony to the whole world of his keeping power. Of his word being fulfilled. Of his time to favor Zion. And it's not really the issue of did you get a job, did you learn the language, do you feel satisfied. It's a much bigger picture. It's the picture of God fulfilling his word... Whatever price it takes. As a Believer, that's your little part... And that's vision. And I think that people go back and they're going to be satisfied with matzo ball soup⁷⁵ and Davidic dancing⁷⁶ in their congregations... I don't condemn any of these people. I just feel that we the body of Believers in this Land, we are losing... The reality is that most Jews on the face of the

⁷⁵ Chicken soup with Ashkenazi-style dumplings made with matzo meal.

⁷⁶ A form of dance used during worship in many American Messianic Jewish congregations based on Israeli folk dance steps. It is called "Davidic" after King David, who according to Scripture, publicly danced before God.

earth don't realize that they are in a place of punishment. And the enemy has fooled them very well with materialism as though now they're blessed. But the reality is that Diaspora is a place of punishment. That's a clear thing from the Bible... If you're a Believer and you realize that to live anywhere else is to live in punishment and in denial of what God has made available and is doing today, then you can't live with yourself... And it's not preached. People don't hear that in their conferences in America. You're living in Diaspora. Let's study what did Diaspora mean to God? It's because your forefathers sinned and you were sent into exile and you're living in punishment today. It's Egypt. What did God want to do? He wanted to deliver his people from Pharaoh. Where did Hebrew come from? *Ovrin*. They came over, they went over the waters. I mean that's what it takes to make *Aliyah*. You have to separate yourself and go over. (Nehama)

Nehama's narrative challenges the supreme American value of the individual. Despite the ideal articulated by Jackie, whether or not he believes that he will find self-fulfillment or professional challenges, whether or not he manages to learn Hebrew and integrate into mainstream Israeli life, in order to be at the heart of what God is doing today, a Jewish Believer needs to leave his comfort zone and return to Zion. Nehama's narrative focuses on the promotion of Messianic Jewish *Aliyah en masse*, challenging Messianic Jews to immigrate as a practical realization of God's calling for the Jewish people in Scripture. Leah adds an additional layer to Nehama's narrative, turning American Messianic Jewish discourse and praxis into a mirrored critique of Diaspora Jewish Believers. American Messianic Jews, says Leah, love to describe themselves as fighting on the frontlines on behalf of the salvation of their people, but American frontlines pale in comparison to those in Israel, which are at once both spiritual and physical, located at the heart of the conflict. She challenges those Jewish Believers to come serve God in Israel and realize their discourse by immigrating to and not only dreamily singing about Zion.

Jackie takes a more pragmatic approach, encouraging people to insure that they have a strong enough ideological motivation to sustain them through the trials of immigration and absorption. They should also equip themselves to acclimate socially, culturally, professionally and economically in the land, in her words, to become "a part of the landscape". Jackie's narrative reminds us of Hough's (1990) natural habitat and cultural landscape. The ideal immigrant, according to Jackie, must be able to manage both the mundane challenges of the natural habitat, and successfully integrate into – not only dream about – Israel's cultural landscape.

In summary, the narratives reveal tension between the official legal position of the Israeli courts and the theological and ideological positions of the Believing community regarding the right and divine calling of Messianic Jews to *Aliyah*. Despite legal restrictions which legislate

against Jewish Believers making *Aliyah* as Jews, all Israeli Messianic Jews would like to see their Diaspora brothers returning to what they believe to be their Scriptural and historical homeland. Native and immigrant Israelis alike voice a concern, however, that immigrants avoid colonialist or ethnocentric attitudes, and not expect to automatically transfer their Believing culture from abroad, as many elements are irrelevant, foreign or even detrimental in Israeli contexts. Immigrants also expressed various positions concerning the conditions under which Jewish Believers should immigrate and why. All Israeli Believers would ideally like to see immigrants who do come successfully, learning Hebrew, making a living and socially and culturally integrating into the Israeli landscape.

Yeridah: The west as a site of capital and individual development

Most North American Messianic Jews interviewed in this research come from upper middle class families and with varying degrees of personal sacrifice have chosen to leave Diaspora wealth and opportunity behind to move eastward, seeking what they believe to be the higher purposes of the prophetic realization of God's calling on the Jewish people. When Mordechai was a teenager, his parents moved from the east coast of the United States to the west coast. In place of their Conservadox synagogue in New York, they joined a Reform temple. Here Mordechai describes the move westward from his point of view. It will come as no surprise that he spends his adult years journeying back eastward, first to New York, and eventually to Jerusalem:

My parents were not observant. I think they just wanted to belong somewhere... Whether they were looking for some place Reform, I don't know. But I sure recognized the difference... There were no women rabbis at that time but who did what in the synagogue was much more free; the use of musical instruments in the synagogue on Shabbat; and they had a choir on the high holidays. There was much more in English and much less, the services were shorter, much less of the *siddur* was used. The Torah wasn't really read per se, the Rabbi would summarize the weekly portion... There was also a vast difference in the education. I continued in the Hebrew school for another 3 years. And the classes that we had as opposed to the classes before were on modern history and I remember very distinctly a class called "Modern Jewish Problems". It talked about assimilation and intermarriage and anti-Semitism. And I remember even at the age of 14 or 15 or whatever it was, concluding that when you take the content out of the modern Jewish life, that what you have left is the problems. I used to joke about that with friends. Instead of studying Torah and Talmud, we talked about Jewish problems. We didn't have these problems in Long Island because we knew who we were and things were more clear. (Mordechai)

Mordechai touches on recurrent themes in our narratives: the east often offers a heightened awareness and spiritual clarity, as well as a stricter, more fruitful focus on collective heritage and calling. In the west, the stricture of God's Law, cultural traditions and social mores are

abandoned by the wayside while the self is lost in a sea of prosperity and endless possibilities. Yet the west, with its wealth and focus on the individual, offers many Israelis opportunities for self-realization inaccessible to them in their native land and culture. In Europe, America and Australia they find more economic and educational opportunity and the freedom to explore non-orthodox Jewish spiritualities. If Israel is the Promised Land, America is the Land of Promise.

Western movement is generally described as eccentric in the interviews, that is movement away from the Jewish collective center, and any collective for that matter, such as the family or community. Family unity or ethnic and religious heritages are often sacrificed on the altar of individual “realization” and “freedom”. In the popular Israeli imagination, anyway, the draw of professional and economic frontiers go hand and hand with intermarriage and assimilation (Zerubavel 1986).

It seems that one of the elements of local leadership culture criticized the most (see below “Foreign fundraising.”) – excessive travel to and connections with the west – is very attractive to some Israeli Messianic Jews. Local laypeople look to their leaders for stability, indigenous vision and initiatives and a down-to-earth practical Israeli Jewish spirituality, all of which are often perceived to be threatened by high degrees of mobility and foreign ties. Those leaders who succeed in making a living off of the economy are regarded with respect. In general, Believers that successfully face the challenges of life in Israel in culturally relevant and integrated ways are attributed real faith.

At the same time, Israel is a conflict-ridden second-world country in many respects, and Israelis, many Believers included, are often on the lookout for ways to rise above their local limitations. The English language, western culture and relations with the west are sources of capital, even while they may be looked down upon ideologically in some respects as “the easy way out” or even “siding with the enemy”⁷⁷. In this way, the North American immigrant like Jackie, has an inherently valuable advantage over the local Israeli, who has to work harder to be culturally fluent in some aspects of western language and culture. This may offer an

⁷⁷ For intimate explorations of the conflicting themes of personal attraction and ideological betrayal in Israeli Jewish relations with the representatives and culture of western colonial powers in Israeli literature, see for example, Amos Oz’s *Panther B’Martef* (1995, Hebrew), Meir Shalev’s *Fontanelle* (2002, Hebrew) and Ram Oren’s *Red Days* (2006, Hebrew); specifically regarding Jewish ties to foreign missions in pre-State Israel, see Shulamit Lapid’s *As a Broken Vessel* (1984, Hebrew).

alternative explanation for the attraction of Israelis to even the least “sophisticated” of western Christian imports.

Clifford (1997:43), when referring to the widespread phenomenon of African nationalist militants wearing Tarzan or Rambo t-shirts, inquires: Is this a fetishization of the west, or “a way of localizing global symbols for the purposes of action”? He answers that “both processes must somehow be at work”. In other words, Black African militants become consumers of western products and symbols not only out of lust for western power and resources, but also likely because they are adopting and adapting these powerful western symbols for their local causes. Tarzan’s independence and competence under difficult circumstances or Rambo’s power to destroy his evil enemies are powerful symbols which can serve to inspire and empower them and intimidate their enemies (who may not speak the neighboring tribal dialect but may very likely have seen or heard of these Hollywood characters). Clifford encourages scholars to think of interaction between cultures in terms of dialogue – however seemingly politically imbalanced – rather than one-sided cultural influence.

Quoted above in her rejection of western imports, Jackie, herself a Hebrew-speaking American Messianic Jewish immigrant and professional, may not value the “equipping” of Israeli Believers to think about American issues and problems like Americans, but many less traveled and perhaps more provincial Israelis might beg to differ. In fact, it is often the native Israelis who become most enamored with even (and perhaps especially) the most unsophisticated of American imports. Countless Israeli Believers with whom the researcher has spoken claim to have greatly improved their English since coming to faith and joining the local body of Believers, evidently due to the very strong foreign and western immigrant influences⁷⁸. In some congregations, English is used out of convenience in informal prayer meetings, worship team practices or women’s group gatherings, for example, rather than bothering to translate from a generally impoverished Hebrew for a sometimes majority of English-speaking immigrants, foreign Christian missionaries and sympathetic indigenous Anglophiles⁷⁹. In fact those that do not speak or understand this lingua franca can find themselves disadvantaged or even alienated in some local and certainly international Believing

⁷⁸ Interestingly, this research has even come across some rare native Israeli Believers who prefer English in Believing circles, while reserving Hebrew for the “secular” aspects of their lives. Perhaps in these cases, English offers an escape from grappling with an Israeli Jewish articulation of their faith. These Believers escape into another space marked by English, where they can be their Believer selves without conflicting with their Israeli Jewish (Hebrew) self.

⁷⁹ Of course Messianic Jewish and Zionist ideologies support the Hebrew speakers, and those that favor Hebrew labor and products, who despite limited vocabularies or resources at times, and particularly among immigrants, continue to plow their way through to indigeneity.

circles. Once associated with the colonial power of the English mandate, and now with American political and consumer global colonialism, and the largest, wealthiest and most powerful hubs of Diaspora Jewry, Diaspora Messianic Jewry and evangelical Christianity in the world, the English language and links to western culture (even if associated at times with the mission) offer cultural, social and potentially economic capital (Bourdieu 1986), giving the Israeli Believer an edge over the common non-Messianic Israeli, and better access to relationships that may afford him “protektzia”⁸⁰ in the Believing world.

Yisrael, for example, as a brand-new native Israeli Believer, was sent by his congregation to a charismatic conference and training seminar in the United States:

I got there. My head was still “in the world”. I said, “Whoa, America!”. Everything is big. It’s all extra, extra large. The cars are huge. All the houses are big. The streets are wide. The supermarkets, you go in and never come out. The people were even big... I liked everything about it... I loved that life and said, “Well, this suits me!” I began to check out the possibilities of living there... I thought about concluding that deputation... returning to Israel to wrap up loose ends and traveling to America. (Yisrael, Hebrew).

The many North American immigrants that are ex-hippies, who tried to establish agricultural and ideological communes in individual-oriented capitalist America, have come to see life in Israel as a natural extension and partial fulfillment of their utopian visions for collective redemption. Native Israelis may, conversely, experience the west as a site for the realization of individual goals and personal growth where collectively-oriented Israel has fallen short for them.

As discussed earlier, 61% of our native Israeli interviewees spent significant lengths of time working, studying or traveling abroad, the overwhelming majority in countries of the west. Many came to faith outside of Israel. They tell of returning to the land only after God revealed to them that they are essentially ascending to the Jerusalem of below while being planted in the soil of the Jerusalem of above, because this is the prophetic place where they, as Jewish Believers, will bring forth the most fruit in God’s greater plan. Yet along with their vision for collective renewal, perhaps they sense that it is in the west, or in relationship with it, that they might still fully realize themselves as individuals.

⁸⁰ “Protektzia” is the semi-formal Israeli use of personal influence or “pulling strings” to solve problems and promote various interests, including personal development and gain (Danet 1989).

The trend of gravitating toward a west, which seems to symbolize personal spiritual and economic salvation for some Israeli Believers, arouses a highly ambivalent response within the overtly Zionist Israeli Jewish Believing community. On the one hand, an individual is said to have “a personal walk with God”, who can ostensibly take her anywhere he pleases for his purposes, reference the strange callings of various prophets and the world travels of the early apostles. On the other hand, the general rule is amongst the interviewees that God is restoring the Jewish people to the land of Israel physically and spiritually, so whatever contradicts God’s divine movement is suspect, and must be framed as a temporary detour or a divinely-directed exception to the rule:

God preserved the people of Israel, scattered them in Diaspora, gathered them again and along the way began to restore the root and the identity of the gospel... I would say that it would be against most of the prophecies regarding the return of the exiles and the restoration of the people of Israel to send a Jew... in a different direction... I’m not saying that it’s impossible in exceptional cases... (Levi, Hebrew).

Despite the supposed “post-Zionist” era in Israel, Israeli Believers still interpret leaving Israel according to the Israeli cultural schema of *Yeridah*, which frames leaving as a physical, ideological and spiritual “descent” from the land, and the opposite of *Aliyah*, the immigrant’s “ascent” to Israel (meant to conjure up the ancient Jewish custom of ascent to Jerusalem on the three annual pilgrimage holidays). *Yeridah* evokes an emotive mixture of pain, loss, despair, anger and perhaps jealousy on the part of those left behind. Those that leave, while arousing sympathy, are thought to have failed in some way or chosen to escape to an easier, less spiritually rewarding existence, abandoning God’s promise on behalf of the material certainty of Egypt, and to some degree following in the footsteps of the spiritually wayward, hedonistic prodigal son who rejected his heritage and ran away from home:

You know what are they saying? God cannot keep us in the place of his choosing? Listen we’re all battling the flesh while we’re in this body. It’s a perpetual battle... Yeah, I’d say something is wrong... I feel bad for them. I feel bad for the body. We’ve lost... It’s the Westerners who have the privileges to make the choice. And I think it’s a weakness. They can opt for the easier... They’ve always got an escape hatch... The thing that keeps us here is the Lord... If you’re a Believer and you realize that to live anywhere else is to live in punishment and in denial of what God has made available and is doing today, then you can’t live with yourself... It’s Egypt... “Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return with singing unto Zion”, not run away saying, “I’m glad I’m delivered of this place.” (Zechariah & Nehama)

The Messianic Jewish community, a tiny, somewhat persecuted and marginalized minority in Israel, grieves over the loss of any members, particularly those long in the land. Of the sixty individuals interviewed for this research between 1999-2006, a full ten percent have since left

the country if not for good, then for an undefined long-term absence in the west. Even while a majority of Messianic Jews remain in the country, western presence and patronage continue to cast their shadow over indigenous stability and growth, and is therefore, despite its promise to be an unique site for the cultivation of personal capital, the west is regarded ambivalently by most Israeli Jewish Believers.

Arborescent metaphors

Returning to the land of promise becomes a goal paralleling the return to the God of Israel through Yeshua. The Israeli Messianic Jewish drive to dig beneath the surface of contemporary concepts of Jewishness in order to reclaim their Jewish heritage and the Jewish heritage of Yeshua, becomes inextricably linked to concepts of the land in the narratives. The narratives describe not only a return to the land, but a digging in toward indigeneity. There are numerous examples of decidedly arborescent metaphors used to discuss the characteristics of an ideal, deeply-rooted and fruitful Believing individual; a healthy Israeli Jewish body of Believers; and visions of the revival of the Jewish people through faith in Yeshua. In addition to the metaphors, arborescent and agri-cultural language is used generously in the Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular both spontaneously and in Scriptural references:

In America I lived in a hi-rise building on the... twelfth floor or something, with a lobby and all my needs were provided. And here [in Israel] I suddenly had to just work in a garden, and I didn't know why... [then] I realized that I needed to get my roots back here in the land (Naomi).

Moshe Dayan, former IDF commander and Israeli Minister of Defense, an avid archeologist, writes of “the impulse to excavate the earth – as if to be swallowed up by it” (Gurevitch & Aran 1994:201). Naomi, a native Israeli, returns to Israel after living abroad for years and feels an inexplicable urge to garden, which she comes to realize reflects her deep need to spiritually and tangibly reconnect to the land. The Israeli root schema (Ortner 1990) of being replanted in the land, is found throughout the narratives:

I would like to see more love of Zion, love of the motherland, among our youth. To take time and invest in planting trees in the soil because this is the land that was given to us... and hiking throughout the land, to know the land. “Go forth” on the lesser known paths of the land, know her ways and plant her saplings (Golan, Hebrew).

Ben David (1997) discusses the Zionist “hike”, the tiyul, in the land of Israel as a symbolic act legitimating and conflating national and social identities. Territory becomes synonymous with identity. Yet “knowing” the land is incomplete without the seminal act of seeding her fertile

soil (Doleve-Gandelman 1987), an act of faith which at once unites biblical Jewish and Zionist Israeli identities, symbolically insuring a future generation of Israeli Messianic Jews.

She will return to the path... [There have been] many children of Believing families here in the land, that have really distanced themselves from the faith here and went abroad, and returned, and returned to their faith... The apple doesn't fall far from the tree (Ovadia, Hebrew).

Although Messianic Jewish parents seek to root themselves in Zion and cultivate faith in their children, in the end, they believe that real faith involves the personal choice of the individual who must choose whether or not to follow “in the way of the Lord”. Ovadia speaks above of the daughter of an Israeli Believing family who has chosen to set aside her Messianic heritage for a time. He refers to a hope inherent in the arborescent metaphor, that one day this daughter, too, will return to the righteous route and her familial roots, to her land and her faith.

All Israeli Messianic Jews describe themselves and the local Messianic Jewish body as being or desiring to be “rooted” in Zion, yet there is a variety of understandings concerning what constitutes these roots, and exactly what this rootedness entails. Three “supernatural” arborescent visions discussed below, narrated by different Israeli Messianic Jews, explore three variations on the theme of “returning to the roots”, highlighting the heterogeneity of vision and its implication for faith expression within the Israeli Messianic Jewish community.

The immense root: Rami

In the dark pit of an Indian ashram, secular Israeli Rami has a vision of Yeshua saying: “Return to the God of your Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Through Yeshua, he feels a sense of connection to an immense root leading deep into the earth back to his forefathers, and knows that one day he will return to live in Israel. The immense root in his vision, situated in the land of Israel, leads directly back to the God of the Patriarchs, bypassing common era Diaspora rabbinic Judaism. Twenty years after the vision, Rami returns to this land and his people with a biblical Zionist and civil religious fervor coupled with his non-Jewish wife and a secular-style antinomian, anti-rabbinic approach to faith expression.

Routes versus roots: Shimon

In high school, American Jewish Shimon would have rather traded in his short frame, curly hair and big nose to be “in” like the tall blond, pug-nosed basketball players. When he finally

discovered Jesus, he thought that he could leave his Jewishness behind in the baptismal waters, and for some time after coming to faith, ignored his problematic identity. Years later, as the intermarried pastor of a small Gentile church in a quiet American town, he receives a vision which changes his perspective entirely and brings him back to the “Jewish roots” of his faith, his people and eventually to the land. In his vision, Shimon sees himself as a leader reaching one hand back to grasp the rootedness of Torah, tradition and Jewish culture while stretching his other hand forward to the freedom in Yeshua as Messiah and movement in the power of God’s Spirit. He understands that he must return to the Jewish roots of his faith, and to his people and tradition, and at the same time, that he is to lead his people forward into the new life of the Spirit through faith in the Messiah. The tension that he senses is between a Law-based rootedness and a freedom of movement in the Spirit:

How do you keep a tent pole up? It’s two dynamics that are working. I see on one end there’s a strong desire for me to maintain my identity as a Jew... yet on the other hand I have a calling to be a leader of my people, not a follower. I’m called to be the head, not the tail. I mean I’m called to bring in the walk and freedom and the prophetic truths and all that God is doing and moving... I’m not here to follow the synagogue, I’m here to lead the synagogue. (Shimon)

Shimon’s vision depicts a wrenching tension between returning to a Jewish identity and progressing in the Spirit. As he leads his spiritually hungry and needy congregants in his new Israeli congregation, Shimon admits that the dynamic balance often gives way to a focus on the spiritual freedom in the New Covenant at the expense of Torah observance or traditional praxis, revealing an additional guiding principle, his perception of an internal hierarchy in which “Messianic” is more important than “Jewish”:

As much as I am a Messianic Jew, I’m really a Jewish Messianic... The Messianic is more important than the Jewish end of it. I mean first of all I belong to Yeshua, second of all I’m a Jew. (Shimon)

The integrated tree: David

David, a veteran immigrant, “received” a vision of a tree with roots dug deep into the earth and branches stretching high into the heavens. The roots, providing stability and nourishment, are the faith of the biblical Patriarchs in its historical and cultural context, the land of Israel. The trunk, the central focus and integral force, is Yeshua. The branches, parallel to the roots in size, signify Jewish Believers moving in the wind/Spirit and bearing the fruit of the Spirit (see *Galatians* 5:22). Movement is lead by the Spirit, yet grounded and nourished by the roots. Thus, the individual Messianic Jew is free to move within the confines of the Law and

relationship with Yeshua. Yeshua, as the trunk, serves an *axis mundi*, connecting between heaven and earth, sacred and profane, the Place and the place (Gurevitch & Aran 1994b:136-139). According to David, Messianic Jewish faith and praxis should grow from the roots of the forefathers in the Torah, be centered in the Messiah, and bear the fruit of the Spirit. He describes his vision as a model centered on the Messiah, which integrates observance with freedom in the Spirit, and asks, “How can a tree bear good fruit if it is cut off from its roots?” David is the most actively and traditionally observant of the three interviewees, practicing in a charismatic-style Messianic Jewish congregation with his Jewish wife. Meanwhile, he continually searches for creative ways to keep his community’s faith expression fresh and relevant within an Israeli Jewish framework.

Interestingly, all three narratives utilize arborescent metaphors. Rami pictures an immense root, Shimon envisions reaching back to his roots, and David dreams of a full-blown tree, roots, trunk, branches and fruit. Rami and Shimon describe a returning to something situated in the past, something old, which they personally had previously left behind. In contrast, the elements in David’s vision, though cultivated through time, are all rooted and fruitfully integrated together in the present. His model reflects an idyllic balance. It is this balance, integration and rootedness, with Yeshua in the center, which David believes will bring about the spiritual restoration of Israel (Personal Conversation. 10 January 2005).

We see from the above three examples that the concept of “returning to Jewish roots”, or “having a Jewish vision”, can cover a wide range of doctrinal concepts and sociocultural practices. Rami’s a-historical jump emphasizes a primordial connection with the national Patriarchs alone, for example, leading to the practical cultivation of a strongly rooted national Israeli identity with a concomitant secular Zionist-style rejection of Diaspora Judaism, Torah and traditional observance. Rami’s roots are *national Israeli* roots. Shimon’s vision depicting terrible tension between the Law and the Spirit, when push comes to shove, admittedly gives way to the favoring of the “freedom in the Spirit” over observance. Shimon’s roots, inferiorly situated in a hierarchy of Messianic over Jewish, are *biblical and traditional Jewish* roots. David’s maintenance of this same polarized tension is pictured as striking an idyllic fruitful balance towards the restoration of the Jewish people through creative, Spirit-filled observance. David’s roots are *an integration of national Israeli and biblical/traditional Jewish* roots.

Each vision illustrates different perceptions of returning to God, the land and the Jewish people and culture through various arborescent metaphors. Each entails different practical

implications for the Messianic Jewish community in Israel. At the same time, these visions share a common goal of deeply-rooted faith and identity in the God, the land and the people of Israel.

The Christmas tree

Hadas' story below employs the arborescent metaphor of the Christmas tree. This tree differs from the three visions above because it does not address the nature and function of the Messianic Jewish body in the land. Hadas' tree is a Messianic Jewish interpretation of the change and continuity of Gentile missions in Israel over time. It shows the willingness of the mission to make room for indigenous Jewish Believers, their language and their national culture. Yet Hadas notes that despite flexibility and change, the mission has essentially remained the same institution, with the same foreign Gentile perspectives, made Israeli-friendly and translated into Hebrew:

In the early 1980's a lot of Israelis came to faith... So this traditional church opened its gates and was ready to absorb all of these confused Israelis, and set aside their [Christian denominationalism]... and to take on an Israeli flavor and songs in Hebrew. During the first year they still put out a Christmas tree during Christmas... and taught them to sing Christmas carols... But the following year there was a Christmas tree but not in a central place in the congregation. It was on the side... next to the Christian volunteers' guesthouse... What can one expect from Christians? Love for the land and excitement over Jews coming to faith in Yeshua. But these people had no connection with Judaism... They were after all missionaries in the land. (Hadas, Hebrew)

The first and most common contention against the mission, namely that it eradicates the Jewish identity of its "converts", has been partially resolved through the influence of Christian Zionism, which opines that the return of the Jews to Israel and the establishment of the State of Israel, as well as a wave of Jewish people coming to faith in Yeshua, are in accord with biblical prophecy. Jewish Believers are encouraged to maintain a Jewish national identity, which in Israel, has commonly come to be articulated as an Israeli national identity. Under the now dominant influence of Christian Zionism, missions to Israel no longer require the Jew to disassociate himself from his people. Because they are free to continue to associate themselves with their nation, the position of the Christian Zionist mission appears to grant Jewish Believing subjectivity, that is, the power to define and assign significance to their own identity. For many Jewish Believers, who often refer to themselves as "Israeli Messianics" or "Israeli Christians", this position is satisfactory.

The olive tree

For many Israeli Messianic Jews, “allowing” or even encouraging Jewish Believers, from a Christian Zionist perspective, to foster a national Jewish identity, is not enough, and leads to contention number two against the mission, the denial of the distinct spiritual identity of Jewish Believers, and three, the Gentile Church’s appropriation of spiritual authority, both of which we will examine through common Messianic Jewish interpretations of the following passage on the olive tree:

I say then, has God cast away his people? Certainly not!... Through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles... If their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?... If some of the branches were broken off, and you [the Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches... Remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you... They also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again... into their own olive tree... And so all Israel will be saved. (*Romans* 11:1-26)

This olive tree metaphor is a widely cited emic reference for the process of Israeli Messianic Jewish returning and (agri-)cultural restoration. According to a common Messianic Jewish interpretation of these verses, the majority of Jewish people have historically not believed in Yeshua, and at the same time, the common era has witnessed the ingrafting of Gentiles, the wild olive branches, into the kingdom of God, supported by the Jewish roots of faith, in order to provoke the wayward chosen people to jealousy. Yet Paul predicts here that one day all Jewish people will receive salvation, and be regrafted into their own olive tree, a development which will trigger a worldwide spiritual revival.

After the first few centuries of the common era, faith in Yeshua had become a phenomenon of the Gentiles, most of whom, Messianic Jews will argue, indeed forgot that their faith is supported by Jewish roots. In fact, many Christians have historically promoted Replacement Theology, which argues that under the New Covenant, God has permanently cast away his chosen nation and “replaced” or “superseded” them with a new spiritual chosen people, the Gentile Church. Any Jew who came to faith in Yeshua was required to renounce his Jewish affiliation and convert to Christianity, becoming a Gentile for all intents and purposes. Clearly, Jewish Believers were assigned no distinct spiritual calling, and should they claim to have such, would be considered either heretics, “Judaizers”, or at best, “spiritually proud”. There are some Jewish Believers in Israel that continue to hold to this position to this day, with the additional allowance for “Jewish” national (i.e. Israeli) identification. However, there are also

those that teach that God has given the Jewish people a distinct spiritual calling and role in his plan of salvation for mankind, which did not terminate with the coming of the Messiah. They view Gentile Christians who teach Jewish Believers otherwise as robbing them of their birthright and keeping them from prophetically taking up their spiritual calling before God.

Similarly, those Believers who agree with the classic Gentile Church position that there is no distinct spiritual calling or role for Jewish Believers, also have no problem with the concentration of spiritual authority in the western Church. However, some Messianic Jews believe that the regrafting of the natural olive branches will be accompanied by a rediscovery of the Jewish roots of the faith, and a concomitant shift of spiritual authority for the universal body of Believers from the west to the regrafted branches centered in Jerusalem, fulfilling the prophecy that “from Zion the law will go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (*Isaiah* 2:3b). This process of restoring the Jewish roots of spiritual identity, spiritual authority and apostolic emissaryship lies at the heart of the developing body of uniquely Messianic Jewish theological literature (Juster 1985, 1986; Liberman 1976; Shulam & LeCornu 1998, 2003).

Rather than hierarchy or replacement, according to common Messianic Jewish interpretations, the olive tree model illustrates an idyllic fruitful coexistence of Jews and Gentiles, each with their unique identities and callings, equal and united in the same faith. The Gentiles are to provoke the Jews to jealousy because of their genuine living faith, and the Jews, with their strong roots, are to disseminate the message of new life to the entire world, thus fulfilling Israel’s prophetic call that “In you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (*Genesis* 28:14). This prophecy is notably fulfilled only after Israel has fully resettled their land⁸¹.

In contrast with the image of the healthy Israeli Believing body as a restored olive tree, Hadas’ Christmas tree is a local Israeli tree uprooted and placed in a pot in the middle of a church, and later, on the side of a Christian compound. It symbolizes sociocultural disconnection from everything Jewish and Israeli, and a short-term vision regarding faith and faith expression. Short-term because the moment the tree is uprooted, no matter how gaily and lovingly dressed or centrally placed, it has begun the process of desiccation and long-term

⁸¹ This Israeli Messianic Jewish interpretation and usage of the olive tree metaphor is a source of tension between Israeli Messianic Jews and Arab Christians, who in many cases do not believe in a distinct spiritual calling or role for Jewish people once they have come to faith in Yeshua, and who also struggle to claim the olive tree as a symbol of Palestinian, not Jewish Israeli, indigeneity.

irrelevance. It is weak, unstable and will never again produce fruit. In addition, although most Israeli Messianic Jews do not seem opposed to celebrating the birth of the Messiah during a particular season, the holiday of Christmas itself is generally not celebrated by most Messianic Jews, who criticize its pagan Gentile “roots” as well as its contemporary western commodification. The Christmas tree is an allusion to the missionaries themselves and their work. Both festively array themselves in religious celebration, but have no connection with Jewish culture, and are by definition a rootless, short-term Gentile presence in the land.

Over time, the mission set its Christmas tree aside, and gave the local Believers the space to be Israeli nationals, that is, to speak Hebrew and continue to identify themselves as members of the Jewish nation. Jewish Believers, who lost their subjectivity in the shadow of the classic mission, were able to reclaim their Jewishness as a national identity through Christian Zionism. However, the reason why many Messianic Jews today remain wary of foreign “ministries” is simply because even their Christian Zionist affirmation of national Jewish identity fails to fully realize the putative right of Jewish Believers to an authentic self-definition, a spiritual Jewish identity, and the possibility for the eventual restoration of spiritual authority to Jerusalem.

The primacy of the land

The non-Jewish Believer... if they want to be blessed, they need to bless the land of Israel, first of all. Why? Because it is written, “I will bless them that bless you”⁸²... He said this to Abraham. And it also says in the New Covenant... “Do not forget your foundation.” (Uzi, Hebrew)

Some Israeli Believers are criticized by immigrants, Diaspora and native Messianic Jews alike for elevating the significance of the land over the people of Israel. In Uzi’s quote above, we see an example of a native Israeli Believer replacing the literal call in the Scriptural text to bless the *people* of Israel with a call to bless the *land* of Israel. The narrative sounds like a civil religious text, since Uzi’s interpretation of the “foundation” is not God, nor the people of Israel who introduced God, the Scriptures and Yeshua to the nations, but rather the promised *land*, the physical foundation on which Jews are to live.

⁸² Uzi’s quote is taken from *Genesis* 12 where God tells Abram to leave his country to the land which God will show him; Abram had only begun his journey to the land. The blessing in the text was literally directed to Abram and his descendants who would one day become a great nation, not to the land itself.

The rather subtle shift of Scriptural interpretation to emphasize the land over the people of Israel is often lost to the undiscerning ear which hears the reference to “Israel” and assumes interchangeability between the land and the people, and theological solidarity among Israeli Jewish Believers. However, two major positions actually exist in the narratives and observations, both utilizing *nearly* the same characteristic biblical Zionist idiom. The theological distinction becomes apparent in the second instance in which the emphasis upon the land of Israel is particularly useful: in substantiating a particular Jewish Believing argument regarding the lack of spiritual distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the Messiah, and against the necessity or efficacy of Jewish observance in Israel.

Among Jewish Believers who do not believe in a spiritual distinction between Jews and Gentiles, a distinct national identity, symbolized by the land, becomes the only characteristic distinguishing between Jewish Believers and Believers from the nations. The physical boundaries of the State of Israel symbolically demarcate the Jewish nation from any other nation, just as the Rio Grande marks the border between new Texanos and Mexicanos. In this Christian-friendly interpretation, the Israelis are like all other peoples with their own language and local cultural customs. The land is not different from any other land, except that God has placed a special blessing on the Holy Land where Yeshua and the prophets walked. Moreover, Torah or traditional ritual observance become commonly equated with sociocultural Diaspora Jewish practices which were and perhaps still are necessary to distinguish the Jewish people from the nations, but which become putatively obsolete once the people resettle in their own land and establish their own nation-state.

Physical presence in the land and service to the nation-state, in the military and the labor force through production and the paying of taxes, often function in the narratives as substitutionary offerings of Israeli Jewish Believers’ ongoing identification with and faithful allegiance to their people. After all, the goal of Israeli Believers is quite the opposite of that of Diaspora Jews; they wish to exhibit practices which demonstrate allegiance to their Jewish nation rather than set themselves apart from a Gentile host nation, or from the universal body of Messiah. According to this perspective, observant Messianic Jewish immigrants are to be pitied for their failure to successfully comprehend and integrate into Israeli society, and observant natives are viewed dubiously as weak Believers having succumbed to a “religious spirit” or even worse, fallen prey to heresy. Both are suspected of re-erecting the “middle wall of partition” (*Ephesians* 2:14). Thus, just as in secular Zionist tradition, according to this version of Israeli Jewish Messianism, the cult of nationalism is constructed as the polar opposite and successor

of Judaism, and indigenous Israeli civil religious observance supersedes “Diaspora” Torah observance⁸³ (Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983).

Richard, a Messianic Jewish immigrant, attempts to deconstruct what he calls this Israeli “myth” of the primacy of the land: It is not the land which makes one a Jew, but rather one lives in the land *because* one is a Jew. The land, and life in it, in and of themselves cannot be the sole source of Jewish national identity. The primary source of Jewish identity is the unique relationship of God to the Jewish people which has preserved them for nearly two millenia of Diaspora. In addition, a national Jewish identity which is land-based excludes the majority of Jews, and Jewish Believers, still living in Diaspora. Richard’s narrative also warns against abandoning the distinct spiritual relationship and calling of the Jewish people, since life in the land is not the full realization of the destiny of the Jewish people:

In Israel there’s sort of a myth, that somehow speaking Hebrew and living in the Land of Israel is enough. But I think what’s happening in the Messianic Movement in Israel is that we’re missing something really important, which is Israel as a land is the land that was given to the Jews. It’s not the other way around. You’re not Jewish because you live in Israel, you live in Israel because you’re Jewish. And I think that as Messianic Jews, a lot of the Israeli Messianic Jews make it too much of a secular nationalistic thing, which, of course, alienates all the other Jewish Believers in the world. Which I think is why there’s a schism between the Jewish Believers in Israel and the rest of the Jewish Believers in the world, is that their identity is, “We’re Israeli Believers.” They don’t say they’re Jewish Believers, and they don’t live a Jewish life, there’s no Jewish religion, there’s no connection to the religion. But the religion is what preserved us, that’s what kept us to this time as Jews, not the land of Israel. (Richard)

The common Israeli Believing position, criticized by Richard, offers a secular nationalist analysis of the sociocultural functions of the Jewish religion, as a mechanism which isolates and protects Jews from a foreign host culture, a mechanism which becomes not only irrelevant, but detrimental to the Zionist project of returning. However, the adoption of such

⁸³ In addition, the researcher has encountered many who forward this argument of the irrelevancy of observance in Israel, claiming, among other things, that 80% of Israelis are secular anyway, and would therefore be less likely to show interest in Yeshua should Messianic Jews become observant, since most Israelis supposedly look unfavorably upon Jewish observance:

When we want to maintain the identity of our people, what are we essentially speaking about? To keep the Jewish identity of the ultra-Orthodox who serve in the military or perhaps the ultra-Orthodox who do not serve in the military? Or to maintain the identity of the 80% of our people who are secular, and do not believe in God? (Kashtan qtd. in “This is the Covenant.” 2001).

In other words, Yeshua should not be associated with commandment observance, lest this scare away secular Israelis potentially interested in “the gospel”. However denying faith in God, on the other hand, is not promoted according to this view, despite the alleged atheism of those same 80% of Israelis. Furthermore, the origin of the widely quoted statistic above is unclear, since the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics’ latest study of 2006 shows that over 55% of Israeli Jews identify themselves as either traditional or religious (See the Central Bureau of Statistic’s 2006 report on their site: “Population demographics by religious self-definition, 2006.” 2007).

an analysis by Israeli Believers fails to address theological claims of the ongoing relevancy of observance among Messianic Jews as spiritual service to God, whose validity and applicability only increases with resettlement in the promised land.

Appadurai (1986) argues that places change through differing historically, economically and politically-informed social constructions. Indeed, our analysis reveals how a particular social construction of the Holy Land, is used to support particular theological positions which promote a national rather than spiritual identity of the Jewish people, the uniformity of Jews and Gentiles in the Messiah, and a view of Torah observance as passé cultural practice associated with Diaspora life. These theological positions have serious sociocultural and economic implications for relations between Messianic and non-Messianic Jews, Israeli and Diaspora Messianic Jews, and Jewish and Gentile Believers.

In summary, treating the land of Israel as the address for God's specific blessings upon Israel both makes the land accessible and marketable to all Believers, Jew and Gentile, as the Holy Land, and constructs the Jewish people as a culturally, but not spiritually, distinct nation like all other nations. While this position may garner favor among Gentile Christians, the secular nationalist emphasis on the land as the source of *national* distinction and Israeli Believers' common standing as a nation like all others in the united nations of Messiah, erects an apartheid wall between Israeli Believers and their Diaspora Messianic and non-Messianic Jewish traditional or observant brothers.

The “Messianic body” in the land

Routes are continually present in the Messianic Jewish vernacular, reflected in such concepts as “coming” to faith, one’s “walk” with God, the ongoing process in some circles of developing a practical, albeit informal and often personalized Messianic Jewish *halacha*, and emissary work in Israel and abroad. Yet the Israeli Messianic Jewish “returnee”, pressing on to “Zion”, as a pilgrim who never fully arrives at his ideal destination in this world (Bauman 1996:20), is at the same time digging in, excavating his inheritance, seeking to revive and restore a deeply-rooted Israeli Jewish indigeneity.

While Israeli Messianic Jews value their relationships with Believers from the nations and the Jewish Diaspora, the struggle is ongoing in many cases, to foster an independent or interdependent indigenous Israeli Believing body, in contrast to an historical dependency on foreign Christian missions with their accompanying foreign interests, means, and roots of faith. The word “independent” is a culturally loaded term for Israeli Jews, who continue to struggle for their own state sixty years after their declaration of independence. It seems that when used in the context of the local Believing community, “independent” is meant to emphasize the importance of cultural, and in some cases, spiritual, self-determination, rather than externally imposed agendas that have historically proven detrimental to the Jewish people. Students of post-colonialism can surely understand that rather than a symptom of racist exclusion or pride, as some may claim, in essence, this is a struggle for spiritual subjectivity, for the freedom of Israeli Messianic Jews to determine their own faith content and expression..

For some Messianic Jews, “Israelified” Gentile Christians who identify with Messianic Jews and the Jewish roots of their faith, should be granted the same influence over the development of the Israeli Messianic Jewish community as Israeli Messianic Jews. Others, who also see themselves in light of a seventeen centuries of Gentile Christian hegemony, may be more cautious in forming alliances with Gentile Christians and even “Gentilized” Jewish Believers, that is Jewish Believers raised in or highly influenced by the Gentile Church. This caution may be likened to a woman in labor or a nursing mother preferring the practical advice and support of an experienced natural mother, over the coaching and sympathetic counsel of a professional male nurse practitioner or an adoptive mother, however seasoned they might be.

These cautious Jewish Believers argue that today's Christian "ministries", as well as many Christian-influenced Jewish Believers, however personable and culture-friendly they have become, for most intents and purposes, remain the same foreign missions, staff and followers that they once were. There seem to be three main contentions against the mission. First, the classic mission "converts" the Jew into a Gentile Christian, that is, into a Gentile version of faith in Yeshua, with all of the Gentile cultural strings attached, at the same time that it forbids identification as a Jew. Second, the mission denies the Jew any distinct spiritual identity. He becomes like all other (Gentile) Christians, who are "one in Christ" (*Galatians* 3:28). Thirdly, the mission promotes western Gentile Christianity, or its particular denominational version, as the ultimate spiritual authority for the universal body of Believers. Whether or not individual Jewish Believers or organizations take clear stands on these issues, many continue to maintain ambivalent relations with the spectrum of Gentile Christians in the land.

Despite ambivalent relations with local Jewish Believers, church missions (or "ministries") continue to provide generous funding, sophisticated programming, training, and materials which the indigenous Believers have difficulty matching in scope and quality, and often wind up extensively importing and translating for local consumption, or imitating as a local model. Some foreign Christians have also developed professional niches in para-church support work such as children's educational frameworks and summer camps, music production, intercessory prayer, discipleship programs, outreach for victims of war and terror, ministries for people struggling with homosexuality or substance abuse, pro-life organizations, etc., often intended to complement indigenous Messianic Jewish congregations, rather than compete with them. Some indigenous Messianic Jewish ministries and congregations also man their activities with foreign Christian volunteers who are looking for an opportunity to serve God and/or the Jewish people in Israel.

Foreign church missions and missionaries which once dominated the local Believing community have gradually undergone transformations, becoming more culturally-sensitive and locally networked, more biblically Zionist and less openly adherent to Replacement Theology, generally adopting trappings of Israeliness and the local Messianic Jewish vernacular (for example, calling themselves "ministries" rather than "missions", and avoiding some loaded terms such as "conversion" or "crusade"), and mainly employing local Believers to represent their work in Israel.

For the purposes of this study, a missionary is defined as a foreign Gentile Christian who resides in Israel because they feel called to do so by God, whether or not they are associated with a “ministry”. As one Messianic Jewish leader said, “Everyone who is a Christian living in the land of Israel who doesn’t have citizenship, in some way, they are all missionaries, not officially, but practically they are.” (Levi). Many of the Gentile “missionaries” of today are long-term, buying homes, raising families in the land, and in some cases even intermarrying with Israeli Jewish Believers. In rare cases, Christians have been known to undergo orthodox rabbinic conversions either in Israel or abroad. Moreover, those Christians living long-term in the land, who have “gone native” in a variety of ways, do not refer to themselves as missionaries among local Believers, nor are they generally referred to as such. They are most often called “Messianic” or “Israeli Believers”, and some eventually receive permanent resident status, reinforcing their Israeliness. Numerous local and influential Gentile Christian families have lived in the land longer than many Messianic Jews who have arrived in more recent waves of immigration. In fact, some Gentile Christians in Israel appear to be more “Israeli”— that is, secular-style Zionist Israeli – in their mindset and sociocultural behavior, than many of the greenhorn Jewish immigrants in the Believing community.

Today the general trend of Israeli Jewish Believers is some degree of resistance against serving classic church missions in Israel, preferring rather to stake a place of their own in their land and among their people (Gedalof 2000), and attempting to selectively manage their ties with foreign Christians according to local Israeli Jewish visions and agendas. Yet, classic missions, that is missions which fit the stereotype of the clearly foreign colonialist entity, are more difficult to locate than ever. The distinction between who or what is the foreign “other”, and who is one’s bosom brother (or potential spouse), is quite nebulous, and often comes down to individual perceptions and relationships:

[The mission] has had a face lift... Call it Americanization in general of the world... but it’s not the Norwegian mission, and beside it the Finnish mission. (Yishai, Hebrew).

The “Israeliness” of contemporary Gentile Christians substantially blurs the lines between foreign and indigenous, Gentile and Jew, as does the 30% layperson (Kjær-Hansen & Skjott 1999:70-72)⁸⁴ and at least 70% leadership Jewish-Gentile intermarriage rate⁸⁵.

⁸⁴According to a loose phenomenological definition of who is a Jew: “We have considered a person who has immigrated to Israel under the Law of Return [whose stipulations only require at least one Jewish grandparent] and regards him/herself as Jewish to be Jewish – even though this person is not Jewish according to halakhah” (Kjær-Hansen & Skjott 1999:18).

In fact, despite what many Messianic Jews envision for the future, it is fair to say that at present, an “indigenous Messianic Jewish community” exists only on paper or in the minds of some community members, for in the field, one would perhaps best speak of a “Hebrew-affiliated Messianic community in Israel”. Hebrew-affiliated, because not all community members are viable Hebrew speakers, although most identify with the Hebrew-speaking communities more than the Arabic-speaking ones; Messianic because members agree on their belief in Yeshua as Messiah, but not in every case with unique Messianic Jewish theological positions; in Israel because not all are Israeli citizens. Some Believers who are physically present in Israel actually live in cultural ghettos, while some affiliates who live most of the year abroad are perhaps more ‘in Israel’, metaphysically speaking, than abroad. Jewish is the most problematic term of all, of course, and therefore could arguably be left out as an overused rubric. Certainly not all community members are Jewish; and not all who consider themselves Jews are considered so by rabbinic *halacha* or even by the state for the purposes of *Aliyah* or marriage; many Israeli Messianic Jews associate Jewish with rabbinic, and subsequently reject their Judaism; and some of those who are not Jewish identify more strongly with Jewish culture and faith expressions than those who are.

In light of our effort to tease apart the nebulous concept of indigeneity among Israeli Messianic Jews, it is worthwhile to mention the interesting case of charismatic⁸⁶ and non-charismatic congregations. A relatively large wave of “veteran” native Israeli Believers who came to faith in the 1980’s, found an Israeli Believing community composed of a handful of mostly mission-planted or mission-backed non-charismatic congregations. Charismatic expressions appeared later on the scene, mostly introduced by American Messianic Jewish immigrants in the mid-1990’s. Today, charismatic expression seems to arouse resistance in older “veteran” Israeli Believing circles who associate it with a broader phenomenon of American cultural colonialism, commonly characterized by Hollywood showmanship and commercialization among Believers. Ironically, therefore, the non-charismatic, more subdued

⁸⁵ The roughly 70% leadership intermarriage rate is based on the marital status of present leaders of the 38 Hebrew-speaking congregations in Israel listed in *Facts and Myths* (Kjær-Hansen & Skjott 1999). The researcher is lacking details on a handful of these leaders, but in all likelihood, would estimate that the percentage of Hebrew-speaking congregational leadership intermarriage approaches 75%.

⁸⁶ “Charismatic” in this work refers to a faith-style which emphasizes “moving in the Spirit” through gifts of prophecy, words of wisdom, healing and glossalia. It is characterized by a more demonstrative, emotional expression in worship, both in the music, which tends to be much more prosaic and contemporary than traditional liturgical worship, and in embodied practice, including the clapping of hands, jumping, dancing, yelling, etc. Some Believers distinguish between a more moderate charismatic-style of worship and doctrine and more extreme expressions, which they interpret as “showy” and overly-emotional, and disparagingly call “charismania”.

style (considered by some to be a puritanical Gentile church style) of the older mission-planted Israeli congregations has become widely interpreted as the more appropriate “Israeli-style” of faith expression, whereas charismatic expressions introduced by Messianic Jews rather than Gentile missions, “feel foreign” less appropriate for Israel to many native Israelis. However the energetic style and enthusiastic embodied expression of the charismatic movement seems particularly appealing to the youth, so charismatic music is entering through the back door of many congregations, in a burgeoning body of indigenous, charismatic-influenced youth music.

In addition to foreign Gentile Christian influences, Messianic Jews from abroad are also involved in Israeli Believing circles through funding, personal relationships, visiting teachers, imported materials and immigration. Many local Messianic Jews also believe that the word of God going forth from Jerusalem means that Jewish Believers are called not only to be the light of the nations, but at times to also send out emissaries on apostolic missions to the nations, in effect also building and strengthening Israeli relationships with Believers abroad.

The four major challenges noted in the research narratives to the development of an indigenously “rooted” Israeli Messianic Jewish community are the ubiquitous importing and translation of western Christian means, materials, theology and faith expressions for local consumption; the ongoing and overpowering presence of Gentile Christians; the devitalizing influences of foreign evangelism; and the potentially counterproductive relations of dependency fostered through foreign fundraising.

Foreign imports

According to Yishai, a second generation Israeli Jewish Believer, the mission once dictated very clearly defined spiritual and sociocultural identities and praxis for the Israeli Jewish Believer. He was no longer a Jew, and the Jewish people were no longer God's chosen people. However today, more and more Jewish Believers are asking questions and working out their own theology, faith praxis and sociocultural identities, and the old missionaries have even shifted from an entirely Gentile Christian-centered perspective, to one that at least takes into account the promises of God for the Jewish people:

I see much more willingness on the part of people to search. To dare to search. As opposed to what there used to be, which was all of the time religious compulsion from the outside. You need to do this, you need to be a certain way. It's unbelievable how much religious compulsion there was [from the mission]... For years and years [they taught] there is no more people of Israel, there is no more Jew. If you believe, then you must do away with the commandments of the Torah, in other words, you are forbidden [to keep them]... People really didn't understand the significance of the people of Israel... as Jews. They saw what God was about to do with the Jewish people as a confirmation and realization of the faith and prophecies of Yeshua for them. It was in their personal, private interest that what would happen to the people of Israel would happen. It wasn't for the people of Israel. (Yishai, Hebrew).

Rami sees himself as part of the new generation of Israeli Messianic Jews struggling to free themselves from foreign mission dependency and develop their own indigenous Israeli Jewish Believing expression. Rami believes that God wants to reveal himself in a unique way through the restoration of the Jewish people to their land and their God. He realizes that this spiritual revelation involves a sociocultural process which is at times painfully articulated through debate. However, while he is ready to take all local Israeli Jewish considerations into account, he doesn't view foreign concerns as "healthy" or helpful intervention in shaping the local faith expression. In addition to a clear criticism of the foreign mission supported elsewhere in his narrative, Rami implies that at times Diaspora Messianic Jewish considerations, because they lack Israeli indigeneity, are also perceived as an encroachment on local territory:

We are in a tremendous debate now... it's not only limited to Jewish, non-Jewish, traditional, non-traditional. It's what kind of spiritual is spiritual. Is Toronto⁸⁷ spiritual?... That's some of the debate that is going on and doing it under pressure of the outside all the time. I'm very much of the understanding that we need to develop by ourselves... Even though I'm an Israeli *sabra*⁸⁸, I see... every person that comes back here very much as an Israeli. And I'm willing, within the family, to go through a tremendous debate and whatever, but I'm fearful of what I call "foreign involvement." I don't see it as healthy. I feel that we should find the Lord ourselves here. (Rami)

⁸⁷ A reference to charismatic Christian faith expressions associated with gatherings held in Toronto, Canada, turning the city into a site of pilgrimage, reference and debate for Believers worldwide.

⁸⁸ A native-born Israeli.

Many Israeli Messianic Jews who espouse a vision of building an indigenous Israeli body of Hebrew-speaking Jewish Believers, are themselves at the same time importing, translating and using large amounts of literature, teaching, music, children's curricula, speakers, staff and volunteers from the Christian west. Jackie, below, complains that the imported materials are often culturally inappropriate, unsophisticated or insensitive, perpetuating a foreign dependency and cultural irrelevancy of the local body. She describes a seminar flown in from the United States which particularly incensed her:

Our congregation... in their attempt to try to feed the flock, come at it from a lot of Christian perspective because let's face it, the Christians have the best stuff. They've got the best books, the best seminars, the best teachings. Their stuff is very proven and they try to adapt it for Israelis and more times than not it doesn't work... A lot of these things are done by Americans with translation... [One particular seminar had] a crew of really very unsophisticated Americans who used a lot of games... Now the Israelis actually liked it. I think it aggravated more of the Americans who felt that it wasn't at all Israeli, but then we have a lot of people in our congregation who are not very sophisticated either, so it was somehow suitable... When I heard some of the things they did with the Israelis I was totally incensed and so were my friends... You have to give Israelis a little bit more credit for being independent thinkers... Now people in churches in North Carolina will do whatever the pastor says cause that's who they are, they're just naïve sheep. But us, we're *chutzpanim*⁸⁹... I don't feel like formulas work, I feel like Israelis resent that sort of thing, I don't think that's the Israeli mindset and I don't think that's how you want to win Israelis. This imported stuff that they're using, I think its our biggest weakness... It's a problem because the teaching the Israelis are getting here is not really coming out of their culture... I feel like the one thing we're supposed to identify with as a movement, anyway when I was in the States, is that we were having our own brand of expression, our own brand of music, our own brand of teaching, our own everything based on our culture, on our background... I don't think we need to be bringing imported stuff, which more often does not take into consideration how Israelis think, how Israelis live or the personality. (Jackie)

Jackie's narrative implies a hardened maturity and depth among Israelis born of the difficult life in the land, which she feels is not only lacking in the lively but culturally oblivious imported speakers and materials. She finds this lack of sensitivity and respect toward Israeli experience and culture deeply offensive, particularly on the part of unsophisticated provincial Gentile Americans⁹⁰. Reliance on these imports reflects and perpetuates a lack of healthy,

⁸⁹ People who have *chutzpah*, meaning gall or nerve.

⁹⁰ An additional challenge for North American immigrants is that the Jews tend to originate in large metropolitan areas, particularly on the Northern Atlantic and Pacific coasts, whereas many of the Christian materials and American Christian missionaries or supporters tend to come from middle America or the Southern "Bible Belt", often looked down upon by Northern urbanites as provincial, culturally backward, and particularly "goyische" regions of the country. Native Israelis often do not discern these intra-American cultural nuances, and seem at times to be much more enamored with Gentile American influences than American Messianic Jews. Some will eagerly welcome a variety of Gentile Christian influences while squarely rejecting the influence of American Messianic Judaism on the grounds that it is too "Jewish" or too "traditionally religious" for Israel. As a result, two rather culturally incompatible versions of the United States exist in the minds of Israeli Jewish Believers,

creative indigenous production and self-sufficiency, which she learned to associated with the Messianic Jewish movement in the United States.

In addition to literature and teaching styles and materials, the field of worship music is another site for the struggle toward indigeneity. Many Israeli Messianic Jews are pleased to see developments in Israeli Messianic Jewish worship music, particularly among young musicians, which seem to be indicative of a strong second and third generation of Israeli Believers, but they also complain that the changes are too gradual. Interviewees have commented on the low level of Hebrew and poetically impoverished language of the lyrics, particularly among youth and immigrant songwriters. Shuki describes his understanding of the historical process of worship song development over time, and concludes with his desire for uplifting, popular Israeli Believing music that he actually wants to listen to in his free-time at home and worship with in his congregation:

Most of the leaders in Israel came from countries abroad where there was no Messianic movement, thirty years ago or whatever⁹¹. They became Believers. They went to churches... They were Christians but they were Jews so they were the Hebrew Christians. That was the only thing that differentiated them. They didn't really have it together. They didn't know what they were. It took me years to figure this out. They sang hymns and so on. And then they came to Israel so they translated their hymns into Hebrew because they wanted to be Israeli Christians... And then we started singing our own music, at least original to Israel... I want something spiritual. I want something in Hebrew but what am I going to put on? "Shabbat shalom, Shabbat shalom"? It doesn't suit me. It just doesn't minister to my soul. I want stuff about today's issues and in today's kind of style and quality... I'd like it to be more indigenous sounding. Not every song, but much more regional kind of rhythms and feels and melody lines... I just wish that I could come to a congregation that is Israeli and it sounds Israeli too... Many of the songs are nice but the melody lines are very Western. And then other ones are translated, which forgive me, drives me bananas. Why not write our own, in Hebrew, with indigenous rhythms and indigenous lines?... When they do *klezmir*⁹², it drives me up the wall... Every time I came [to the congregation] the last few times, ten minutes after we got there... I just felt like what am I doing here? (Shuki)

Shuki often finds himself frustrated in his congregation by the present lack of relevant indigenous worship music. Western translated songs, hymns, melodies and rhythms; worn-out

taking cover under the same name – America. Those Israeli Jewish Believers whose primary connections with the United States are through Christians and Christian churches often think of America as the Bible Belt or rural middle America, Christian Bible colleges, mega-churches, fried chicken, bacon-lettuce-and-tomato sandwiches, "Focus on the Family" (an evangelical para-church organization promoting conservative Christian values through the media) and conservative values and politics; whereas for those raised as Jews in the States, many of whom eventually affiliated with the Messianic Jewish movement, America tends to conjure up for them large metropolises on the East and West Coasts or alternative communes, Jewish geography, bagels and Chinese restaurants, academic excellence, the arts and/or liberal politics.

⁹¹ I.e. in the 1960's and 1970's.

⁹² A traditional Ashkenazi Eastern European style of music based on the violin, clarinet and accordion.

Klezmir-style “umpchas”, or songs from “the basement of the Jewish Agency” can alienate Israelis and immigrants (who often intentionally left some of these things behind), who hunger for worship music that grows out of their own indigenous culture and experiences.

Foreign presence

[My congregation] is so big, and sooo not intimate... and there’s always all these foreigners there with earphones [for translation]. And it just seems like I’m never getting to know anyone... I’ve heard a lot of people say they wish it was smaller but I would like to be very strict on – no foreigners, none of these tourists who come. I almost feel like they’re coming to see how the Jews worship, to watch the miracle of the Jews worshipping the Jewish Messiah in Israel. They come and sit there with earphones – really! I think earphones should be for the new immigrants. (Shuki)

Shuki somewhat jokingly refers to escatological prophecies which speak of the nations coming up to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage holidays, bemoaning the thought of thousands of pilgrims flooding the tiny indigenous Israeli Messianic Jewish congregations. The Messianic reign from Jerusalem, supposed to be an idyllic period of peace on earth, due to this imagined crush of foreigners stifling indigenous growth, is instead comically portrayed as “hell”:

When the prophecies of the end times come true and all the nations come to Jerusalem then it’s going to be hell. We’ll never be our own congregation and free to grow up as Israeli. I mean to grow as an Israeli Messianic body... So tell them that okay now go get a life, come, there’s English congregations, go, bring your own speakers, if you want, I mean whatever... We have to grow as an independent body and be allowed to do it in freedom, in a natural-not under telescopes with people watching us because we’re “The Jewish believers in Israel.” (Shuki)

Shuki describes a sense of the incarceration of the native Believers under a somewhat voyeuristic “touristic gaze”. Perhaps equally as disturbing as this objectifying gaze, is the thought that these foreigners who crowd their congregations and national events, are oblivious of the indigenous development or significance of the Israeli Messianic Jewish body. Shuki’s complaint is repeated in many interviews and conversations with Israeli Messianic Jews. They enter their congregation or some other gathering of Believers and feel that they are in the minority as local Hebrew-speaking Jewish Believers. Instead, the seats are filled with mostly nameless faceless Gentile Christian missionaries, volunteers, students and tourists in the land for anywhere from a few days to years, often with no clear long-term commitments or status, and obscure affiliations. Many of them are single or divorced European or American women without dependents.

Ironically, to adapt Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's theorization of tourism, some of the missionaries coming to religiously and culturally "convert" indigenous Israeli Jews, are the same ones searching for spiritual and cultural authenticity among their ranks. The worship and everyday lives of indigenous Believers potentially offer a orientalist touristic spectacle for Christian missionary-pilgrims (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1992). It seems that local Believers sense the tension between the drive of the Christian as missionary to convert Israeli Jews into their foreign paradigm of faith, which paradoxically threatens to undermine the orientalist indigenous authenticity to which the Christian as pilgrim seeks to return. Furthermore, the objectifying touristic gaze is another mechanism by which western colonialistic missions influence and shape indigenous culture, most significantly by leading the native to grow accustomed to being on display, to behaving and seeing herself and her community as an object for admiration, exploration, colonialization and exploitation (Said 1978)⁹³.

Although local Believers claim that they have tried being friendly by striking up conversations, the Christian population is so fluid and disconnected from the rhythms of Israeli life, that for many it becomes difficult after a while to keep track of them. In the meantime, their bodies fill up the limited space available for the local Believers to establish intimate Hebrew-speaking Israeli Jewish communities.

Gibush, a notion of intimacy in the sense of social crystallization and cohesion of a group, is an emotionally and conceptually powerful cultural force in Israeli cultural semantics (Katriel 1991). *Gibush* in Israeli society has become a value in and of itself. It offers a metaphor of social order and suggests variously socially validated modes of action designed to promote *gibush*. In the case of Israeli Messianic Jews, it can serve as a metaphor for the ingathering of lost, scattered individuals to a state of well-integrated stability in a congregation. *Gibush* is about creating a sense of order and well-being for the individual through integration in a cohesive collective.

Among Israeli Messianic Jews, the use of Hebrew has become one of the strategies of action designed to foster *gibush* at the same time that it filters out non-indigenous persons or cultural

⁹³ Apropos the internalization of the objectifying touristic gaze, in one email newsletter, a couple in full-time "ministry" advertised their home to Christian tour groups wishing to have a Shabbat dinner in an Israeli home with "a home-cooked Sephardic Israeli meal". In general, Israeli Messianic Jewish e-mail newsletters are a fascinating read because they are generally marketed to pro-Messianic Gentile Christian audiences, and therefore require Israeli Jewish Believers to represent themselves to non-Jewish Believers or non-Israeli Messianic Jews in English. One wonders how this ongoing self-presentation to the other shapes the self-perception of local Believers and their work.

factors. The exclusive use of Hebrew in some Messianic Jewish group settings is an effectual drawing of a border, which can serve as a partitioning wall between indigenous Israelis and two other groups: Christian migrants (in Israel for long or short terms) and Messianic Jewish greenhorn immigrants. By setting up a border, Hebrew usage becomes a socializing agent spurring the newcomer to master the local idiom as a key to her integration and active participation in the local community. Shuki is particularly disturbed by earphone translations which artificially blur the border and bridge between outsider and insider in a culturally insufficient, invasive manner, creating only a superficial, mediated sense of cohesion and mutual understanding.

For Ami (below), translation during meetings, while allowing limited access to non-Hebrew speakers, promotes the cultural and emotional alienation of indigenous Believers. Shuki and Ami are interested in a sense of *gibush* which helps promote a “long-term stable social structure” in the face of the constant flow of pilgrimage, missions, *Aliyah* to and *Yeridah* from in the land. At the same time, *gibush* is a dynamic created in living social interaction, which, in line with Katriel’s gloss (1991:24) on Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas*, is “spontaneous, egalitarian, immediate, holistic” and intimate enough to handle the spectrum of Israeli social life from laughter to tears:

We’re not gonna provide (translation) because it will create something... that we don’t want. It will lose the intimacy... Like when I’m standing there and leading the worship and I throw up [sic] a joke by the *HaGashash HaChiver*⁹⁴, something that nobody will understand if you translate... because that’s how we are.. you know that’s the life of an Israeli. The life of an Israeli shouldn’t stop when he come to church. That’s where you speak in Hebrew and you make jokes... and you cry (Ami).

In the research interviews, in addition to an emphasis on Hebrew language usage, frequent, almost motto-like reference is made to the dutiful military service and honest tax-paying of Israeli Messianic Jews, to emphasize their good citizenship, loyalty and sacrifice for their country. Both military service and tax-paying seem to also serve a socializing, crystallizing function in in-group cultural semantics. In Ortner’s terms (1990), they serve as cultural schemas which establish and maintain the root metaphor of indigeneity, forming the basis for intimate *gibush* in the Israeli Believing community. Note the following quote by Joshua, a young man whose new congregation over time “successfully passed the test” of Israeli Messianic Jewish socialization according to a veteran Israeli Believing leader:

⁹⁴ A prolific theatrical comic trio responsible for coining innumerable phrases that have become integrated into the household parlance of modern Israel.

I remember he told my father, he said “Look I not going to judge you right now.” He said, “You only judge the fruit of the tree after six years. So after your congregation has been here for six years, then I will come and tell you what I think.” I saw a lot of wisdom in that... and he saw the fact that we all... went into the army and that we really were part of Israel. (Joshua)

These cultural schemas of Hebrew, army service and tax-paying, inform indigenous models of Believing community cohesion, which may explain some Israeli Believers’ sense of anomie in their congregation or other gatherings of Believers characterized by a strong foreign presence and lack of common cultural values or expressions. Importantly, none of these basic Messianic schemas exclude Gentiles that are willing to become the equivalent of Israelified “Ruths”. In fact, many interviewees defending cases of intermarriage, claim the strong indigenous identity of the Gentile spouse, based on their language acquisition, military service, civic integrity and Israeli-style informality as qualities which sanctify their formalized entrance into the community through matrimony.

Not surprisingly, these three schemas are a reversal of the Believing culture cultivated by the mission, of foreign language prayer and worship, pacifism or avoidance of military or para-military involvement (Nerel 1996, Hebrew), and dependency on foreign financial sources. As Yishai says, in an attempt to explain the sometimes extreme behavior of an earlier generation of Israeli Jewish Believers effecting this dramatic shift toward independence, “This is a generation that needed to set itself free from the mission”.

Foreign evangelism

Uzi, a native Israeli Believer employed by a large international mission active in Israel, describes one of the ways in which his organization attempts to make contact with local Israelis. They advertise free Hebrew-speaking tours of an old city in Israel, then take the local tourists on a route of church sites, acquainting indigenous Israeli Jews with an alternative, Christian geography of their land, while quoting Scriptures from the New Covenant. At the end of the tour, the guide explains that the tour is freely offered by Jewish Believers and asks if anyone might be interested in knowing more about their faith and receiving free materials.

While Uzi acknowledges that his organization views Israel as just another nation that needs to know Christ, he claims that their materials and means are high quality and can be easily adapted to the Israeli context. In fact, at the time of his interview, he was preparing to launch a series of nationwide seminars to train local Believers to utilize his organization’s evangelical

strategies and materials. Although the organization holds offices in two cities, they prefer having local congregations host the seminars to encourage indigenous Believers to take responsibility for the training and evangelistic campaigns.

In contrast with Uzi, Moshe is opposed in principle to mission-backed street evangelism. He claims that Yeshua should not be marketed on street corners, even though similar methods of outreach are practiced by other Jewish groups. Reminiscent of Ben Meir's testimony from the previous chapter, Moshe questions if missionaries really want to spread the "good news" of the Messiah, or whether they are really after converts to their particular Christian denominations:

I'm against missionary work here because missionaries... take Jews and want to make them into Baptists or Pentecostals or charismatics... And I'm against going out in the streets and making propaganda. Jesus is not a restaurant, and Jesus is not a product to be sold in the streets... [It's a] commercialization and a cheapening of the "good news". We have "a pearl of great price"⁹⁵, a diamond. We don't see the diamond salesman going out passing out flyers at every intersection... trying to sell diamonds. Why not? It's too precious to market it like that. Yeshua is not to be marketed. If the *Haredim*⁹⁶ now are marketing their rabbi at every intersection, or their God or their religion, it's their problem." (Moshe)

Throughout his interview, Yosi, a native Israeli Messianic Jew, contends that disconnected, foreign-funded Gentile Christian-backed missions will tend to serve as a magnet for people wanting to "work in ministry", to live off of foreign funds, travel abroad a lot, build connections with the west, etc., in short, become like the missionaries themselves. However, a socioculturally rooted witness of indigenous Israeli Jewish Believers truly ministering to the real needs of their neighbors, will produce an indigenous, socioculturally rooted Israeli Jewish faith expression:

All of these organizations that come to Israel it's like the IDF entering Lebanon to catch one terrorist... Because outreach has to be personal... It's the only way. I think it's a waste of money, because it doesn't ever achieve the goal. I know that whoever takes a flyer out of his mailbox goes straight to the garbage can. With Israelis it doesn't work... I am talking about those that send people to evangelize here, give them a credit card and say, "Evangelize!"... You need to understand the character of Israelis. With Israelis, money speaks. When they see a person who has a very high standard of living who doesn't work all day and speaks to them about God, they will never receive God... They will be jealous of someone, the way that he lives, but they won't ever connect that with God. They will see it as a show, a commodification of God... They don't play games and don't like hypocrisy... You can't come in a super-spiritual way. They won't know what you are talking about... That's why our lives are the best witness... But when you work

⁹⁵ A reference to a parable on the kingdom of God from *Matthew* 13:46.

⁹⁶ Ultra-orthodox Jews.

with an un-Believing person and he asks you about the word of God all the time and sees how you live and how you think and how you manage your business and interact with clients, that's an entirely different story. So to truly share your faith, you need to be with people, to live with them, to live among them... I think that they corrupt a lot of Believers by giving them the free opportunity to evangelize... Money is something that corrupts people, and they receive it for free and call that work... They become lazy... Of course they invest themselves... but the effect is so pathetic that it's just a shame... One of the most basic things is to work. Real work. (Yosi, Hebrew)

Interestingly, Yosi begins his detailed critique of missionary crusade-style evangelism with a metaphor of an absurdly prodigal military conquest that a thrifty, pragmatic Israeli would never even contemplate. The mission force, technically well-trained and well-armed, invades an entire foreign country, targeting one wily indigenous rebel. The extensive flyer blitzes, free materials campaigns and extravagant buffets only succeed in drawing the un-Believing Israeli out of reverence for their money, power and juicy steaks, the same means by which they simultaneously corrupt their local Believing grunts. Yosi's imagery, even more than the generalized details of the narrative, imply his perception of missionary activity as violent and invasive acts of western colonialism. Instead, himself an independent business man, Yosi uses the language of commerce to reflect naturally reciprocal relationships. For both Moshe and Yosi, the commodification of God and hidden colonialist agendas are dirty business, on the one hand, while respectable, open-book relations and tangible reciprocity are the Israeli ideal. Both view their faith as a precious treasure, requiring hard work and long-term investment, and are highly suspicious of western promises of quick rewards with little investment.

Yosi's analysis of missionary evangelism, whether by foreign missionaries or their local Believing employees, conscripts classic Romantic and socialist analyses commonly used by Zionists in their analyses of the "Jewish problem". For example, Zionist writer Ber Dov Borochoff (Isseroff, 8 September 2007) argued one hundred years ago that Diaspora Jewish economics are built almost exclusively on labor severed from the soil, describing them in Yiddish as *Luftgescheft*, meaning "air business", a business based on nothing substantial. A *Luftmensch* is a person who makes his living from nothing and is tied to nothing. Similarly, A.D. Gordon, Zionist philosopher and pioneer, influenced by Tolstoyan ideas and the Russian *Narodniki*, insisted that only through an intimate link with nature can the Jewish people be redeemed (Doleve-Gandelman 1987:261). Although Yosi's language is void of Yiddish expressions, peppered instead with the Arabicized Israeli street slang of his generation of *sabras*, the same concept of pragmatic production rooted in Israeli soil persists as the arborescent root schema of Israeli Jewish redemption.

In light of this grounded Israeli vision of Jewish redemption, note the dangers of financial patronage, the humiliating objectification of the native and the ever-present threat of renewed Diaspora likely to undermine the indigenous work, materialized in Yishai's narrative below. Yishai describes how the mission can cut off the indigenous development of promising young Israeli Jewish Believers, uproot them and lead them into *Luftgeschäft*, which eventually destroys them and the fruit of their labor, but makes good business for the Gentile mission in the short-term:

This is a man who came to faith... but they took him for a ride... They publicized him as the personal guard of [a leading Israeli public figure], who came to faith... He became a well-known religious leader in the United States in conferences... He left the land – of course, that's obvious... He said, "What has become of me? I am a rag of a man"... He lost all of his children and grandchildren. Not one is a Believer. Not one is in the faith. They hate it; they don't want to hear it... Because he says it was like selling a commodity, selling products. They prefer other products, that's how he put it... The man was broken... I know that [an Israeli Messianic Jewish leader] warned not only him but the missions [that employed him], "You take from here our best youth, instead of letting them grow, put down roots. Even the most foolish farmer knows when he plants a tree, this is what he does. He waters it for six years until it brings forth fruit." It's a business... I am repulsed by these things. I think that a man needs a profession. (Yishai, Hebrew)

Yishai implies that the American mission not only failed to understand the Israeli Believers and their indigenous enterprise, by appropriating the first fruits of spiritual revival in Israel, but also displayed a deep lack of respect and long-term concern for them. The dirty business of mission evangelism conjures up the apparition of Hadas' Christmas tree, a poor imitation of the Messianic *sabra* ideal, rootless, ungrounded, barren, cut off from its peers, and laden with commercially mass-produced adornments, carefully contained then cast aside in the courtyard of the Gentiles. The ideal alternative, articulated in Yishai's story, is to invest in planting and watering these youth in their own land, with the goal of long-term growth and fruitfulness, like a good farmer cultivating a tree.

Foreign fundraising

The raising and distribution of funds through religious and other non-profit organizations is a common activity in Israel today. For centuries, Jews in *Eretz Yisrael*⁹⁷ have traveled abroad to garner support for Jewish *kolels*⁹⁸ in the land, and the tradition continues. The pre-state Jewish *Yishuv* sent their emissaries, (like Meir Shalev's Pesya Tsirkin, below) to raise funds for agricultural communes, arms and eventually to finance the infrastructure of the fledgling new

⁹⁷ The land of Israel. The term is used to refer to the land without reference to the Jewish state which was only established in 1948.

⁹⁸ Religiously affiliated communities.

state. To this day, national and local government representatives work hard to “inspire” contributions from Jewish and Gentile individuals, communities and governments abroad. The Jewish Agency is, essentially, one large institutionalized consciousness and fund-raising organization. In Israel, non-profit services, organizations and academic institutes also operate on local and foreign voluntary contributions, as do missionaries and churches for the most part.

Nonetheless, Zionist ideology has always pushed for indigenous, subsistent production, and distained foreign support and intervention, no matter how essential it has proven to be to the local work. Note a passage from Shalev’s novel (2004:79-81) addressing the conflict between indigenous work and fundraising abroad commonly perceived by Israelis:

Mandolin met Pesya at some conference where she gave an impassioned speech on the subject of mutual aid funds... They were married – yet it soon dawned on her that life in the village lacked the emotional rewards of a career in the Movement, with its sense of mission, its joys of travel, and the polished intellects and shoes of its orators, bursars, and platform drafters... Pesya Tsirkin quickly scaled the heights of public office and soon was in charge of budgets and bureaus herself... After Pesya went to London on Movement business, she returned to the village cloaked in exotic perfumes that made the barnyard animals sneeze and stagger... Tsirkin, whose most ingrained beliefs were offended by the scent of her... found in her suitcase still more perfume, a pair of high-heeled shoes, and a black dress... “You bought all this crap with Movement money,” he accused her, shaking with anger... Forty years later Pesya was awarded the Labour Prize... [It was written] that Comrade Tsirkin’s whole life was “devoted to her society and people.”

Shalev’s character, Pesya, described above as a highly placed Zionist Movement official, builds outstanding ties with Diaspora Jews who give generously to the indigenous work, on the one hand. On the other hand, she herself spends most of her time abroad or among foreigners, speaking their languages, living to some degree according to their standard of life (illustrated in the contrast between her expensive European perfume and black stilettos with the stony dirt paths and the aroma of manure in the pioneering farm village), and producing nothing of her own (apart from one son that she leaves behind in the village during her travels, which wins her the role of “bad”, unnatural mother who markets her children in contrast with the “good” mother(land), who sustains and nurtures them). Because she herself does not embody indigenous Zionism by working the land (which she could not possibly do while filling her vital bridging role), she is held in suspicion and eventually rejected by her husband, who becomes disgusted with her foreign cultural consumption and imports which he interprets as betrayal of the Zionist cause, the very cause for which she receives honorary recognition for outstanding devotion. Shalev chooses to maintain the dialectic tension by

writing Pesya into a rented room of her own in Tel Aviv where she devotes herself to fundraising work abroad, while her husband invests himself entirely in the redemption of the fields.

Another phenomenon, dating back to the Jewish *shtetl*⁹⁹ in Europe, is that of the *schnorrer* (beggar). According to the personal diary account of Moshe Emmanuel Ben Meir concerning the body of Believers in the pre-state *Yishuv*, an unhealthy relationship of mutual exploitation took place between the various missions and the Jewish Believers, in which the missions essentially bought the attendance of the Jews to justify their continued presence in the land, while the Jewish Believers learned to manipulate their patrons but were nonetheless financially dependent on them. Although Ben Meir does not describe Jews becoming Believers in response to financial support offered by missions, according to an accusation commonly used against Jewish “converts”, this appears not to be far from the truth, since at least denominational allegiances were allegedly “bought” with money:

Because of their stand for the Lord Yeshua the majority of them were unemployed and in serious economic straits, especially those that had families for whom they had to provide. Since missions generally have funds for the purposes of relief to help needy people, the needy Jewish Believers learned in time to depend on the financial gifts offered to them by the missions. To get those gifts it was advisable to attend those meetings. So our brethren developed the art of attending the respective meetings of each mission. Thus the money the missions distributed had two evils attached to it. On one hand, the relief money entrusted to the mission to help the needy was used to bribe the recipients to attend the meetings and so provide the mission with an audience and with Jews they could introduce to visitors from home as “our converts”. On the other hand, it made the Jewish Believers depend on the missions’ dole, which turned them into practical *schnorrers* [beggars]. Rabbi Jacobs and I desired to put a stop to all this if possible by founding a Messianic assembly in which Jewish Believers could meet and unite and help one another as free persons. (Ben Meir, in publication).

Elsewhere in his diary, Ben Meir describes Christmas packages distributed to local Jewish Believers by these same missions, large packages for regular attendees, and smaller ones for occasional visitors (In publication:110). The unhealthy relations that developed between the two groups served as a major impetus for the Jewish Believers to work towards establishing Messianic Jewish congregations independent of foreign missionary connections.

Contemporary Israeli Messianic Jews find themselves somewhere in between all this capital flowing into the land from abroad, and between the haves and the have-nots. Some Jewish Believers are employed by classic missions, others by Christian aid organizations, Christian

⁹⁹ Jewish villages in Eastern Europe.

study centers or training ministries. Some work as evangelists, teachers or spiritual leaders, and others as translators, administrative or maintenance staff for these foreign bodies. Many Messianic Jews have established their own ministry organizations, attempting to operate independently of foreign agendas and influences. There are also plenty of laypersons, Israeli Believers who work in the local economy, ranging from unskilled workers to high-ranking professionals.

The financial support of the broad range of Israeli Messianic Jewish activities within the community is managed in ways rather well-known to community members. Many members hold to an ideal of supporting congregational leadership through the tithes and gifts of congregants, but few congregations seem to successfully subsist in this manner. Para-congregational organizations receive only a fraction of their support from local congregations or individuals.

Local missionaries – Gentiles employed by foreign Christian missions – periodically visit their supporters to teach and report on their successes. In between visits, supporters must content themselves with periodic reports and updates detailing progress and the fruit of labor “in the field”. Missions use these reports abroad, now often sent as regular emails, to encourage and maintain voluntary contributions. Similar mechanisms exist among Messianic Jews employed by Christian missions¹⁰⁰ as well as those who have established independent Jewish Believing ministries, in order to maintain connection with and encourage the support of their foreign contributors. Most often the Jewish Believing reports take the form of a combination news¹⁰¹ and prayer letter, informing the supporter of the inside scoop on Israeli news, local Messianic Jewish and personal developments, and asking for prayer and financial involvement in these matters. Some “ministries” also host periodic combination conference/prayer tours for their supporters, serving as both a spiritual resource center and guide to the holy land, while encouraging the nations to pray for and financially support Israel and Israeli Messianic Jewish “spiritual revival”.

Like the early Zionists described above, Israeli Messianic Jewish laypeople often display ambivalence toward such support-raising activities, since on the one hand, many non-profit

¹⁰⁰ Many of whom reject the label “missionary” when referring to themselves.

¹⁰¹ Some Christian and Messianic “ministries” have even found a niche for themselves as professional or semi-professional news services providing “biblical” and “objective” reporting and editorials on Israel and the Middle East.

activities would cease entirely without the foreign support, but on the other, there is a tendency of the supporters, particularly those in media-flooded America, to want to hear more and more exciting stories, and particularly, to reports of large numbers of people being “saved”, in order to maintain their support. Consequently, local workers find themselves under ever-intensifying pressure to produce and perhaps to exaggerate a little in their descriptions or interpretations when the fruit of their labor is not easily discernable:

Sometimes there is a problem with American Jews that come [to Israel]... They bring the American mentality to Israel and want to impose it on Israeliness, on the local congregations, and it creates problems. The Americans are used to everything on a grand scale, bombastic, enthusiastic, Hollywood excitement... and it just doesn't work. They want to forcibly import these things and they don't understand anything else. It takes many years to comprehend that the Israeli mindset is a different mindset. And it's all of these publications, fundraising letters, all on grand scale. I've seen it. And it leads to inaccurate reporting in order to raise funds... Because the Americans, in order to give money, have to become excited, so they must report something really big, otherwise they don't give money, because the American threshold for excitement has been raised.” (Yinon, Hebrew)

In contrast, Yishai describes an Israeli leader who refused to play by the rules of the mission one generation earlier:

They want information, reports... There were exciting things, but [a particular leader] did not write them. He didn't want to expose specific people in any way. It wasn't easy... They didn't like his reports because you know what they wanted – numbers. (Yishai, Hebrew)

The greater the reported success, the more invitations to travel abroad, constantly pressing the local leadership to temporarily uproot and travel, often at key times, such as the Jewish holidays, in order to lead holiday services or speak in congregations abroad rather than investing that time in their local community. Some leaders with whom the researcher spoke travel abroad and within Israel for conferences and speaking engagements on average up to one third of the year. Perhaps some travel more. However, if the travel comes at key times, such as holidays or weekends during the local congregational meetings, or during times of sudden local or national crises, the absence of leadership can be felt more strongly than a technical tally of travel days might elude.

That's a problem with a lot of our Messianic congregations here... that the leadership is often out of the country six to nine months out of the year... If you're going to be the head of a congregation you need to be here, you have to find some way to support yourself, work in a regular job, support your family. You don't need support from German Christians, you need to be here with your flock. If you're going to be the head of a congregation, then be here. If you're going to be a traveling fundraiser, wonderful, God bless you, but don't be a congregational leader. You can't do both well... (Leah).

The traveling Israeli leader-fundraiser must effectively bridge two or more communities, balancing both indigenous and Diaspora perspectives and idioms at all times. In the Israeli Messianic Jewish community, as in Shalev's novel, the question of how much indigenous bodies should adapt or translate themselves to the standards of western contributors, an act which can consume significant percentages of manpower and funds designated for indigenous work, remains an ongoing dilemma.

Standard of living

Fundraising is perceived as problematic among Israeli Believers not only because it requires frequent travel abroad, perceived by many as the leaders' temporary abandonment of their soldiers engaged in battle, but also because of the lack of general accountability to the local community. A Jewish Believer living off of the problematic local Israeli economy, is rather transparent. If he drives around in a Mercedes and lives in a beautiful villa, he is either a successful professional, a fortunate heir or a crook. But the resources of the missionary or Israeli Jewish Believer in full-time ministry are unknown by anyone but his supervisory board, if he has such a mechanism of accountability, and therefore unusual signs of luxury are instinctively held in suspicion by many local Believers. How can he justify such a high standard of living on the contributions of trusting Believers? Is he paying local taxes? What is he using his funds to achieve, other than supporting his extravagant lifestyle, and how do his actions compare with his published reports, etc. Not only can a relatively luxurious lifestyle impugn a Believer in ministry, his lifestyle is often considered a "bad witness", that is, detrimental to the message of Yeshua in Israel. Note Yosi's thoughts on how a high standard of living maintained by Believers in ministry may be perceived by local non-Believing Israelis:

First of all, it is not right before God. Because you are essentially using money that people contribute themselves. Think about it. There are people that don't have money and they give. And you go now and live according to that standard of living?... It comes from an American mentality, because there there isn't such a problem. Here in Israel people put two and two together. They understand that modesty is something from God... A moral life, that's something from God. Non-Believers understand that. It's part of the tradition here. So no one will buy the fairytale that the man that lives in that big beautiful house and drives a fancy car, and is dressed like a groom, is a man of God. Despite the fact that we know that this can be the case. But the witness is not correct, it doesn't reflect the gospel. (Yosi, Hebrew)

Standard of living is not only measured in Israel materially and in terms of free time for non-profit activities. There is also an expectation, rooted in early Zionist *sabra* culture, of not only *kibbutz bagaluyot*, but *miẕug bagaluyot*. Whereas the first refers to the ingathering of the exiles,

the second refers to a melting pot concept of the creation of a new Hebrew culture born of life in Israel. Apart from the retrospectively problematic assumption that the exiles must sacrifice elements of their cultures for the creation of one indigenous amalgamation, there is an inherent expectation, not entirely absent in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community today, that the immigrant submit himself to a process of acculturation, facilitated in no small part by working in the local economy. Not only was labor essential to the socialist Zionist concept of redemption, in practice, it forced the immigrant to eke out his living from the local economy, which inevitably either broke him or very practically transformed him into a local, and in the eyes of the Jewish settlement, granted him the “right” in turn to transform the local culture and economy, hence the Zionist phrase *livnot u’libananot* (to build and be built).

Although in many Israeli Messianic Jewish circles today, just as in the wider Israeli society, this collectivist approach has given way to a more individualistic model and the adoption of western consumer culture, elements of Zionist ideology persist buttressed by religious doctrine. Leaders in particular are “morally” expected to lead by example through this transformative sacrifice of laboring in the land. Foreign support, while acceptable according to western consumerist and certainly western missionary paradigms, nonetheless interferes with the transformation of the spiritual leader into a relevant and worthy player in the local sphere.

For example, Daniella is concerned with how raising funds abroad distorts the perspective of indigenous leaders when it comes to the financial challenges of their congregants. In contrast with the degree of community involvement encouraged by foreign-economy supported individuals, Daniella’s difficult economic situation shapes much of her free-time, exhausts her physically and emotionally and greatly limits her participation in the Believing community. She describes how her congregational leader’s mouth gaped open when he heard how little she earns as a full-time professional:

Among Believers there is this pressure of “Go evangelize.” And the person standing there, what does he care? He receives tons of money for free every month from the “open bar” of America. He doesn’t have to worry. He doesn’t go home and think, “Wow, they took off another 4% from my monthly income because Bibi Netanyahu [then Israeli Minister of Finance] decided so, and now I barely finish the month”... This is perhaps one of the things that I really admire about [my congregational leaders]... I don’t feel that they live luxuriously. But on the other hand, they do live in another world. Who are we fooling?... At some point we talked about salaries and I told [my congregational leader] how much a [particular professional] earns and he was in total shock. I said to him, “Tell me, what did you think? How much do you think that people earn?” (Daniella, Hebrew)

Messianic Jewish immigrants have been heard to complain about *sabra* Believers turning them a cold shoulder in their early years in the country. Yet *sabras* describe the endless train of people moving in and out of Israel, and often explain that they wait to see whether the newcomers are indeed “serious” about remaining in the country. Only after passing some informal trial period will many, especially older immigrants, be gradually received into more inner local circles. This test seems primarily to be one of socio-linguistic and socio-economic viability.

Patronage and the western gaze

The guests Pesya brought were the Americans who had donated the money for buying the village lands, and who now wanted to see how they had helped make the wilderness blossom. The three Ford limousines they came in were the first American automobiles we had seen. The wealthy Jews spent hours walking through the farmyards, smiling and taking pictures. “Their clothes stank of sybaritism, and their smooth skins masked the hideous secrets of wealth. But what could we do? The money was theirs.” (Shalev 2004:81)

A major concern for Israeli Jewish Believers is that their dependency on foreign consumption/support will give their supporters a say in what goes on in their indigenous work, or at best, leave them deeply indebted to foreigners who likely do not live by the same principles fostered in the land. There is concern that payback will be required – ranging anywhere from theological obeisance, to hosting periodic entourages of Christian Zionists, to requisite visits abroad.

The very inequality of the fundraiser/supporter relationship can lend itself to the patronization and objectification of native Believers, or even to the erasure of Jewish vision, presence and production, reminiscent of Shalev’s (2002) literary portrayal of the German Templar map which excluded any sign of Jewish life in Israel. For example, an “over”-emphasis on Scriptures which speak of the land, or interpretations which replace the people with the land, as discussed in the above section entitled “The primacy of the land,” seems particularly common in fundraising for Israeli outreach. The interviewee, Uzi, a very successful fundraiser, frequently quotes such Scriptures as “If I forget thee Oh Jerusalem...” (*Psalms* 137:5). Perhaps rather than ply potential contributors with Scriptures about reaching all of the Jewish people, which might lead them to send funds to more international organizations trying to reach Jews worldwide, the emphasis on the land of Israel encourages contributions to specific works going on within the borders of Israel.

Often foreign support is accompanied by foreign missionary workers who come to “serve” the local body, and wind up taking on strong leadership roles within the community, shaping the local faith and its expression. Local Believers often complain that it is the dependence of Israeli Jewish Believers on foreign funds that opens the door for unwelcome foreign intervention:

In our congregation there isn't much influence of foreigners anymore. In the world of Believers I really don't like what is happening because I think that the Jewish Believers are dependent on them, on their contributions; they even dictate what to do... all of the foreigners and even... all of the contributors from abroad that so greatly influence the congregations in the land. I think that in our congregation we don't have that. At least I don't want to believe that we do... [The congregation operates] mostly off of the tithe, and I think that [the leader] travels once a year to [a European country]. I don't know if it is to raise money or to speak... He told me himself a little while ago, that thank God the congregation is prospering and all of the [additional activities] are funded by the tithes of the congregants. I think that's how it should be. We are our own body. We don't need to be dependent on anyone, and we certainly don't need some foreigner who comes to the land to influence our decisions. We need to be authentic.” (Osnat, Hebrew)

In commenting on an unusually sedentary villager in a village of migrant workers, Clifford writes, “Indeed, his conscious choice not to travel – in a context of restlessness driven by Western institutions and seductive symbols of power – may be a form of resistance, not limitation, a particular worldliness rather than a narrow localism” (Clifford 1997:5). It seems that Clifford's observation holds true for certain leaders and laypeople in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community. Rather than attributed a “narrow localism”, those who withstand the draw of resources and power associated with travel (particularly to or for supporters in the west) are held in rather high esteem by many local Messianic Jews, due to their commitment to an ideologically-driven vision of indigenous life and work.

Another equally if not more serious consideration for a community striving for indigeneity and locally driven community agendas, is the effect that continual self-representation for the outsiders' gaze (whether Diaspora Messianic Jew or foreign Christian) has on the self and communal perceptions of local leaders. In other words, does the community leadership become accustomed to the slick packaging and marketing of themselves as an exported commodity, and how does this effect their indigenous vision and praxis?

One new immigrant commented recently that she is appalled by a local congregation's offer to provide Christian pilgrims with an authentic “Israel experience”. The congregation periodically

organizes an evening of Hebrew worship songs, then sells a variety of Israel-oriented Christian products after the performance. The immigrant is shocked by the commercialization of Israeli Messianic life, and the willingness to put local Believers and their worship on display as in a performance of local folklore for curious Christian pilgrim-tourists.

Some Israeli Jewish Believers like Yishai¹⁰² and Shuki¹⁰³ are asking: Is the local body truly free to operate indigenously, or are they subdued into a colonial dependency through the ever-present gaze of their western consumer/supporters¹⁰⁴, or caught in a cycle of ever-increasing consumer demands for religious products and performance? Where is the line between fruitful dialogue and exploitative consumerism?

Indeed, some observed and interviewed Israeli Messianic Jews who work in “full-time ministry”, travel for months each year, and write periodic newsletters, among other things, to raise monies, seem to have developed a characteristic commercialized discourse of their own. In this consumer-oriented discourse, each experience, whether personal or communal, is framed as potential newsletter content for their ever-present audience, even when they are speaking about mundane experiences with fellow indigenous Believers. Exposing and packaging themselves and the ones around them becomes an integral part of their life, perhaps much in the same way that people today are becoming used to life as a constant performance, with the proliferation of “reality” television and internet blogging.

Manifest destiny versus the steady conquest of Canaan

In order to preserve the theological and practical independence of his congregation, Moshe prefers to externally raise funds only for para-congregational activities such as the publishing of teaching materials mostly for foreign consumption, through a separate non-profit organization, but runs his local congregation on a budget supplied by the tithes and offerings of its members:

The local congregation has no raising of support. It's a self-supporting local community of Jews that believe in Yeshua... [Our] research institute has to raise support, and our position is we'll take money from anyone who gives it freely without any strings attached, as a gift... The congregation, in their charter, in their incorporation papers has decided that they don't want that, they don't need it... Because they don't want to be connected to any mission or any Protestant church or any church at all, period... They want to do

¹⁰² See Chapter eight, the section entitled “Foreign evangelism”.

¹⁰³ See Chapter eight, the section entitled “Foreign presence”.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter nine, the section entitled “From Nicaea to Ikea? A non-discussion of heresy and authority” for an example of how opponents of the Netanya conference proceedings express concern that western money might be a major underlying factor of the attempt to canonize a religious creed.

only what they themselves can do... They say, "The owner of the hundred dollar bill is the one who owns the consensus," (בעל המאה בעל דעה) and so, because we want to keep our theological freedom, because we want to live within our means, which are very meager, we've chosen to take this route... [It's] a Western myth, an American myth, that the more money you have, the more you can accomplish. The people who have accomplished most in this country were people who were alone, who fought alone, and who had no money at all. The heritage of Moshe Emmanuel Ben Meir who was a post office clerk most of his life, has accomplished more for the body of the Messiah, the Jewish Believers in Israel, than any of the rich missionaries who lived in expensive villas. (Moshe)

Moshe's position also addresses the widely held perception of American Believers, who are said to invest large sums of money in expectation of large returns. His congregation wants to make their impact according to their indigenous means, humbly and steadily, like the faithful post office clerk. His vision conjures up images of the earthy modesty of Shalev's Tsirkin, the Zionist pioneer-settler, a modesty driven not by provinciality, but rather by a fierce vision of indigeneity for which he is willing to lay down the popular American-inspired cultural schema of manifest destiny in favor of the slow but steady conquest of Canaan.

Israeli Jewish Believers are still in the process of defining and creating their own indigenous faith expression. Strong protest is voiced in the interviews against the tendency to import manpower and resources from abroad, including educational materials and music, which are said to alienate and inhibit local Believers, and generally cause them to develop a faith identity that is disconnected from Israeli society and Jewish culture. While most criticism is directed against foreign Christian presence, influence and imports, some also take Diaspora Messianic Jewish input with a grain of salt, carefully examining it first for indigenous relevancy to local Believers. In the face of the constant flow of pilgrimage, *Aliyah* and *Yeridah*, local Believers have adopted several Israeli cultural schemas, among them Hebrew language usage, to guard and develop a sense of congregational cohesion; and the addition of military service and upright citizenship in matters of financial propriety, to establish and maintain the Israeli Messianic (not exclusively) Jewish metaphor of indigeneity. Foreign evangelistic efforts which introduce western Christian worldviews, evangelistic strategies, materials, lifestyles, sociopolitical ties, short-term plans and generous budgets are also perceived to threaten to uproot and devitalize the efforts of indigenous Jewish Believers to build a long-term, culturally-relevant community of faith. Similarly, fundraising abroad for local work also presents a contradiction. The more money putatively required for local work, the more time and energy must be invested in relationships and travel abroad to garner necessary funds, the more indigenous work is subjected to the patronizing western gaze and grand-scale western concepts and measures of fruitfulness.

Bridging between Israel and the nations

Yael Zerubavel's review (1986) of the "wandering Israeli" theme in Israeli literature discusses the gap between the Zionist dream and Israeli reality, in which the return to Zion was expected to but didn't entirely resolve the problem of the wandering Jew. Her review shows that wandering Israelis, and the Israeli-born *sabra* wanderers in particular, dream of realizing "their own salvation in faraway countries" (1986:128), especially in America, that alternative land of promise, or in the cold northern European countries. One wonders if the embrace of western Christian languages, cultures and products in many Israeli Believing circles isn't perhaps related to this same phenomenon of the *sabra* described by Zerubavel, who despite the dreams of his pioneering forefathers, fails to fully realize himself in the promised land, disappointing not only himself, but his parents and the entire Zionist collective for whom he is a living symbol. Or perhaps, he feels led to realize this pioneering dream for himself by finding new wildernesses to make blossom.

Two Jewish Believing Israeli leaders in particular come to mind who fit the classic prototype of the elite *sabra* found in Zerubavel's literature, and who left Israel more or less during the same period covered by her literature review. Their fathers were outstanding military leaders for the State of Israel, yet both sons felt lost as young adults, left Israel for a significant period of time, came to faith abroad and eventually returned to lead congregations and ministries in the land. In contrast with Zerubavel's protagonists who, in search of new life, eventually meet their untimely death, these two sons experience spiritual rebirth abroad, which serves to empower their return and reintegration into Israeli society, and to enable them to take part in the spiritual restoration of their people in Israel, as an extension of their familial and national Zionist heritage, much like a Moses figure.

Both are strongly Zionist and speak of a clear parallel between the nationally redemptive Zionist work of their fathers' generation and their present spiritually redemptive work. Both intermarried and maintain foreign ties abroad and in Israel. Both have a vision for positive reciprocal relationships between Israel and the nations, with ultimate spiritual authority residing in Jerusalem. Could it also be that they retain warm memories of exile, which they instinctively associate with their salvation, a sort of spiritual motherland (and wives' fatherland) parallel to Israel, the land of their fathers? Could this dual birth place, the experience of redemption in western exile, which leads them to strive for redemption in their

eastern homeland, symbolized in their intermarriage, form the basis for a dual loyalty which bridges between Israel and the nations?

Harvey Goldberg (1997:53-54) writes of a Libyan Jew living in Italy who describes Libya as his motherland, with whom he is “linked by love and nostalgia”, and Israel and Italy as his joint fatherlands, the lands of his entitlement as son and citizen. “Where is it written,” says the Italian Libyan Jew, “that you cannot have two loyalties?” Goldberg attributes psycho-social motivations to his subject, who as a child lost his father in an anti-semitic riot, postulating that perhaps it is this loss that is leading him “to join together disparate worlds”. It may be in the case of the Messianic Jewish *sabras*, that it is salvatory gain through life in the west, which has birthed in them a desire to personally bridge between the west of their salvation experience and the east of their origins, and communally, between the Believers of the Christian west and the Messianic Jews of Israel, not for the sake of memory, as in the case of Goldberg’s subject, but rather for a present and future hope of personal, national and world-wide redemption.

In another model of Israel-nations relations, Israeli Messianic Jews see themselves returning to the apostolic role of the early Jewish apostles in the New Covenant, who took the message of Yeshua as a light from Jerusalem out to the nations. These Messianic Jews believe that the hierarchy of leadership in the universal body of Believers is in the process of being overturned, and that Jewish Believers, as in the first century, will once again be “the head and not the tail”. As interviewee David says, “Turn us back to you, O Lord, and we will be restored. Renew our days as of old” (*Lamentations* 5:21). He explains that in the Hebrew, “old” is *kedem*, also an ancient word for the east. The same root, *kḏm*, is also used to form the Hebrew word for moving forward or progress. Thus, following a spiral course of renewal and progress, David prays that his people return to their God and their ancient roots in the east (*kedem*), so that they may be restored to their original Cohenic¹⁰⁵ calling to lead the world forward (*kadima*) in the spiritual realm.

According to Ovadia, part of the revolutionary process of restoring Israel to the spiritual fore, includes the reversal of the present direction of evangelistic outreach. A Jewish message of the salvation of the God of Israel needs to be proclaimed to Israel and to the nations *from Zion*, rather than the nations importing a foreign Gentile message to the Jewish people:

¹⁰⁵ According to the priestly order of the *Cobanim*, descendants of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi.

I would really like not to go back in time, but to at least be like the first apostles who were Jews and shared their faith with the world... as opposed to those that come from abroad and evangelize the [Jewish] people in an improper manner. (Ovadia, Hebrew)

Ami agrees with Ovadia, referring to verses from both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Covenant, that Israeli Jewish Believers should once again be going forth from Jerusalem to be a light to the nations. The two interviewees emphasize the preservation of both Jewish and Gentile identities:

I believe that Israelis today, Messianic Jews, should think about going outside and preach the gospel to Gentiles. Not to get money, to give money... The disciples... God told them, start in Jerusalem and then go out. They went out; they did what he told them to do, they went to be a light to the Gentiles. Some of them, I don't know, stayed there, some of them came back. The fact is that they never forgot their Jewish roots there; they always went to synagogues and evangelized, but at the same time they were opening the door for the Gentiles. And that's something we need to do, I believe, today. (Ami)

Here we see an historical model for Jewish Believers in the narratives, in addition to the Patriarchs and the first-century congregation located in Jerusalem (see in Chapter nine, "Temporal returning to the birthright."). The early Jewish apostles were sent out by the Jewish Believers living in the land to witness concerning Yeshua "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (*Acts* 1:8b), to the Jew first and then to the Greek. Application of this model implies a radical reversal of historical patterns of outreach. For the past 1600 years, the Gentile church has been "evangelizing" the Jews, however the apostolic model invoked by many interviewees reclaims the original apostolic calling and pattern of Jewish Believers going out from Zion to all the nations. The invocation of a Messianic Jewish historiographic schema (Ortner 1990) – Ovadia and Ami's reference to the early Jewish apostles – is a means of temporal travel into the past to retrieve a model realization of the Jewish prophetic calling, in order to inspire and inform future action. At the same time, as an alternative Israeli Jewish reading of the "great commission", the schema necessarily challenges traditional Jewish interpretations of the call to be a light of the nations, as well as the hegemonic erasure of Jewishness and Israel centeredness of western, Gentile-oriented models of Messianic outreach.

One pro-observant immigrant emissary applies this vision by reaching out to various "indigenous" people groups in the world, teaching that Jews and Gentiles can redeem their cultural identity and praxes through faith in the Messiah, rather than convert to western white Christian culture. He shares a message which, among other things, respects and encourages worship through native culture:

I taught in an international worship conference... [it] was a very loud and demonstrative Charismatic gathering... I kept hearing them talk about a “new sound” that needed to be “released” to the Lord. While addressing the conference on the last day, I suggested that this “new sound” that needed to be “released” in that place might in fact be an ancient sound. It might be the original sound of that land, the sound of the indigenous people. The missing “new sound” might actually be an old sound that has always been rejected, denied, and forbidden. Some of the leaders on the front row got very uncomfortable and fidgety. In the audience, some of the tribal people present were weeping. Throughout the world, most indigenous people are not heard. They are neither heard in wider society nor in the church. Among Christians, dominant western expressions of worship are imposed on the people as being the only true and spiritual worship, while the local sounds of music and singing are all too often rejected. Sadly, most indigenous people continue to be taught by Christians that their instruments and styles of singing are inherently ungodly, and cannot be used in the church. The peoples of the earth need to be liberated to approach God in worship as they are. This is part of what we do as we take the message of Yeshua to the nations. (E-newsletter. 30 November 2006.)

Most Israeli Messianic Jews seem to embrace the call of Isaiah that the Law will one day go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. While an intense debate rages over what constitutes this “Law”, Messianic Jews agree that in that day, there will be bi-directional, reciprocal movement, including western spiritual and material support but not colonization of the east, and eastern apostleship to the west, preserving the eastern role as the spiritual roots and spearhead of the universal body of Believers, while empowering the unique cultural identities and expressions of the nations. In other words, the historical patterns of unidirectional colonization, exploitation and assimilation will be replaced and repaired by a relationship of reciprocity and preservation of the unique characters of Israel and the nations, the natural and ingrafted branches of the olive tree, noted earlier.

Summary

Focusing on aspects of identity as roots reveals that the personal, prophetic and national themes of spatially returning to the land strongly resonate throughout the narratives, constituting another facet of the Jewish Believer’s manifold return journey. Native Israelis reveal various approaches to and interpretations of the land even in cases where the narrators have never traveled significantly or lived abroad. Israel is not experienced and interpreted by Israeli Messianic Jews as just any place; it is the Place mediated by a variety of cultural texts, including the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Covenant, Israeli civil religion, the Zionist *Aliyah* ritual and the Christian pilgrimage tradition.

In addition, we have seen that despite the State’s efforts to legislate Jewish Believers out of the community of Israel, Believers refuse to accept this verdict, continuing to make *Aliyah* and to

frame their returning to the land as a fulfillment of prophecy. At the same time, a spectrum of positions exist regarding the breadth and conditions of the call for Messianic Jewish *Aliyah*. *Yeridah*, is also examined in light of its broader Israeli context, as well as the unusual opportunities often afforded to Israeli Jewish Believers through their connections with western Christians.

Chapter eight also discussed in detail the arborescent metaphors of the struggle for indigeneity, examples of its various visionary renderings, and their practical interpretations. A secular nationalist-style discourse of the primacy of the land was explored as one means of returning to the land while promoting a uniform spiritual identity of Jewish and Gentile Yeshua-Believers, negating the place of Torah observance in the Israeli Believing body, and boosting financial support for Israeli ministries. The cultivation of indigenous faith and praxis was considered in light of western imports, presence, evangelism and fundraising abroad.

Lastly, the chapter offers two alternatively empowering readings of models bridging between Israeli Jewish Believers and the west. The first promotes a symbiotic marriage between the strong Messianic faith which developed in the west throughout the common era, and the Jewish roots of the faith and the Jewish people originating in the east. The second touches on a growing Messianic Jewish vision of indigenous apostleship to the nations, in which Israeli Messianic Jews promote indigeneity, not as an exclusive provincial club, but as an international fountainhead of spiritual renewal and prophetic progress.

In conclusion, roots are more than just the destination of Israeli Messianic Jewish routes. Arborescent roots as described in the research data are also a dominant cultural schema of authentic, enduring Messianic Jewish faith in Israel. Roots provide a long-term measuring stick for the development of the role and calling of indigenous Israeli Messianic Jews, as well as in the face of the challenges of Jewish orthodoxy, Israeli secularism, western consumer colonialism and Christian Zionism and missions.

Chapter nine

IDENTITY AS BORDERS: RETURNING TO THE BIRTHRIGHT

We are crossing borders in many, many dimensions, not just religious, also with our sympathy to Arabs, and sympathy to others... We are really a strange group of people here who breaks [sic] almost everything that is agreeable nationwide even though we live in a nation that's completely disagreeable about everything. (Alon)

Most interviewees tend to narrate a rather harmonious personal life story. When dwelling upon points of dissonance, they often offer lessons learned and explain the ways in which these “tangents” from the straight and narrow shaped their subsequent identity route and returning to their roots. However, the participant observations and textual analyses carried out in the framework of this study yielded material of quite a different nature. It is in social interaction, whether in face-to-face communication or textual exchange, that the in-group fur really starts flying, and the multiple voices within the Messianic community are heard in first person, rather than filtered through the moderating voice of a single interviewee. Thus, it is primarily through observation and analyses of congregational services, community celebrations, conferences, seminars, internet forum correspondences and periodical publications, that we witness the multidimensional border disputes over the sociocultural identity construction of Israeli Messianic Jews.

Over the last few days during the original writing of this chapter, the Israeli Minister of Education, Yuli Tamir, has instigated a political maelstrom by declaring that the Green Line, the line demarcating pre-1967 Israel from the territories of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, will be re-inscribed upon Israeli textbook maps. She claims that school children can no longer follow the maze of political negotiations, border violations and protests against the controversial fence (called the Apartheid Wall by opponents), since the historical dividing line has been erased from sight.

Borders are the ultimate definitive tool of inclusion/exclusion and social control, and as such are highly politically charged. It is argued in the Introduction that scholars need not impose hegemonic delimitations on Messianic Jews, that the anthropological mandate is to explore the emic border work of one's subjects. Accordingly, this entire work essentially traces discursive

and practical subjective attempts to delimit sociocultural territory, and the politically-charged in-group and out-group border disputes engaged in the process.

Cited above, Alon notes that the identity travel of Israeli Jewish Believers criss-crosses theological and socio-political borders: Jewish-Christian, Jewish-Gentile, Israeli Jewish-Palestinian Arab, liberal-conservative, orthodox-secular, charismatic-non-charismatic, and so forth. Some Messianic Jewish travel serves to reify existing borders, while other travel, of a more dangerous and subversive nature, attempts to traverse and revise the very borders themselves. The traveling subjects also hold multiple passports – Israeli, Jewish (including Israeli and Diaspora Jewry), Messianic (including Jewish and Gentile Believers), etc. – whose inclusive salience varies according to diverse travel situations (Nagel 1994:154-5).

For example, there is a small handful of Israeli Messianic Jews criss-crossing religious, ethnic, political and national borders to build relationships between Jewish and Arab Believers toward the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision (19:23-25) of a highway of peace from Egypt to Assyria that crosses through the land of Israel. Therefore, while travelers are limited by borders, they can also cross them, sometimes dangerously and at great personal cost, equipped with the salient sociocultural passports, challenging positions of inclusion/exclusion and politically-imposed limitations on social relations, at the same time that they work towards the establishment of a different cartography altogether.

Well-maintained borders require dutiful policing. Consequently, disputes arise from these border crossings. How integrative or segregative must Messianic Jews be toward secular Jews, religious Jews, non-Zionist or Zionist Gentile Christians (including Arab Christians), and the cultures which they represent? Border disputes are alternate versions of identity competing for hegemony.

This chapter particularly explores the identity border disputes of community members over who or what is, is not, should or should not be included in the identity rubric of "Israeli Messianic Jewish", and who is one's brother versus the other. Having returned to God and the land of Israel, Israeli Messianic Jews struggle over what comes next. This last leg of returning is the most embroiled in controversy. It is the struggle over the Messianic reclamation and restoration of the Jewish birthright. The major disputes seem to take place over the question of the borders of the birthright: What does it or should it mean for a Messianic Jew to return to his people and heritage? Is it enough to identify one's Jewishness with the nation of Israel

or does returning to the people of Israel also imply a return to a cultural and spiritual Jewish heritage?

The struggle over the birthright is the struggle over what it means for the Israeli Believer to be Jewish in discourse and praxis, including how he relates to the historically developed discursive and practical borders of the contemporary Jewish collective. Is the Believer's Jewish identity to be segregated from his spiritual identity to a nationalist or ethnic identity, or is his Jewishness to form an integral and inseparable part of his spirituality? Likewise, in which ways will this spiritual integration or segregation of his Jewish and spiritual identities inform his integration with¹⁰⁶ or segregation from the Jewish collective?

In this chapter, we analyze these emic border disputes, beginning with juxtaposed narratives, then drawing primarily from participant observations and in-group texts, to better understand how Israeli Messianic Jews struggle over defining and delimiting the borders of their identity. In the first sub-chapter, returning to the birthright is called a temporal returning, because it is primarily through re-envisioning the Jewish past that Messianic Jews come to conclusions about their present birth inheritance, rights and obligations, both in principle and in practice.

The Jewish birthright is highly contested by the Jewish and Christian establishments, both of whom claim to be the true inheritors of the promises made to Israel. True Israel is thought to have a God-appointed calling, roles to play in God's plan for the world, and an empowering authority. The Synagogue and Church have also historically negated shared kinship with Messianic Jews, claiming them cut off from this inheritance. In the process of Messianic Jews reclaiming their putative covenantal birthright of the first-born, they also may choose either to include their brother (whether non-Messianic Jewish or non-Jewish Messianic) as part of a larger complimentary family structure, or to reproduce the hegemonic pattern of excluding one's brother as the non-chosen other. The potential integrative or segregative response to the birthright is examined more fully in the section entitled "Integrative and segregative applications of ideal Scriptural models."

A variety of Messianic Jewish bodies in Israel organized a series of national seminars and conferences held during the years 2001-2003, two to three years into our identity research

¹⁰⁶ The word "with" rather than integration "into" implies a dialogue with rather than a unidirectional assimilation into normative Judaism.

project, which reflect a dense blitz of identity work in recent years and attest to the growing intensity of the internal Messianic Jewish identity struggle in Israel:

In March of 2001 a group of Israeli Messianic Jewish translators gathered for a conference to discuss the guiding principles behind their translation work from English (mostly Christian materials) to Hebrew. In November of the same year, Tsvi Sadan published an article in the magazine Israel Today entitled, “The Trinity – Midrash or Dogma?” Two months later, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel (MJAI) held a seminar called, “Our Jewish Identity in the Messiah Yeshua”, followed by a National Conference of Messianic Congregational Leaders in Israel held in Netanya during the month of June. A mere three months later, a congregational leader published an article in the Messianic Israeli magazine MeEt L’Et entitled, “Yeshua is God!”. That October, YEHI organized a seminar addressing the question, “Do the Adherents of Yeshua in Israel have the Right to Self-Definition?”, followed by an additional MJAI conference called, “The Trinity – What Do We Believe?” in February of 2003.

Keeping in mind that identity becomes crucially important the moment it is perceived as threatened (Eriksen 1993:76), the analysis of these participant-observations and textual analyses, forming the basis of the second through fourth sections of this chapter, are intended to give the reader a sense of both the content and urgency of identity discourse in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community in recent years. More specifically, these last three sections explore how Israeli Messianic Jews struggle to become subjects (“subjectivity”), rather than objects of existing hegemonic religious establishments by discursively defining and representing themselves; to quicken a distinct Israeli Messianic Jewish spiritual identity and expression (“theology”); and to initiate a shift in “spiritual authority” back to Jerusalem which is expected to reinstate Israeli Jewish Believers as “the head and not the tail” of Believers worldwide.

Temporal returning to the birthright

Temporal returning refers to travel back in collective memory to historical figures or time periods which empower Messianic Jews to redefine the borders of the Jewish birthright. Thus Messianic Jewish historiography is engaged to legitimize the struggle to return to the fold of the Jewish people, land and heritage. This chapter begins with an analysis of Israeli Messianic Jewish historiography and collective memory which counters the delegitimizing historiographies and collective memories of the Jewish and Church establishments. The selective nature of collective memory is illustrated in the second sub-section which provides a glimpse at how selective memory enables Messianic Jews to lead a movement of renewal claiming to return to a lost Jewish authenticity (in this case, “authentic expression in worship”). The third sub-section outlines the use of two Scripturally-based selective historiographic models, of the Patriarchs and the first-century Congregation, to shape and inform contemporary Israeli Messianic Jewish individual and communal life. Finally, in sub-section four, the conscription of collective memory is examined in a broader social context, exploring how the Messianic Jewish understandings of the past help practitioners integrate with or segregate themselves from rabbinic Jewish and Gentile Christian contemporaries.

Messianic Jewish collective memory and countermemory

Chapter one discusses hegemonic uses of historiography against Messianic Jews, but Jewish Believers have, at the same time, developed their own historiography¹⁰⁷ and collective memory, that is, their own ways of reading, reinterpreting, canonizing and constructing historical records and meanings of the past (Bekerman 2007). Collective memory is “the history that common people carry around in their heads... Whether the general run of people read history books or not, they inevitably picture the past in some fashion or other, and this picture, however little it responds to real past, helps to determine their ideas about politics and society” (Carl Becker qtd. in Zerubavel 1995:3). The Messianic Jewish collective memory, due to its suppression and marginalization by non-Messianic Jewish and Christian establishments, functions as a countermemory, deconstructing the hegemonic Jewish and Christian master collective memories by partially denying their validity and presenting its own version of the past to inform the present. In fact, by its very existence, Messianic Jewish collective memory

¹⁰⁷ Quite a number of Messianic Jewish leaders and scholars have also devoted university theses and doctoral dissertations to the development of a counter-historiography of Messianic Judaism. See for example, Friedman (2001), Nerel (1996), Snow (1996). Most of the work has focused on 2nd Temple and early common era or recent history. Non-Messianic Jewish scholars such as Cohn-Sherbok (2000), Daniel Boyarin (2000, 2004) and Shaye Cohen (1999) have helped to problematize previously taken-for-granted historical and theological distinctions between Jews and Christians.

necessitates the redefinition of Jewish and Christian collective memories and identities¹⁰⁸. The commemoration of the past becomes a battle over the political authority to determine who and what is a Jew or a Christian today.

In the earliest published sociological study of Jewish Believers, Glick claims that Hebrew Christianity is a protest movement against the accepted meanings and usages of the key terms of Jewish, Christian and Gentile, an attempt to change the present social reality and to create social space which will legitimately allow the Jewish Believer to define himself and his relationship to God and man (Glick 1958:423, 427). One major way that Messianic Jews work to create this new social space and foster a distinct Jewish Believing identity is through the construction of a unique Messianic Jewish collective memory.

This dissertation cannot attempt to deconstruct in one short chapter all of the mechanisms which constitute Messianic Jewish collective memory, nor to explore its polyphonic nuances. This section is intended to highlight uses of the past in the broader context of “returning” through time (temporal travel) and space in the construction of Israeli Messianic Jewish identity. Following is a brief overview of Messianic Jewish chronology and examples of alternative concepts of history and collective commemoration which are meant to give the reader a sense of how “travel” back through time, compliments metaphysical travel and travel through space, serving as another means of Israeli Messianic Jewish identity construction.

Messianic Jews reach back nearly two millennia and point to the beginnings of faith in Yeshua as a Jewish movement within Second Temple-period Judaism. Some wish to disassociate Messianic Judaism from any later rabbinic relations, but others will argue that Messianic Judaism is still a stream within Judaism today, except that the Gentile Church has made it extremely difficult to clarify this point to Jewish people due to Christian anti-Semitism and concerted efforts to obscure the Jewish roots of their faith:

In the earlier ages of Messianic Judaism, when we go back 2,000 years ago, it was a stream within Judaism just like Reform Judaism is today, and I believe we still are a stream in Judaism except that the 2,000 years have clouded the whole relationship to Judaism, especially Christianity. Christendom took our religion, and separated it from Judaism.
(Alon)

¹⁰⁸ For more on the mechanisms of counteremory see Zerubavel 1995:10,11.

Continuing along the Messianic Jewish chronology, Israeli Jewish Believers also recognize that historical conditions did not allow for the development of a visible movement of Jewish Believers in Yeshua until the end of the 19th century. They often speak of a parallel between the physical revival of the Jewish nation through Zionism, and the spiritual revival in Messianic Judaism (Harris-Shapiro 1999:128), a process often compared to Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones first coming back together and only then receiving the breath of life¹⁰⁹. Therefore, apart from extraordinary Believing individuals throughout history who formed a "remnant"¹¹⁰ testifying to the truth, Messianic Jewish collective memory does not require proof of the historical continuity of Jewish faith in Yeshua for the past 1700 or so years. God is said to have first allowed the nations to come to faith in the Messiah, and is only now causing his people to return¹¹¹. The spiritual revival of Israel is an issue of God's timing and is eschatologically designated to occur *en masse* only during the "end times". The historical discontinuity of Jewish faith in Yeshua is itself conscripted as a critique of the failure of both Jewish and Christian contemporary religious establishments: the former for rejecting the Messiahship of Yeshua and replacing biblical Jewish faith with a man-made religion, and the latter for its anti-semitic crusades against Jews, Jewish Believers and the Jewish roots of its faith, and for its role in Gentilizing Yeshua beyond Jewish recognition.

In addition, radically different conceptions of history and collective commemorations work to constitute Messianic Jewish collective memory. To Christians, for example, Jewish Believers speak about the Jewish origins or roots of Christian faith in Yeshua, as opposed to the classic concept of the "birth of Christianity". Even in instances where the Jewish parentage of Christianity is recognized, the very concept of birth articulates a sense of historical discontinuity and separation from a previous body, denoting the beginning of a unique new life with a distinct future and destiny (Nora 1989:17). However, the Messianic Jewish concept of "origins" leaves an open door for historical continuity, and "roots" imply a necessarily ongoing nourishment, depth of foundation, commitment and reciprocity.

Another example of an unorthodox Messianic Jewish countermemory is the distinction between biblical and common era rabbinic Judaism, a common distinction in our narratives

¹⁰⁹ *Ezekiel* 37. This interpretation is so widespread among Messianic Jews and Zionist Christians that one Palestinian Christian scholar who does not believe that the present Israeli State is a fulfillment of prophecy, specifically determined to devote his doctoral dissertation to refuting the interpretation.

¹¹⁰ A Messianic Jewish concept referring to the idea of there always being righteous persons who choose to follow the truth, even if they are an invisible minority, as in the seven thousand who refused to bow the knee to Ba'al (*I Kings* 19:18).

¹¹¹ According to the common Messianic Jewish interpretation of *Romans* 11. See, for example, Liberman 1976.

which supports Messianic Judaism as the authentic heir of biblical Judaism, and constructs rabbinic Judaism as the unfaithful son who has deviated from the fundamental biblical mandate and created a man-made religious substitute for the concept of Messiah. Messianic Jews also “restore” holidays to their Jewish contexts. For example, holidays commonly known as Easter and Pentecost are restored as the newly unabridged biblical holidays of Passover and Shavuot (Feher 1998). The restoration of the “full” biblical significance of the holidays at once points to the consistently recurring cyclical patterns in God’s salvation plan, and the progressive historical revelation, respectively leading to the sacrificial death and resurrection of Yeshua (the Pascal lamb), and the giving of the Holy Spirit (the Torah) to his followers¹¹². Rejection of Christian holiday subrogation is a subversive Messianic Jewish critique of the anti-semitic and pagan influences in Christian theology and practice, while the layering of Messianic significance and New Covenant events upon Hebrew biblical holidays is a challenge of the hermeneutical hegemony of the Jewish establishment and a clarion call to face the Messianic claims of Yeshua in their Jewish context, and the subsequent Jewish identity claims of his followers.

Selective memory and “authentic” expression

These songs were meant for you, to delight your heart and bring back true worship once again...

- *Messianic Jewish songwriter*

Messianic Jews see themselves as members of a renewal movement, reaching back into the farther, biblical past for purer and more authentic precedents of Jewish spirituality. “Returning to the roots”, according to Stuart Charmé (2000:139), is a particular way of constructing and authenticating movements of religious renewal and innovation. This is “returning” in the sense of realizing optional, but generally untapped or stunted potential within a particular identity community. It is a product of choice, a decision to reconnect often to an idealized Jewishness, but not a Jewishness traditionally and wholly owned or defined by the Jewish mainstream.

A fine example of selective returning can be found in a new worship song recently written by a young Messianic Jew abroad, and translated into Hebrew for use in Israeli worship by a local Messianic Jewish worship leader. The lyrics express the desire “to bring back true worship

¹¹² For a discussion of the functions of linear and spiral models of time, see Zerubavel 1995:7.

once again”. The implication is that the Messianic Jew potentially possesses the missing link, something which is prescriptively¹¹³ more authentic to offer to God than that which has been offered up for some time in either synagogue or church worship, something which will restore the true worship that God originally intended. These young musicians are making a creative attempt to return to something that once was in the domain of their people and was lost.

Use of pop-rock style music and free-form lyrics in the song is meant to reflect an “authentic” heart expression which the translator perceives to be neglected in more rigid liturgical forms (Personal Conversation. 28 August 2006). Thus the modern existential authenticity of the individual (Charmé 2000:135) is favored over a selectively “forgotten” (Zerubavel 1995:xvi) historically Jewish liturgical tradition, likely a more technically accurate reflection of ancient Hebrew worship. Yet contrary to secular Israeli rock, the modern Hebrew lyrics of the translation focus on a relationship with God according to a Messianic understanding of the Scriptures. In one creative act, the musicians introduce “authentic” personal worship and a new spiritual focus, in place of institutionalized orthodox liturgy and secular Israeli lyrics, in effect restoring their understanding of “true worship” to Israel. The past is conscripted to address the needs of the present, achieving renewal by restoring a phenomenological essence of what once was: authentic Jewish worship of the God of Israel, and what should be: worship centered on God’s anointed one, the Messiah of Israel. Embracing this radical faith, the Messianic Jew becomes a good Jew, and reinvents Jewish culture accordingly.

Scholar David Roskies writes concerning S. Ansky, a revolutionary writer of the Jewish Enlightenment, that his rejection of the rabbinic Jewish framework in his youth, embrace of radical socialist politics and later return to Jewish folklore, was the paradigm for the Jewish cultural renaissance of his period. “The hero of the modern age was a born-again Jew in a Judaism of his own remaking” (Roskies 2002:260). Returning to Jewish roots, therefore, or the romantic return to “authenticity”, is not about returning to *everything* that ever was Jewish, or to every version of authentic Jewishness. For the Messianic Jews, as for many other Jews from the Enlightenment period onwards, returning is a subjective, uniquely-tailored quest for

¹¹³ Charmé (2000:134) discusses three types of authenticity: descriptive, prescriptive and existential. Descriptive authenticity claims historical continuity with particular traditions of the past as a source of authority for the present. Prescriptive authenticity claims the superiority of one form of praxis over another, often relying upon the form’s descriptive authenticity. Existential authenticity claims to reflect the individual’s deepest values and sense of self.

Jewish renewal, a purposefully selective process of remembering and forgetting, restoration and *tikkun*¹¹⁴.

Modeling the Patriarchs and the first-century Jerusalem congregation

Yael Zerubavel (1995:8) argues that, “The power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance.” Jewish Believers have developed at least three such powerful images or models which articulate and reinforce Messianic Jewish ideology by informing and explaining strategies of action. The lives of the Jewish Patriarchs, including among others, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David, represent an ideal, personal living relationship with God. The Jerusalem congregation of first-century Jewish Believers in Yeshua, as detailed in the book of Acts, represents an ideal spiritual and practical outworking of this relationship within the framework of a Messianic Jewish faith community. The third model, discussed previously in “Bridging between Israel and the nations,” at the end of Chapter eight, models an apostolic vision of Israeli Messianic Jews “going forth from Zion” by combining the calling of Israel to be a light of the nations with Yeshua’s “great commission” to bring the “good news” to all nations. Thus, the three historiographic models move from the individual to the community to outreach by covering the individual relationship of the Jew to God, the ideal functioning of the Jewish faith community, and the apostolic role of Israel as light of the nations.

Levi speaks of an authentic Judaism, reflected in the personal conversing of Isaac with God, which is far more spontaneous, intimate and experiential, and less structured into ritual prayers than contemporary Judaism or even the Second Temple-period Judaism of Yeshua’s time. An ex-hippie American immigrant, Levi is attempting to take up what he believes is Yeshua’s challenge of the institutionalized religious forms of Judaism, by returning to an authentic living relationship of God with his people:

We don’t want to only draw closer to contemporary Judaism, but to return to the Judaism of the Second Temple period, even to return to the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Moses and to those experiences. And all of these things are because we are quite sensitive to the distinction between tradition and Scripture, because we all know when something is a cultural commandment and when it is a Scriptural commandment... I spoke with an ultra-orthodox man yesterday who said, look there is a belief in Judaism

¹¹⁴ *Tikkun olam* literally means “reparation of the world”. In Jewish orthodoxy, *tikkun olam* refers to observance which is thought to quicken the coming of the Messiah and help usher in the Messianic age. In some non-orthodox circles, it refers to actions which work toward the realization of social justice. In either usage, *tikkun olam* describes a way in which man can partner with his creator to bring healing and restoration to a broken world.

that Abraham our father composed the *Shaharit* prayer, and Isaac composed the *Minha* prayer, and Jacob the *Aravit* prayer¹¹⁵. So I said, look we don't think that this is correct... It is written of Isaac that he went out to the field to walk around and converse with God. So that's what we want to return to, not just to the *Minha* prayer, even if it is from the first century... What is my *Minha*? I want to leave my home, walk in the field and speak with God like Isaac and that is my Judaism. In other words, I want an even more primordial Judaism not only from today, even more primordial than the Judaism of the first century. The Judaism of the first century resisted Yeshua, when he called them to return to their roots... Look, we are not religious people. We are people of faith. Religion is always more defined than faith. There is no doubt. Faith requires something a bit spontaneous, whereas religion rejects the spontaneous. (Levi, Hebrew)

Shimon historicizes contemporary Judaism, declaring it a product of Diaspora which is historically authentic, but does not represent the spiritual ideal to which he aspires. He agrees with Levi in principle, that his goal as a Messianic Jew is to return to the patriarchal ideal of a living personal relationship with God. However, in the same breath, he acknowledges a degree of disorder and need for some form of religious structure and *halacha*, not necessarily rabbinical, to transform a group of persons with individual spiritual relationships into a coherent community, together tackling the challenges of working out a Scripturally-observant lifestyle in accordance with Messianic faith:

To me even to this day, the synagogue is a creation of Diaspora Judaism. So, I'm not really looking at that as the authentic. I mean it's the authentic American Judaism, but it isn't totally authentic... To me I go back to Abraham in the sense of a man of faith. It's knowing God, it's kind of more primitive. I don't know what I believe anymore. I think that we're all a mixture, we're all a menu, we're taken a little bit from here, a little bit from there, you know, a salad. We're all a mixture, nobody's keeping the Law and nobody can keep the Law so we've all taken what we've felt is most important and some have done more and some have done less. I'm talking about the way we live our lives. Unless you decide to go by rabbinical *halacha*. Then you have a set thing of what you can do and what you can't do. But if you go strictly by Torah, obviously you're going to get into challenges in trying to keep the 613 and so forth. (Shimon)

The Patriarchs, whose relationships with God are displayed in detail in the Torah, are described by many Messianic Jews as representing the intimate relational ideal (relationship not religion) between the God of Israel and his children. At the same time, Messianic Jews are faced with the practical challenges of *halachic* borders, the working out their faith. For what seems to be the majority of Israeli Messianic Jews who do not support a lifestyle of traditional or even non-traditional Torah observance, the concept of working out their faith is simply a spiritualized ideal. God will speak to the individual Believer and guide her by his Spirit; the Believer will bear spiritual fruit of love, joy, patience, etc. in her life and according to some, operate in spiritual gifts such as prophecy, teaching, words of knowledge, etc. There are fewer

¹¹⁵ The three daily liturgical services of the synagogue.

explicit commandments in the New Covenant, but they include loving God, loving one's neighbor, sharing the news of the Messiah with others, etc. As Israeli Jews they may also keep cultural traditions such as holiday celebrations. However a more tangible, practical guide of how to work out the hundreds of explicit commands of the Torah is superfluous for those who have abolished the necessity of observance for Believers.

Moshe is among those that do believe Messianic Jews are to live a Torah-observant lifestyle, not for the sake of their salvation, but because the Hebrew Scriptures are God's guidelines for living for the Jewish people, and it is pleasing to God when Jews honor his word. He attempts to solve the dilemma described by Shimon, arising from a living "patriarchal"-style personal relationship with God, coupled with a need to walk out God's commandments without blind submission to rabbinical authority. In response, Moshe studies and attempts to emulate the body of first-century Jewish Believers in Yeshua who formed the first Torah-observant, Spirit-filled Messianic Jewish community in Jerusalem. It is interesting to note that observance essentially requires a schematic shift from the level of the individual to the level of the community:

In my opinion, the healthy approach is to have a more biblical, a more New Testament approach and to see what the early Believers did in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago and to try to restore that... The early Jewish Believers did not lose their Jewish identity. They kept their Jewish identity. That's true from the New Testament, from Paul's own writings... It means keeping *kashrut*¹¹⁶, it means respecting the Shabbat... The Early Church in the New Testament all lived according to the Torah. Paul did too... That's why I said the word "restoration." We are like the *chalutzim*¹¹⁷ in Zionism, trying to restore the ruins of something that at one time existed in this city, in Jerusalem... It's a return back to rebuild the thing that existed. Two thousand years ago there was a large community in Jerusalem. Eusebius said there were forty-thousand Jews that believed in Jesus in Jerusalem. The Book of Acts witnessed to that and said, "myriads", tens of thousands. This community lived here, existed here, functioned here, in this city. They went to the Temple, they went to the synagogue. They were in the Galilee, the Talmud witnesses that there were Jews that believed in Jesus, in the Galilee toward the end of the second century, and they were a part of the Jewish community... We want to do what is written in that word and to put it as [sic] a practice of our lives... Very few people really seriously have that desire, especially in the Christian world, because the Early Church was Jewish. It didn't leave the framework of Judaism... The last thing we hear from Paul, *Acts* 28 verse 17 says, Paul gathers the leaders of the Jewish community in Rome. He tells them, "I have done nothing against either our people or the tradition of the fathers." It means the Oral Law and the Law of Moses. Now how could Paul say that? Did he lie? I don't believe he lied. I believe that he lived as a Jew, he went to the Temple, he offered sacrifices, he paid his taxes in the Temple, he went to synagogue every Shabbat. Why shouldn't the Believers today do the same? (Moshe)

¹¹⁶ The Jewish dietary (kosher) laws.

¹¹⁷ Early Zionist "pioneers" who made *Aliyah* and began rebuilding a Jewish presence and economy in the land of Israel.

As Moshe mentions, many Believers claim to emulate the first-century Jewish Believing model, yet few imitate its characteristic law observance emphasized by Moshe. For many Jewish Believers, the early followers of Yeshua appearing in the New Covenant texts, are simply an example of strong Believers, a testimony to the Jewishness of their faith before the issue ever became complicated by 2000 years of Jewish-Christian tension, and a confirmation of the legitimacy of preserving their unique national Jewish heritage.

Integrative and segregative applications of ideal Scriptural models

Israeli Jewish Believers use the two Scriptural models of the Patriarchs and the first-century Congregation both as ideals to which the in-group aspires and strategies of action for practical imitation. But how are these models utilized by Jewish Believers in their relations with non-Messianic Jews and Christians? Are these “culturally constructed versions of the past authorized to shape” Messianic Jews’ integration with or segregation from the larger, non-Messianic Jewish community (Brow 1990:1)? The examples below will illustrate that employment of the models can achieve either purpose, integration or segregation, depending on their employer (Eriksen 1993:73); they can be used to either support or negate Messianic Jewish dialogic integration with non-Messianic streams of Judaism or Gentile Christians.

I was born into a Jewish nation. No one can change this fact. I do believe that to be a Jew in the eyes of God is to continue the faith that Abraham, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel had. They had the same faith. I do believe that I have the same faith they had. So actually, I didn’t change... If there would be no other religions, no one would kill the best terminologies. If someone would come and say what are you, I’d say I’m a Jew. Because I’m continuing the same faith as the prophets had Isaiah, Jeremiah. I didn’t change nothing. (But the rabbis changed.) Absolutely. They took my terminology. They took my name. So what do you think I’m going to quarrel with them? That’s the last thing that I am going to do. I would rather place an add to evangelize than to quarrel with them.
(Pini)

Pini claims to follow the authentic biblical faith of the Patriarchs; it is rabbinic Judaism which has fundamentally gone astray, negating in the process his right to call himself a Jew by orthodox Jewish standards, thereby robbing him of his true biblical identity. He doesn’t seem to have any interest in dialogue, whether for outreach, educational or self-reflexive purposes, labeling potential exchanges between himself and the rabbinic establishment a “quarrel”. Instead he indirectly offers his written alternative to the hegemonic rabbinic narrative, a process which he calls “evangelization”: At the time of the interview, Pini and his congregants were organizing a media campaign which printed Messianic interpretations of selected prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures, including a contact number and address for those interested in receiving more materials.

Interestingly, a second-generation Israeli Believer, Pini does not actually describe himself as returning, but rather as strengthening his already existing faith. Though he spent a period of time in his youth returning to the doctrinal basics of his faith to shore up his apologetics, he simply never erred from the path. Since he perceives rabbinic Judaism to be fundamentally erroneous, Pini also reveals no interest in Jewish praxis developed over the past two millennia, apart from sociocultural practices adopted into the standard corpus of Israeli civil religion. Unlike most Messianic Jews interviewed who do want to return in some way, Pini is representative of those Jewish Believers who portray themselves as having found the true path already without dialogue with the Jewish world. The idiomatic difference is subtle, but telling. Rather than speaking about returning to the faith of the Patriarchs, he simply continues their legacy as legitimate heir to the birthright.

As a Jewish Believing *sabra*, born in the land to two Jewish Believing parents, Pini might be among the few Jewish Believers uniquely placed to construct his identity as entirely rooted in Zion – the God, land and birthright of Israel – so much so that he need not envision himself returning. Yet other second-generation Israeli Messianic Jews interviewed *did* describe themselves returning to reinterpret for themselves, in their own generation, their various identifications with their God, land and birthright in discourse and praxis. However Pini, when asked whether he makes references to Jewish sources in his teaching, claims to do so only in order to emphasize their errant interpretations. As Yaakov, another interviewee, capsulizes Pini’s segregative position, “Being a Jewish Believer is not the same as being an orthodox Jew, they’re two *entirely different* things.” Regarding his library, Pini says:

If you enter my room, which is the church office, it’s definitely not a rabbinical Judaism room. That’s obvious... It’s a Christian library. Many Christian theology books have a big cross in front of them so you don’t have to wonder what is [sic] the flavor of these books.

In his negation of rabbinic Judaism, rather than “returning to his roots” for spiritual sustenance, he simply replaces them with Christian sources. Nonetheless, his Israeliness is important to him and connects him both nationally and socioculturally to his land and his people.

The other dominant approach among Israeli Messianic Jews is use of the models of the Patriarchs and early Jerusalemite Jewish Believers as a standard to challenge the Jewish establishment in dialogue, aptly illustrated by Levi’s discussion of Isaac and the *Minba* prayer

quoted above. Levi takes exception with the oral tradition that claims Isaac as composer of the first-century prayer. But in referring to an example of Isaac's prayer recorded in the biblical text, Levi is challenging the very nature of Jewish prayer as it has historically developed in post-Temple Judaism. He is not rejecting historical Judaism, but goading his contemporary Jewish counterparts to return to a more primordial Jewish faith rooted in relationship rather than ritual formula.

The difference in the two usages of the ideal Messianic Scriptural models is subtle. Pini's segregative approach dogmatically negates and ignores the past two thousand years of rabbinic Jewish development, due to rabbinicism's putative fundamental deviance from Scripture and rejection of the Messiahship of Yeshua. The integrative approach tries to remind fellow Jews of biblical concepts and values which have perhaps been collectively "forgotten" or suppressed (Zerubavel 1995: xvi, Swidler 1986), but nonetheless hold their quiescent place in the vast and variegated cultural heritage of the Jewish people. While the one approach constructs a dichotomy between biblical and Jewish tradition, dismissing and excluding rabbinic Jews as the black sheep "entirely different" from "true" Believers, the second approach cultivates a heterodox concept of the Jewish world which contains within its broad borders a multivocality, including rabbinic and Messianic Jews.

The integrative approach of excavating quiescent discourses and praxes within the Jewish world involves a three-step approach. The first step requires the Messianic Jew to identify himself within the borders of the Jewish collective. Second is the attempt to restore Yeshua to his putatively rightful place of honor as the Jewish Messiah among his people. Third is the attempt to challenge non-Messianic Jews and Judaism with Yeshua's personage from within a Jewish faith framework. In other words, if the segregative usage of the Scriptural ideal is to negate and exclude the historically developed collective of non-Messianic Jews as illustrated through Pini's narrative¹¹⁸, the integrative usage, represented by Levi's narrative, respects and challenges Judaism from within its borders.

The Scriptural models are similarly used to critique, reject or constructively challenge practices or practitioners in the larger (Gentile) Believing world. For example, two interviewees speak of the "pagan rituals" of Christians on Easter and Christmas to justify their rejection of Gentile Christianity as idol worship. On the other hand, the more common approach of Israeli Messianic Jews is to challenge the Gentile Church (interestingly, even during Hebrew sermons

¹¹⁸ For another example of the segregative approach, see Reverend Baruch Maoz's Judaism is not Jewish. (2003).

in Israeli congregations) to return to the Jewish borders of their faith. So, for example, one Israeli spiritual leader consistently challenges Christians abroad to realize that Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples of Yeshua (in *Acts* 2), was none other than the biblically-appointed day of Shavuot, the holiday of the giving of the Law. This leader teaches that the infilling of the Spirit on this day was no coincidence, and came to empower the Believers to carry out God's commandments. Therefore, Christians who remove the holiday from its original context, he argues, lose its deepest significance and promote a decontextualized praxis of seemingly arbitrary holy days (Sermon, 11 May 2006). The latter critique is one which employs the model of the first-century congregation in a constructive and integrative manner to challenge but not reject the Gentile Christian establishment.

In conclusion, the research narratives describe Israeli Messianic Jewish identity as a tri-fold journey homeward to Zion: metaphysically to God, spatially to the land, and temporally to the birthright of Israel. The various discursive constructions of this journey by Jewish Believers also reflect the spectrum of their subjectively negotiated interactions, ranging from segregative to integrative, with their major religious referents: religious Jews and Gentile Christians.

The struggle over subjectivity

Various streams of Judaism have a vested interest in constructing Messianic Jews as outside the Jewish camp. The element of faith in Yeshua is used to exclude Messianics from "authentic" Jewishness. Therefore, we must first recognize the obvious - that normative Judaism has not only failed to provide a model for "authentic" Jewish faith in Yeshua, it has actively worked to purge Messianic faith from "authentic" Judaism and to promote it as the exclusive domain of Gentile Christianity (Boyarin 2004). Messianic Jews are therefore, by definition, outside the borders of the normative Jewish camp.

Within the Israeli Messianic Jewish community is a struggle over the right of the Jewish Believer to define and represent himself as a *subject*, rather than an object manipulated by historically hegemonic religious establishments. The struggle for Israeli Messianic Jewish subjectivity is fought on several fronts, beginning with the in-group which lacks consensus on this matter, and extending to the Jewish, civil Israeli and Christian religious establishments.

Levi (below) is aware of the orthodox Jewish hegemony in Israel which marginalizes and silences alternative Jewish voices. He speaks of a present in which Messianic Jews define themselves from outside the borders of the Jewish community, and a future in which "We will

become strong enough to appropriate the terms, definitions and identifications *from within* the society, in place of terms imported *from without*.” In other words, when the community has grown enough in numbers and in presence in Israel, self-definition in Israeli Jewish terms, even in orthodox Jewish terms, will be received with greater legitimacy; Messianic Jews will eventually succeed in expanding the borders of Israeli Jewishness. Levi’s children, growing up in the meantime, have suffered for lack of better terms:

Like every group in the process of absorption and *Aliyah*, the Messianic Jewish community in Israel is also in its early stages, quite young in our development. So we are still in the process of developing our identity, our self-perception, our self-image... It is difficult to define ourselves and this causes a great deal of discomfort among us... I see that we will become stronger in the future... We will simply grow in numbers, it will be easier for us in the culture, the language, a greater degree of integration into the society... But I think that this future will arrive in stages... For example, what do people say to me? You’re a missionary. It’s not true. There are among the orthodox those that work to bring people back to the faith (*mahzirim b’tshuvah*). They bring people back to the faith, and we bring people back to the faith. In other words, there is such a thing in Israeli Jewish thought. You don’t agree with us, so don’t agree with us, but I have the power to define myself in terms within the society from without. In other words, what is the difference between a missionary and a *mahzir b’tshuvah*? Every rabbi that brings people back to the faith is a missionary to some extent. But in Judaism we say either an emissary (*shaliach*) or a *mahzir b’tshuvah*. So over time we will become strong enough to appropriate the terms, definitions and identifications from within the society, in place of terms imported from without... Regarding my children, there was another factor which was difficult for them. They weren’t only Believers, but because I am professionally in “ministry”, they had a hard time knowing what to say when someone asked what their dad does... It sounds insignificant, but actually it was a very serious emotional issue for them. In other words, not just identity, who you are as Believers, but who are you as a family... I teach Bible in all kinds of places and I manage non-profit organizations among Messianic Jews... But the problem is that there is simply no societal definition for what that is. The only definition is essentially missionaries, which is out of the question. We don’t see ourselves as missionaries, but there is nothing else. In the society it is supposed to be a rabbi. I serve in the position of what is today a rabbi... And I don’t have the authority to say that, so it remains undefined. (Levi, Hebrew)

In contrast to Levi, Annie feels that the need to be recognized and express oneself in Israeli Jewish terms stems from a “Jewish complex”, a problem of prideful arrogance, insecurity and lack of proper priorities. She makes a clear hierarchical distinction between a person’s “identity in the Lord” and their Jewish identity. As one commentor at the MJAI’s¹¹⁹ Trinity seminar put it, “I am a Jew, but it is much more important that I am a Messianic” (“This is the Covenant.” 2004). People should be investing in “spiritual” matters, i.e. their “identity in the Lord”, rather than trying to “prove that they’re something they’re not” by becoming more observant in lifestyle. After all, being recognized in Israel as a Jew is “not going to get you into

¹¹⁹ The Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel, an organization composed of individual Israeli Messianic Jewish members that organizes nationwide activities for Jewish Believers.

heaven”. Identity is something “that either you are or you’re not”. Despite her own story of mixed parentage, which describes a gradual discovery of Jewish roots, practice and eventual *Aliyah*, she determines that Messianic Jews who choose to develop their practice to a greater degree than herself, or those who contend for political recognition in Israel, are inauthentic, less spiritual and following one anecdote, likely to bring problems upon themselves and their children:

I can’t stand this high Jewish attitude... It kills me... Okay, so, you’re Jewish, get over it. You know you’re Jewish. You have a call and God’s done it. God did that work for me too, and then it becomes a part of your life and fine. And now get on with life. As though being Jewish is about receiving entrance permission to a club, rather than the beginning of a lifetime of service. You can’t always be sitting around insisting that you have Jewish in your identity card because that’s what you are. I get so angry with some of these American Jews that come over here. And the whole world knows that they are Messianic Jews and they want “Jew” in their identity card. Who cares? It’s not going to get you into heaven... I couldn’t care less what’s in my identity card. The only reason that I didn’t want *Notzri* (Christian) is because I didn’t want them to look at me and think I was a Catholic lighting candles to Mary...

There were several famous court cases of people who basically the government said, we will give you citizenship but you can’t have “Jew” in your identity card, and they refused, and so the government denied them citizenship. And it made it bad for all of the people that followed... Yes, being Jewish is a privilege, but with every privilege comes responsibility and they forget the responsibility part... I think what they’re really trying to do is prove they’re Jewish. That somewhere within themselves they’re not content with their identity. They’re not secure... It might not even have anything to do with Jewish... I remember somebody once said in a *kebila*¹²⁰ meeting that he was very concerned about his daughter’s Jewish identity and I said to him, “You have a problem because you should be more concerned about her identity in the Lord”. And in the end I saw that a lot of problems happened for that person with their daughter. And hopefully things are going to start to get better and people are really praying. But I think for a lot of these people that come over from America, they’re insecure in their Jewish identity already and now they come here. And the American Jews, whether they’re Believers or not, are the worst... They come over here and they become more Jewish here in Israel than they ever were in America. They weren’t kosher in America, but, my goodness, they’re more kosher than the koshers are. They never observed Shabbat there. Here they won’t drive a car on Shabbat. They never wore a *kipah* there. Here they’ll wear the black hat. You know, it’s like they go from one extreme to the other in trying to assert this identity that either you are or you’re not... I’ve seen it in so many Jewish people actually also from Europe. It’s just this need, I guess I call it a Jewish complex, it’s like this need to prove you’re Jewish... I just remember some of the Americans that I’ve known and it seems to me like that they’re just trying to prove that they’re something they’re not, if that makes sense. (Annie)

The text raises a number of questions related to the concept of authenticity. According to Stuart Charmé (2000), the issue of authenticity is raised when identity boundaries are challenged. Charmé very succinctly reminds us that all identity is socially constructed, and that “authentic” identity is a political concept used to expand or contract community boundaries at

¹²⁰ Congregation.

will, to determine who is acceptably, legitimately Jewish, and who is ersatz, a poseur, whether out of ignorance, evangelistic sympathy, or insecurity.

Annie makes reference above to an essentialist, monolithic concept of identity, a *Volksgeist*, that delimits members to a strictly bounded, ahistorical, largely homogenous ideal of Jewishness. Essential identity, into which one is born and raised, solves the unsettling problem of fluid, shifting and overlapping identity boundaries. Annie herself was not born into nor raised in this essentialized Jewish identity. Therefore she admittedly views herself as disqualified from the dispute over who is a Jew. Since she was raised in the Church with a Gentile Christian mother, and because she resigns herself to the *halachic* status-quo in Israel that a Jew is the child of a Jewish mother, she doesn't even expect to be welcomed as a Jew. At the same time, as a child of an intermarried couple, by embracing an essentialist view of Jewishness that she can also forfeit to the rabbinic status quo, she avoids both betraying her non-Jewish mother and challenging herself to recover a lost birthright:

But a lot of the problem comes about because you got these Americans who come and they are so proud of who they are and God forbid that you don't accept me for exactly what I am. Well, nobody is going to accept me for what I am... For me it's a lot easier than a lot of people I know. Because since my mother isn't Jewish, I fall into that thing where you really don't count so nobody's going to really argue with me... Some of these Believers don't realize they have got to get over it (Annie).

Annie emphasizes the need to be true first and foremost to one's spiritual identity, as though one's spiritual loyalty would be challenged or tainted by a concomitant increase in or concern about Jewish observance. Discourses of loyalty and purity ensure submission. What is Annie claiming to be the true "authentic" identity of these Messianic Jewish poseurs? There are three discourses at work in Annie's narrative. The first two compliment one another: secular Zionism and Protestant Christian Zionism. "Religion", and Judaism in particular, for secular Zionists and evangelical Christian Zionists, is predominantly depicted as empty, corrupted and inauthentic external forms; pure spirituality is internal. External signs of Jewish observance indicate conformity to a corrupt Judaism, which by its very nature endangers authentic spirituality. Therefore, secular Zionist, as well as Protestant Christian Zionist discourses, reject orthodox Jewish observance and find it anathema to their respective visions of salvation, yet at the same time, defer to orthodoxy by default when it comes to the official definition of who is a Jew. Thus, orthodox Judaism constitutes the third voice in Annie's discourse, filtered through and inflected by the other two. Annie's narrative of loyalty and purity, that specifically challenges the authenticity of American Messianic Jewish immigrants who increase their

Jewish observance after making *Aliyah*, points to a putative lack of submission on the part of these immigrants to her concepts of Israeli (secular Jewish) and Messianic (Protestant Christian) standards, which she reads as identity confusion at best or heresy at worst.

The stark contrast between Levi's and Annie's narratives reveals two entirely different visions of identity in general, and Messianic Jewish identity in particular. Levi understands identity to be a process by which a community, in this case, Israeli Messianic Jews, constructs the identities and traditions which they need to live and thrive. He reveals a consciousness of the political and historical processes of Jewish identity construction, and the hegemonic efforts of orthodoxy to essentialize and exclude. While Annie is struggling to promote a spiritualized "Jewish" identity, Levi is fighting for Messianic Jewish subjectivity, so that his children will be able to define themselves and their praxis within Israeli Jewish time and space.

In this sense, by Charmé's definition, Levi exhibits an "authentic" Jewish identity; "Authenticity is surely not present when it is claimed to have been located, fixed, or acquired. But it may be glimpsed in moments of self-awareness of the inevitable process of deconstructing and reconstructing all cultural identities" (2000:150). If Jewish identity is perceived not as a reified possession, but rather as a project situated in time and space, then many versions of Jewishness may exist, becoming salient in different situations. Thus, for example, increased observance in Israel can be understood as part of a recontextualization of Jewish identity by the Messianic Jewish immigrant, and perhaps part of a larger process of return along with other elements such as *Aliyah*, learning Hebrew and recalibrating the immigrant's life according to a Jewish calendar yearly cycle and Israeli seasons. The struggle for self-definition can therefore be understood as an authentic minority struggle *within* the Israeli discourse on Jewish identity (Ben-Ari & Bilu 1997).

Clifford (1997:10) provocatively inquires who is deploying the concept of authenticity, against whom, with what relative power and ability to sustain a hegemony. In the above two narratives, Levi is explicitly challenging the orthodox Jewish hegemony (and practically challenging dominant local paradigms represented in Annie's narrative) with an alternative claim of authentic Jewishness, working to expand the narrow borders of authenticated Jewishness in Israel. That is, Levi's position struggles for the right of Messianic Jews to self-definition and self-determination in Israel. Alternatively, Annie is busy policing identity borders, attempting to delegitimize certain personally undesirable Messianic Jewish practices by arguing the inauthenticity of those that seek out increased traditional Jewish observance

and struggle for an Israeli Messianic Jewish subjectivity. In her narrative, Messianic Jews clearly belong outside the Jewish camp, which has long been abandoned to rabbinism.

Is the second generation, the children mentioned in both narratives, a victim of the social marginalization of a narrow, exclusive society or of the insecurity and carnality of their parents? Why does Annie advocate a passive acceptance of her exclusion at the hands of rabbinic hegemony, rather than, like Levi, challenging a “faulty” status quo? Why are struggle for Jewish legitimacy and indigenous discourse in their own homeland, or a process of self-exploration and returning framed as insecurity? Does Annie posit that Believers have no right to challenge the establishment? Would the criticism of the Beresfords (Stern 1990) and others be so sharp had they succeeded in forcing the hand of the Israeli Supreme Court to recognize Messianic Jews as Jews under the Law of Return? Or is perhaps Annie’s diatribe really aimed at preserving another hegemony – that of non-observant, secular-style Hebrew Christian Zionists, who wish to preserve their dual identity of Hebrew nationality and Christian spirituality? Are these “other” Messianic Jews challenging the secular-style Messianic status-quo, claiming a certain identity integration, a continuity rather than rupture, in which Jewishness is spirituality, and Christianity is “other”? Levi’s re-imagination of the boundaries of Messianic Jewish identity seems a rather unwelcome challenge for Annie with her Christian mother, church upbringing, and denominational Israeli fellowship. After a long and painful route of returning to her nation and homeland through the Church, perhaps it is Annie who feels challenged once again to assert her membership in the Jewish club, this time putatively threatened by her very own fellow Messianic Jews.

In March of 2001, a group of Israeli Messianic Jewish translators and editors responsible for translating and publishing mostly western Christian materials from English into Hebrew, gathered for a day-long conference to discuss Israeli Messianic Jewish linguistic challenges, compare notes and possibly begin to solidify a working lexicon. Rubik Rosenthal, a secular journalist, editor and compiler of a Hebrew slang dictionary, was the main speaker invited to address the subject of Messianic Jewish jargon. His message to the group was if they want to avoid alienating the average Israeli, they must take pre-existing Hebrew words and laden them with additional Messianic meanings. After all, language is characterized by the detachability of signs (Berger & Luckmann 1966:36); words take on a life of their own once uttered, retaining or discarding original intent, making room for new meanings, contexts, speakers and audiences.

The second speaker, a veteran Christian Zionist missionary active in translation work, on the contrary, was in favor of the introduction of new, Greek-based religious terminology, since, he argued, the New Covenant introduces new concepts which are foreign to, and did not ever exist in the Hebrew Jewish experience. Israeli Messianic Jews should not be ashamed of the “good *news*”, he intimated. After presenting a brief historical survey of the various linguistic influences on Hebrew language development from early regional and trade intercourse to later colonialist influences, he argued that openness to surrounding cultural influences has always characterized the development of authentic Jewish culture and Hebrew language. Only cultures that feel threatened close their doors to external influences, and what do Israeli Messianic Jews have to fear from western Greco-Christian influences?

Yet, the overwhelming response of the translators emphasized the need “to take the Christian words out of the Hebrew lexicon”, or in the words of another participant, “to shake free of the Christian context”. One translator explained succinctly, “The fear of borrowed words is the fear of assimilation.”

Already we can see the development of two parallel and potentially antagonistic discourses. On the one hand, the Christian missionary’s paradigm views the gospel as a radically new and different message from the “Old Testament”, which cannot be fully expressed through any previously existing Jewish language or culture. This paradigm intimates that the indigenous translators are expressing ungodly fears and perhaps shame of the Christian “good news”, which is supposedly not a threat to the local culture, promising only salvation. “Universalistic” (i.e. Hellenized) language is presented as the only option, the only accurate version of culture-less, time-less spiritual truth. The local Israeli Jewish culture becomes a challenging obstacle: how can one sift out un-Believing religious influences so that the universal truth can be translated as “culture-free” as possible? Christian Zionist missionaries can work on translating Believer material to make it “relevant” to Israeli Jews, but their idea of relevancy is evidently very different from that of many indigenous Jewish Believers.

According to this paradigm, the missionary seeks to weed out Jewish religious influences and import faith concepts grown in foreign fields, whereas the indigenous Believing translators express the desire to cultivate and prune their home-grown faith culture in dialogue with non-Believing family, neighbors and friends. Whereas the missionary paradigm is “universal”, the Israeli Messianic Jewish paradigm is particularistic. The native Israeli translators feel pressed to find a relevant indigenous expression, while preserving the integrity and particular calling of

the Jewish people and birthright from the threat of assimilation. The indigenous effort reflects the belief that the Jewish people must autonomously cultivate their own unique identity, and that in order to do so, they must guard the borders of their language and culture from universalizing, de-Judaizing Greco-Christian colonial influences.

During the discussion time after the lectures, one translator suggested forming a committee to crystallize a standardized terminology for Hebrew translators. One seasoned editor goaded, “Who will sit on that board?” In other words, who will be granted the power to articulate and inscribe Israeli Messianic Jewish theological discourse and praxis? Haggai, one of the most creative and prolific publishers and editors of Messianic materials in the country and host of the conference, suddenly spoke out in a loud, forceful deep voice in the room full of keenly articulate women (all but two of the translators present were women). He curiously began by denigrating the efforts of the present conference attendees and spiritualizing their goals: “Let us remember why we are here. I prefer a spiritual leader with faulty Hebrew that knows God, to a fine Hebrew-speaker that doesn’t. We are not here to speak about language. We are here to speak about God.” He argued that it is better sometimes to be misunderstood, because this stimulates people to come to Believers and begin to ask questions. Anyway, he concluded, someone that has not yet been “born-again” cannot possibly be expected to understand or even begin to speak about the subject.

The curious behavior of this prominent publisher and spiritual leader deserves unpacking. First, he addresses the internal language politics of Messianic Jews, vociferously attempting to undermine the idea of a national language committee by implying that such efforts are vain and missing the mark by focusing on language and not on God. However, if he truly believed that, why then would he host the conference in his editorial offices and personally attend the meetings?

Haggai’s second point addresses his approach to non-Messianic Jews when speaking “about God”. Regardless of how culturally sensitive the translators’ finished products may be, the non-Believer cannot be expected to come to a spiritual understanding on his own, since he is incapable of doing so before the born-again experience. At the same time, the Believer is in the light and cannot learn from the benighted non-Believer, so attempts at cultural dialogue or the development of a comprehensible Messianic Jewish vernacular are futile. Only a Believer can know God and have spiritual understanding, requiring the un-Believer to appeal to the

Believer as the sole holder of knowledge in order to lead him to the inscrutable universal truth.

Like the missionary's paradigm, Haggai implies that his un-Believing audience must make a clean break with what they previously knew (Judaism), which cannot equip them with the tools to understand or discuss the new birth experience. This makes the willingness of the un-Believer to strip himself of Jewish culture a pre-condition to his acceptance of the culture-less (i.e. Jewish-less), universal truth of the gospel. The Believer is then placed in the face-to-face position of indoctrination, bringing new knowledge to a *tabula rasa*, an absolute position of power over the seeker rather than the interactive process of dialogue and sharing aspired to by the majority of the translators. Yet if Haggai truly believed that printed material on Messianic faith is of no avail to the spiritually blinded un-Believer, why would he bother working in his profession at all? Why not leave the un-Believers with the Scriptures and invest in door-to-door or friendship evangelism instead?

Obviously Haggai does find value in thinking about and discussing a Messianic Jewish vernacular. He himself leads this canonical work daily from his editorial offices. However, perhaps he doesn't want a professional lay group of women to determine which words can enter the Israeli Messianic Jewish lexicon, his bread and butter. In fact, by attacking the idea of a language committee and downplaying the importance of such work, he is preserving his *de facto* monopoly not only on Israeli Messianic discourse, but also on the theology and spiritual authority which the discourse represents. According to the status quo which he defends, publishing houses and magazines like his determine not only which materials are imported, translated and disseminated, but also the standard Hebrew words and theology in Messianic media. Moreover, with the growing demand for indigenous Messianic study program material in Hebrew, organizations such as Haggai's will continue to increase their practically undisputed, and heavily western Christian-financed impact on Israeli Messianic Jewish youth and young leadership.

One might say that in a simple linguistic sense, a "word" can be defined as a signifying vehicle which can be loaded with various connotations by its speakers. This is the sense that Rubik Rosenthal had in mind when he counseled the translators to take Hebrew words that already exist in mainstream Israeli parlance, and load them with additional, particularistic Messianic connotations, rather than introduce totally new, alien terminology from other languages and cultures. However, if words were simply neutral, malleable vehicles, why the apprehension of

alien terminology hinted at by Rosenthal and emphasized by the translators themselves? Rather than neutral signifiers, each word contains within itself its own history of contextualized utterances (Bakhtin 1999:129). Indeed, whichever way they turn, to the secular, the orthodox or to Christians, Israeli Messianic Jews often feel lost in translation “between Church and Synagogue” (Benhayim 1994). They find themselves either not fitting in or being coercively squeezed into pre-existing discursive fields (Herzfeld 1992). This coerciveness of language serves to reify current hegemonic constructions of reality that ignore, silence or marginalize Israeli Messianic Jews.

At the same time, Foucault (1998) speaks of discourse as a *Kampfplatz*, a battlefield, where subjects struggle over discourse, social structures and power relations. Hence Haggai’s impassioned speech seeking to preserve the hegemonic status quo of discourse in contemporary Israeli Messianic Jewish media. Thus, Annie, Levi, and the wordsmiths of the translators’ conference are all involved in a struggle over an Israeli Messianic Jewish discourse, promoting different “words” to define and represent Israeli Jewish Believers. In light of this struggle over the Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular, every “word” should also be understood to potentially represent a microcosm of an entire economy of discourse, theology and authority.

The struggle over theological autonomy

Some Messianic Jews maintain a distinct border between their Messianic and Jewish identities, elevating the one over the other in significance, while others, as Jerusalem scholar David Stern writes in his Messianic Jewish Manifesto, see themselves as “100% Jewish and 100% Messianic” (1991:25), envisioning not only harmony, but integration between the two, likening the community to a subset of two intersecting sets. As the examples of Levi and Annie illustrate above, the way that individual Messianic Jews integrate or segregate their Jewishness and their faith on a personal level directly impacts the way that they integrate or segregate the two in communal praxis and vice versa, as well as the way they integrate or segregate themselves as Messianic Jews in Israeli society and the Jewish and evangelical Christian worlds. In other words, Messianic Jewish praxis is not only a practical outworking of theology; it also reflects and defines the social boundaries of Messianic Jews, including, among other things, who is perceived as one’s brother and who is other.

This section, which analyzes the struggle over theological autonomy, first addresses segregation and integration, two Israeli Jewish Believing approaches to the treatment of Jewish

identity. The first sub-section addresses the concept of Jewish identity as nationality or ethnicity, and its segregation from the Believer's Messianic faith identity on the individual and communal levels. The second sub-section explores the position of certain streams within the Israeli Jewish Believing community which promote Jewishness as an integral element in the Believers' spiritual identity, consequently informing the ways in which they approach and understand God, and practice their faith. The third subsection, "From Nicaea to Ikea," offers a case study analysis to illustrate a struggle between Israeli Messianic leaders representing both "segregative" and "integrative" positions, over the exercise of subjective autonomy in the formulation of doctrine and practice of faith.

Segregation

The question arises again and again in Messianic Jewish writings, teachings and discussions: How does one integrate Jewishness, Israeliness and Messianic faith in Yeshua? Harvey, a LCJE (Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism) Israel coordinator posted a MCLN¹²¹ notice summarizing a LCJE meeting on Messianic Jewish identity in Israel held in Haifa on 1 June 2002, saying:

This whole issue of identity for the new young Israeli Messianic believer is a non-issue. It only creates more problems for the Israeli Messianic believers to discuss the question of our identity in the Israeli Body of Yeshua. Almost everyone in the discussion group were in agreement that this whole issue of Israeli Messianic identity has become irrelevant. This group of young Israeli believers, who consecrated three days of their time to tell their brethren in the flesh about Yeshua, were wondering what significance the identity issue would have in God's vast eternal plan for the redemption of our Jewish people... There was total agreement among all that we need to redeem the time... We need to concentrate our energies and time and activities as Israeli Messianic believers on those things that bring glory to His Name and count for eternity.

The issue of identity is not a non-issue. It is an issue that is so complicated that the youth were led to ignore it, particularly in a context which emphasizes imminent eschatology and consequently exigent evangelism. In the same way that ecological concerns of deforestation, pesticide abuse and diminishing natural energy resources might lose their potency if this were indeed believed to be the last generation before the end of the world as we know it, so, too, for Jewish Believers, whom one marries, how one raises one's children, or how one articulates Jewishness might seem to matter less at the end of the age. But what if the world continues in

¹²¹ Messianic Jewish leaders in Israel maintain a virtual network, the Messianic Congregational Leaders Network or MCLN, for mutually relevant discussions and announcements. Not a congregational leader, elder or head of a ministry in Israel, the researcher was denied access to the network. However the network manager at the time of my application kindly forwarded me a series of letters for research purposes on a discussion of the Jewish identity of Israeli Believers in Israel. A participant in the LCJE meeting, after hearing about this research, sent me the summary posted by Harvey.

its present configuration for another hundred or more years? What then of Jewish calling, generational continuity and the importance of understanding and articulating the proper relationship between faith and Jewish identity? Moreover, is ignoring Jewish identity “problems” truly an effective and more efficient means for this community to share the news of their Jewish Messiah with observant or even secular Jews and Israelis?

A self-described “secular” Israeli Messianic, Ami notes concerted efforts to ignore the sense of identity dissonance experienced by many Messianic Jews, and frames the difficulty of working out an integrated Israeli Messianic Jewish identity as a sociocultural problem rather than a spiritual insufficiency:

I heard once a message “Our identity is Jesus, period.” I think it’s ignoring the fact that we are made of body, soul and spirit. My identity is Jesus in the spirit but it’s not my identity in the flesh. In my body I was born as an Israeli, as a Jew, and I have a problem. I have to find out my identity, to find this kind of unity, unification of body, soul and spirit, and that’s the thing I think is a little bit complicated with us Messianic Jews because we’re not really sure how to be an Israeli and a Jew mixed-up with the spirituality of Jesus. (Ami)

Ami is one of the ten percent (10%) of interviewees who have left the country indefinitely. One is left to wonder whether the dissonance between his segregated Jewish body, Israeli soul and Messianic spirit, was a factor in his decision to leave.

First a Messianic, then a Jew. “I see my Christian identity to be of utmost importance,” writes Dov, a prominent Israeli Jewish Christian leader, prolific author and teacher, in an English-language letter shared with the MCLN concerning Jewish identity. Dov states that he sees no difference in Scripture between Jews and Gentiles regarding “present duties and privileges or future hopes” (“Our Messianic Identity.” 2001). The Jewish Believer should be a church-going Christian who leaves his “Jewishness at the doorstep of the church” (“Our Messianic Identity.” 2001.) and “unequivocally” rejects Judaism (“Jewish Identity in Christ.” 2001.).

Dov, like many other Jewish Believers in Israel, holds to a theology which conceives of Messianism and Jewish expression of faith (whether observance of the Law or rabbinic tradition¹²²), as mutually incompatible and competing for supremacy, in which case, Messianic

¹²² No Jewish Believer with whom I spoke expressed that Law observance is necessary for spiritual salvation. The debate among Israeli Messianic Jews is over whether observance is an obligatory or desirable lifestyle expression of one’s Messianic faith as a Jew, and how to go about working out such principles in practice.

identity must be supreme and center, challenged by none other. All particularist “national” identities, including Jewish identity, must be left “at the doorstep of the church”. According to Dov, who actively opposes Messianic Judaism’s somewhat characteristic pro-observance, pro-tradition and pro-independent congregational stances, Messianic Judaism “constitutes the greatest mortal threat to the evangelisation of our people”. As an alternative, he offers the classic Christian mission position on Jewish identity: “Jewish Christians do not perceive of their culture as a religious heritage, merely as a cultural expression of the nationality and of the way their *unenlightened* fellow Jews worship God” (“Our Messianic Identity.” 2001. Italics added).

At the same time, Dov recognizes that Jewish Believers should work towards offering their people “a bold alternative” to rabbinic Judaism. He believes that faith in Yeshua as Messiah is the ultimate panacea for the failure of rabbinism and Zionism to continue to lead the Jewish people forward into the 21st century. Yet, after two books, articles and numerous teachings critiquing Messianic Judaism, he doesn’t know what form this “bold alternative” should take: “Now comes the clincher; you can ask, ‘Ah, but what form will that alternative take?’ I confess I do not know.” (“Our Messianic Identity.” 2001.). And again in a later letter, “I frankly do not know. But I do know this: the course mapped out for us by Messianic Judaism is plainly mistaken” (“Jewish Identity in Christ.” 2001.).

The grace versus works dichotomy. Models of Messianic-Jewish integration are sometimes poorly received by Israeli Jewish Believers in practice. Faith forms which require thought, study and more engaged praxis are commonly associated with popular conceptions of Jewish orthodoxy, often perceived as laborious religiosity which squelches rather than elevates the spirit. The intensity of orthodox practice, associated in many Jewish Believers’ minds with more observant Messianic faith forms, is exclusive toward those who are not study-oriented, toward women in general, and toward women outside of traditional family structures. Many Believers are drawn to faith in the first place because they have come to know an all-loving, all-inclusive God, and they do not wish to reconstruct what they perceive to be exclusive androcentric religious borders.

Ziva, a native Israeli Believer from a difficult family background who never finished high school, married and divorced at a very young age and raised her children as a single working mother, emphasizes the simplicity of faith in Yeshua, which doesn't require years of formal religious study in order to be a good Jew:

If we look at our Law, it is not written that we need all these external trappings, and it isn't written that we need laws in order to walk with God. It is written, "Be simple¹²³ before the Lord your God." If we were to go by religion... a four-year old child almost cannot be a religious Jew, by the time he learns all the laws... (Ziva, Hebrew).

The "work" that it takes to live as a Jew and the "catch-up" study described by Mordechai and Michael below are illustrative of Swidler's concept of the drastic and costly cultural "retooling" that takes place in periods of ideological change (1986). Retooling is not only unpopular by definition, it also contradicts some Jewish Believers' concepts of an anti-works, grace-based salvatory faith, in which not only salvation is by grace, but the entire Believing lifestyle is characterized by what two interviewees call an effortless, non-obligatory culture of "Graceland, credit card grace, Amnesty International" (Benjamin & Gila). Dr. Daniel Juster, scholar and American-Israeli Messianic Jewish emissary notes: "We too easily dismiss that which requires some effort and learning as unspiritual. We make absolute the forms in which we have personally experienced blessing and then dismiss other forms" (Juster 2006, www.tikkunministries.org).

The grace-versus-works argument against Jewish practice is not only resonant of popular western evangelical Christianity strongly influenced by the individual, success and comfort-oriented American culture. Messianic grace is also oftentimes dichotomized against a stereotyped works-oriented orthodox Judaism. For example, Paul Morris, a Gentile missionary to Jews, speaking after a prominent Messianic Israeli theologian at an International Jewish Evangelical Fellowship (IJEFF) conference in 2005, blatantly rejects Messianic Judaism, claiming, for example, that "'Messianic Judaism' is a syncretistic expression in itself because it brings the name of another (and opposing) faith into union with that of belief in Jesus as Messiah". With missionaries such as Morris who espouse supersessionist doctrines and categorically cede Judaism to "the Rabbis who reject Jesus", calling it both "the religion of the

¹²³ *Tamim*. From *Deuteronomy* 18:13, see also *Psalms* 119:80, for example. Ziva uses the word in the more modern sense of child-like simplicity, even naiveté. A word often used to describe the proper condition of an animal for sacrifice or a worshipper's heart as "blameless" or "without blemish", it also carries the sense in Scripture as being "complete" or "having integrity" (Even-Shoshan 1993, Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius 1979).

Rabbis” and “the most anti-Gospel religion in history”, it is no wonder that Jews “converted” by such missionaries might avoid Jewish practices¹²⁴.

Ami describes a more popular Israeli aversion to black yarmulke-wearing Jews (ultra-Orthodox) among his secular non-Believing friends from the Tel Aviv area:

Today you could ask every Israeli, if I would come to you and speak about God with a big black yarmulke, what would he think, and he would say, “I think that you’re a thief”... Every Israeli from my society, that I’m engaged with, wouldn’t think that the external things would refer to your holiness. Actually, they would rather get to know you and see your heart to find out if you are holier than them or not (Ami).

Interestingly, according to a survey of the Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel (“Population Demographics.” 2007), there are more national orthodox (9%) Israelis than ultra-orthodox (8%). In addition, national orthodox tend to be in greater contact with traditional and secular Israelis than the ultra-orthodox who lead a more insular lifestyle. Therefore it would seem strange for Messianic Jews to reject orthodoxy on the basis of reactions to the more extreme elements in Israeli society who come into less frequent contact with Messianics and who constitute a smaller minority than the more moderate modern orthodox. Nonetheless, the narratives are full of comments which stereotypically equate observance with some of the most extreme forms of ultra-orthodoxy.

The impact on the relatively marginalized community of Messianic Jews of negative associations evoked by orthodox Jews in Israel should not be underestimated. Jewish orthodoxy has come to represent to many native Israelis the opposite of holiness, righteousness and integrity, and the epitome of corruption and moral turpitude. Indeed, Ami himself would never consider adopting an orthodox lifestyle or appearance for himself.

¹²⁴ “Syncretism occurs when critical and basic elements of the Gospel are lost in the process of [cultural] contextualisation [of the gospel]... Syncretism then can either be the incorporation of godless and pagan ideas into New Covenant teaching or the adding of superseded Old Covenant teachings... In fact ‘Messianic Judaism’ is a syncretistic expression in itself because it brings the name of another (and opposing) faith into union with that of belief in Jesus as Messiah, Son of God and only Saviour. No amount of redefinition will alter the fact that the term Judaism is the universally accepted one for the religion of the Rabbis who reject Jesus as Messiah... Would we find ‘Evangelical Mormons’ acceptable for converted Mormons? Why is it that Messianic Jews feel they can go down this road but not others? It is because of the Old Covenant link of their culture. But the Judaism link is what matters. That is the name of the religion of the Rabbis - the most anti-Gospel religion in history.” (Morris 2007).

Nurit, a native Israeli Believer, explains clearly how she is simply convinced that her orthodox Messianic Jewish friends are missing the mark by *not* abandoning Jewish sources and embracing a non-observant lifestyle:

We have very close friends that are even ultra-orthodox religious. Now he didn't stop his whole lifestyle, he only added in Yeshua. Now there is something wrong with this because it is written in the Gospel of *Matthew*, chapter 9, which says that we will put new wine into new wineskins, because if we put new wine into old wineskins, they will burst, and then all of the new wine will spill out. The point here is that we need to leave our old lifestyle in order to enter into a new lifestyle... He simply needs to leave his old life. Which means what? For example, to leave the *siddur*. He has some issue with the *siddur*. He still sometimes reads the *Zohar*¹²⁵. So [he needs] to part with the *Zohar*, to part with all of the external books. Just let go of them. To go only on the clean and pure Word of God... the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament (*HaBrit HaYeshana*) and New Testament... without commentaries... All of what is written in the New Testament is essentially the "new wine"... and to trust God that He will explain it by the Holy Spirit... (Nurit, Hebrew).

Note also the curious description of non-Messianic Jews in the song "Brethern, My Heart's Desire" from the album "The Restoration of Israel" sung by American Messianic Jewish musician and leader, Joel Chernoff (1999), whose music has influenced both American and Israeli Messianic Jews for decades:

I tell you the truth in Messiah
Sorrow and grief fill my heart
My people, my brethren are dying
I could wish I were lost
That they might be found in Him

Searching for G-d in the Torah
Doing the works of the law
Striving in vain to be righteous
Not knowing we need only to trust in Him

One day He'll come out of Zion
The One Who was pierced they will see
My people will turn to Messiah
Their sins He'll forgive,
Righteous they'll live in Him.

The song, an interpretation of some of Shaul's (Paul's) words in the book of Romans concerning his people¹²⁶, conjures up a nostalgic image of black and white-clad ultra-Orthodox fervently poring over stacks of Talmudic books. Yet according to the United Jewish

¹²⁵ A book of mystical rabbinic commentary.

¹²⁶ The lyrics to the song, copied directly from the pamphlet accompanying the CD, are based on verses from *Romans* 9-11, and were not written by Chernoff himself.

Communities and Jewish Federation System's National Jewish Population Survey 2000-1, less than 46% of American Jews belong to a synagogue, while less than 27% attend services monthly.¹²⁷ Of those Jews who are synagogue members, 45% belong to synagogues which are Reform, Reconstructionist or Other. American Jewry is also characterized by an overall current intermarriage rate of 47% and a secular Jewish intermarriage rate of 72%.

How is it in a country where over half of the Jews are unaffiliated with a Jewish house of prayer, and even more are marrying out of the community, that the Jewish people are portrayed as seeking for God in the Torah and striving to be righteous by keeping the Law? This statement might characterize a minute percentage of Jews today, but for the Messianic Jewish audience, in addition to a stereotypical depiction of the Jewish people, it conveys a clear message that seeking God in the Hebrew Scriptures and keeping the commandments is dichotomous to faith in the Messiah. Doing the “works of the law” and seeking righteousness according to the Torah is vain since all that is necessary is trust in Messiah. Study and observance are equated with death and vanity, whereas the Messiah embodies life and the path to true righteousness. The Messianic Jew who listens to the song is left with a grim admonition that he ought not “backslide” into some form of Torah study and observance. The Messiah will forgive the sins of the Jewish people and then they will live righteously. However on the substance of righteous living, and particularly of righteous *Jewish* praxis, apart from the obvious baseline of salvation by faith, the song is curiously silent.

In addition to the study, teaching and observance of Jewish law, ritualized elements of Jewish worship are often viewed ambivalently at best by Israeli Jewish Believers. One layperson interviewee involved in the organization of congregational services tells of an encounter with his spiritual leader. David suggested singing the *Shema*¹²⁸ during a particular service, and the leader agreed with a caveat that it be “led by the Spirit”. This statement seemed strange to David when used in reference to the *Shema*, a direct quote from Scripture, declared by Yeshua himself as the most important commandment of all, and sung by a congregation of God-fearing Messianic Israelis. He noted that this same leader would never think to voice the same caveat when planning to perform traditional Protestant-style rituals such as the “Lord’s supper” or the “taking up of the offering”.

¹²⁷ The survey was constructed in such a way that only those who were determined to have “stronger Jewish connections” were asked to report on their synagogue affiliation and attendance. It is highly likely that the less “Jewishly-connected” Jews would significantly lower these percentages. For information on the survey structure and its results, see <www.ujc.org>.

¹²⁸ Scripture from *Deuteronomy* 6:4 which has been considered since ancient times to be the watchword of Judaism and the Jewish people.

Interestingly, charismatic clapping, dancing in place or around the room, waving flags, blowing trumpets, glossalia, shouting, spontaneous prophecy and so forth, or the more conservative Brethren-style practices of sitting in pews, singing from printed hymnals, avoiding embodied expressions of enthusiasm such as clapping or dancing, reading from pre-selected texts, etc., are not interpreted in any way as Believing cultural forms but rather as the “pure” (i.e. “culture-free”) leading of God’s Spirit (unless the interpreter belongs to the opposing camp, in which case such practices may imply lack of spirituality). On the other hand, traditional “Jewish” practices of liturgical readings, cantorials, Torah readings, *midrashic* expositions and so forth, as previously mentioned, are considered man-generated, carnal attempts at achieving salvation or pleasing God. It is also interesting that the heart intent of the more observant Jewish Believing practitioner is somehow assessed and found wanting, or at best, his depth and degree of spirituality and spiritual understanding are considered suspiciously irresolute, whereas the antinomian Believer is automatically assumed to be reasonably spiritual, unequivocal in his faith and holding to a proper understanding of salvation by grace.

A pro-observant native Israeli leader described the phenomenon in a phone conversation (25 September 2001) as follows: “Whatever smells Jewish is not good, while whatever smells Christian is very good. I have come to the conclusion that this is anti-Semitism, period.” What seems certain is that practical attempts to integrate Jewish expression or culture within the boundaries of Messianic Jewish praxis seems to be generally treated with ambivalence at best by a majority of those affiliated with the Israeli Jewish Believing community.

The “common denominator”. Another major challenge to Messianic-Jewish integration is the desire to promote and preserve unity among the various Jewish and Gentile Believing groups and individuals in Israel, who represent a vast variety of doctrinal, denominational, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel, study or outreach organizations, and artistic or child-oriented endeavors in particular often try to reach and unite the widest spectrum of Believers possible under one umbrella to achieve their specific goals. In order to develop such working relationships, the organizations will generally adopt what might be called a working “common denominator” Believing theology and practice, attempting to avoid commonly divisive subjects such as charismatic or non-charismatic practices, political views or issues of Jewish identity and its relationship to faith and faith expression, whose inclusion within the borders of acceptable praxis is under debate. The same principled refusal to deal with potentially “divisive” issues that allows them the broadest

support within the Israeli body of Believers, theoretically positions them best to influence that body in their meetings, publications and productions, which unite vastly differing groups and individuals in study, worship, prayer, service and fellowship.

For example, the national music conference sponsored by the MJAI is an effort to foster the presentation and distribution of the newest worship music developed in the local body, and also produces the printed worship songbooks and overheads most widely-used in the local congregations. Soldiers', singles' and childrens' conferences, the national outreach committee and nation-wide educational and discipleship programs, offer teaching, training, worship and fellowship times to similarly stationed individuals.

Potentially "divisive" issues are said to be left to the individual. When this comes to songwriting and presenting at the music conference, for example, each songwriter is more or less free to express him or herself, but the decision to use their songs in a congregation setting is in the hands of the specific worship team leaders in each congregation. However, how is joint worship led? How are disciples or students taught to pray or study in discipleship and study programs? How are individuals trained in the art of outreach?

There is an often unspoken agreement of trust in which broad alliances of Israeli Jewish Believers are made possible precisely because they reputedly avoid arbitrating doctrinal decisions on controversial matters. Ostensibly rather than tilting the balance one way or the other, they seek to preserve a common denominator status-quo.

In the management of broad-based conferences and study programs, the very basis of organization, at best, reflects the organizational leaderships' perception of "the [present] Israeli Messianic situation", in the words of one leader. Nonetheless, acting on subjective perceptions of the status quo reifies and promotes a particular standard "operating procedure", articulating a *de facto* Israeli Messianic Jewish standard. This is particularly the case when it comes to the expression of Jewish identity in such general Israeli Messianic frameworks. There is generally little if any public space reserved for Jewish observance (unless it overlaps with Israeli civil observances, such as in some holiday "celebrations", for example), and a Messianic-Jewish dichotomy, rather than integration, is generally being promoted as the norm.

The biggest hitch in relegating Jewish praxis to the private sphere is the assumption that such an approach is feasible. It is feasible for those who seek to preserve bits and pieces of

traditional Jewish ritual in their home, such as a candle-lighting ritual on Friday evening or even the private laying of *tefillin*¹²⁹, or for those who uphold mildly obtrusive public practices such as the wearing of a *kipah*¹³⁰ or *tsitsit*¹³¹, the use of occasional traditional prayers such as the *Hamotzi*¹³² said over bread, and even an occasional public ritual redemption of a first-born child. It is particularly feasible for those, like Yoni described below, who have extended non-Messianic Jewish family in Israel, who preserve a link *for them personally* with traditional Judaism and/or synagogal life, so that come time for the Messianic child's *brit*¹³³, *bar mitzvah*¹³⁴ or wedding, familial rather than Messianic networks can be activated to enact aspects of sociocultural Jewish identity¹³⁵.

Relegating Jewish practice to the private sphere is not feasible, however, for those who promote an observant Jewish identity which is fully and consistently integrated into various aspects of their lives, in the ways that they study Scripture, disciple new Believers, raise and teach their children, reach out to non-Messianic Jews, organize their home and community, worship, prayer, food, fellowship, etc¹³⁶. This should come as no surprise to Jewish Believers in Israel surrounded by orthodox Jews whose everyday existence is shaped by *halacha*. According to Swidler's tool kit model, any identity consists of ideas, values and strategies of action. Secular Israelis, by definition, do not practice prayer, worship, discipleship or study of Scripture (unless they are cult members). If the ideas, values and strategies of action practiced in these "common denominator" settings are not particularly Jewish, and neither are they Israeli, then what are they? The research findings indicate that the common denominator "tool

¹²⁹ Phylacteries.

¹³⁰ Yarmulke, a male head covering, pl. *kipot*.

¹³¹ Traditional fringed garment, based on *Numbers* 16:37-41.

¹³² The traditional prayer over the breaking of bread.

¹³³ Circumcision.

¹³⁴ Coming of age of a boy when he takes responsibility for his own actions before God and is expected to keep the commandments.

¹³⁵ The reliance on non-Believing Jewish channels among Israeli Messianic Jews forms an additional challenge, because it reduces the desire of these practitioners to construct parallel Messianic channels for Jewish expression. Immigrants, on the other hand, who often lack close extended family members in the country, may have a greater motivation to find routes of Jewish expression within the Israeli Messianic community. One wonders whether this familially-mediated connection to the Synagogue will be extended to the second generation of Israeli Messianic Jews and beyond.

¹³⁶ The relegation of Jewish practice to the private realm assumes that one can practice Jewish observance individually, if one feels led to do so. However, many Jewish practices require communal gatherings, not only according to traditional practice, but even according to fundamental readings of Scripture. For example, one clearly cannot observe a "holy convocation" alone in one's home. Holy convocations are called for the following days in the Scriptures: Shabbat, the first and last days of Passover, Shavuot, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, the first and eighth days of Sukkot. The "common denominator" strategy of action creates a dilemma for the Jewish Believer who is attempting to observe the commandments, in which he must seek an alternative spiritual framework often during the holiest days of the biblical calendar. At these times he is left on his own to worship in a non-Believing Jewish context, or not at all, and cannot, of course, invite non-Believing Jews to his Messianic framework to worship with him at those times. Some congregations meet on some but not all of these holy days, while some "celebrate" the holidays during the closest corresponding weekly meeting.

kit” is, for the most part, adopted from western evangelical Protestantism, with a local overlay of Israeli language and culture¹³⁷.

Even activities or practices in which the observant Believer can respectfully decline to participate, can make certain observant Israeli Messianic Jews feel uncomfortable or out-of-place with other Jewish Believers, and keep them from inviting their un-Believing Jewish friends. Such practices may include, to give some examples, the lighting of a *kumzitz* (bonfire) on a Friday night to promote group solidarity among youth attendees of a conference or retreat, the declaration of a group fast on the Sabbath during an intercessory prayer conference, the common placing of Hebrew Scriptures on the floor during meetings, requisite travel on the Sabbath to attend activities, the cheerful exchanging of gifts during the Hanukkah/Christmas season rather than the sending of *mishloach manot*¹³⁸ during Purim, the holding of baby “showers” before the birth of a baby rather than a *brit*, *zeved bat*¹³⁹ or naming party after the birth, or consistent lack of reference to weekly Torah or *Haftara*¹⁴⁰ portions, not to mention the absence of a Torah scroll, particularly in Sabbath services.

In summarizing the issue of segregation or integration, the attempts of broad-based Israeli Jewish Believer organizations and endeavors to be as inclusive as possible by segregating Jewish praxis to the private sphere, effectively excludes or alienates observant Messianic Jews, and necessarily promotes a “non-Jewish” environment of praxis. Equal participation, in effect, is only offered to those willing to resemble the dominant streams. This sameness is often confused with unity and a certain enlightenment (Bekerman 2004). The lowest “common denominator” promoted by these organizations, therefore, is common to relatively non-observant (secular-style) Israeli Messianic Jews, Christian Zionists and a few particularly pro-Israel Arab Christians. While many pro-observant Israeli Messianic Jews can easily “pass” in “common denominator” settings, and often do so for the sake of fellowship and “unity”, many describe experiencing feelings of dissonance and alienation. Furthermore, some ponder how it is that they have found themselves hegemonically compelled by their fellow Believers to camp outside the borders of their birthright – their people, their tongue and their worship

¹³⁷ Perhaps the perception of western Christian praxis as a neutral facilitating ground is preceded in this region, as in most others, by the complex relations between the hegemony of the English language, American-fueled global consumerism, and the vast, well-appointed network of Anglo-American based world missions. For example, one Israeli Believer related how he began attending local Bible studies in order to get free Coca-Cola, the cool new American drink for youth, and only later came to faith in Yeshua.

¹³⁸ Sending of gift packages during the Purim holiday.

¹³⁹ *Zaved Bat* is the communal consecration and or naming of a girl baby.

¹⁴⁰ The *Haftara* refers to portions of Scripture from the Writings and the Prophets which correspond to the weekly Torah portions, and are also read weekly in synagogues.

of the God of Israel – despite their desire to practice their faith as Believing Jews in their own land.

Two models of segregated Jewish identity. Rami and Yoni in the two following sections offer two examples of congregational identity praxes. Rami, a native Israeli who spent much of his formative adult years in the west, promotes a “universal” style of Believing worship, whose elements can be found in evangelical Protestant services the world over. To this he adds a fervent nationalism. Yoni, on the other hand, who lived, came to faith and entered spiritual leadership all on his native Israeli soil, prefers a communal worship style also reflecting universal evangelicalism, yet emphasizing unity between different cultural groups present in the group- native Israelis, English-speaking immigrants, Russian-speaking immigrants, new Arab Christians, and western Gentile Christians- among other things, through group dancing and flag-waving, mixed Hebrew and Arabic worship songs and joint Jewish and Arab-led public prayers. Apart from symbolic gestures, Yoni reserves Jewish cultural expressions for private, familial spheres. Both Rami and Yoni attempt to maintain an Israeli Messianic corporate faith expression segregated from Jewish praxis.

British anthropologist Mary Douglas writes, “Any symbol or ritual which exalts the spirit over the body is tantamount to a ‘detachment from or revolt against the established social forms’. Conversely, symbols in which ‘body and mind are intimately united, any emphasis on the necessity to mingle spirit and matter, implies that the individual is by nature subordinate to society and finds his freedom within its forms’.” (Douglas 1970: 195-196). We hope to illustrate below how Rami and Yoni both promote a “detachment”, in Douglas’ terms, from the Jewish religious establishment, and a concomitant integration (“subordination” in Douglas’ terms), Rami with Zionist Israeli nationalism, and both leaders with the multi-national “body of Messiah”.

Jewishness as nationalism. In June of 2005, the researcher observed a Shavuot¹⁴¹ service at a Messianic Jewish congregation. The worship song themes seemed standard and unrelated to the holiday. Congregants sat or stood in their places, at times clapping or raising their hands in worship. Rami did not speak on Ruth or refer at all to Shavuot. He spoke of the centrality of Yeshua in Scripture and of his divine nature, saying among other things:

¹⁴¹ Shavuot is the Biblical Feast of Weeks, called Pentecost in the New Covenant.

In recent years, people have been asking me: “What is the vision of this congregation?”. I answer, “Yeshua the Messiah”. They say, “Yeah, yeah, but what about the vision?” Brothers and sisters, if you see something else, that’s simply not it. (Rami)

At the end of the message, the children entered the sanctuary dressed in white, donning colorful wreaths and carrying baskets of fruit. When they arrived at the front of the hall, they sang a traditional Israeli agricultural song. Congregants had been asked to provide cheesecakes which were laid out on tables after the service for an informal “fellowship” time.

During a regular weekly service, this congregation follows a standard evangelical Protestant formula of free-form, (non-liturgical) non-denominational, mostly western-style worship, announcements from the front, the offering baskets passed around, after which the children are dismissed to their classes during the hour-long message, a concluding song or two and then a congregational blessing or parting prayer. This Shavuot service retains more or less the same ritual framework performed weekly in the congregation, with holiday enrichments tacked on the end. Customary Israeli agricultural elements are introduced by the children, and traditional cheesecakes are served after the service. However, the worship songs and the message very clearly did not relate in any way to the Hebrew Scripture, New Covenant or even Zionist themes of Shavuot. Instead, the leader addressed the centrality of Yeshua to Scripture and his divine nature, a loaded issue at that time in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community.

The apparent disconnect between the worship/message and the traditional/ritualized elements of the service are indicative. According to the “vision” of this particular leader, spirituality stands alone. It is “simply” Yeshua. The spiritual elements of the service are to remain untainted by embodied ritual that may smack of religiosity or distract the worshipper from Yeshua. The pastor uses the Shavuot service message to address two dangerous phenomena, which according to his paradigm, are inherently linked: One is the strongly perceived threat of confusing the goals of Messianic Jewish praxis: Yeshua is the center and the goal, “the Essence” [*Ha'Ikar*]¹⁴²; anything else is superfluous. Faith must remain untainted by tradition and ritual, a universal spirituality distinct from particularistic nationality. Confusion on this point leads to the decentralization of Yeshua, and the second dangerous phenomenon, namely the contemporary heresy which denies Yeshua’s divine nature.

¹⁴² "העיקר" - *Ha'Ikar*. A colloquial Hebrew expression used to reduce complex situations to a core essence, stripping them of extraneous matters. For example, “Yeshua is *Ha'Ikar*”, meaning that Yeshua is the essence, and everything else is peripheral trappings.

The stage properly set, the service now progresses from the “spiritual” segments, to the national embodied segments that are highly ritualized traditional textbook Israeli civil religious practices. Shavuot is portrayed as an agricultural holiday of Israel (fruit baskets, a harvest song, and traditional white garb of the harvest celebration) that connects the Israeli Believer to the land, which ensures the continuity of the Jewish people (the children). The mouths which previously sang spiritual praises are now free to eat milk and honey, at once reclaiming the land, and incorporating themselves into the Israeli collective. Thus, the individual worshipper is “spiritually” integrated with the universal Messiah through a common (western Protestant-style) ritual worship format and content, while her particularist corporeal identity is constrained to communally-enacted, nationally-sanctioned embodied ritual, integrating her with her nation.

The service described above, devoid of any Jewish religious content, takes place in Israel, on the closest Saturday service to one of the three pilgrimage holidays of Judaism. According to an application of Douglas’ theory, in the first half of the service, we observe ritual discourse and praxis which exalt spirit over body, signaling a revolt against the established forms of the Jewish religion. Quite clearly, both the discourse and praxis reflect a conscious eradication (Deshen 1970) of Jewish thought or practice and an embracing of Gentile Christian “universalism”. In the second half of the service, mind and body are pleasurably integrated, indicating the integration of the congregants with Israeli national culture, and the freedom to embody and impart its forms.

Jewishness is superseded by Israeliness, which provides a particularistic collective context for a universalized personal faith in Yeshua. One perceived advantage of Israeli nationalism over Jewish identity is its embrace of a much broader range of individuals within its borders (apart from most Arabs¹⁴³), avoiding the sticky dilemma of how to integrate Gentiles. Secular Israeli culture can encompass all those that embrace Israel, Jew or Gentile, as long as they function minimally and physically remain within state borders to participate in Believer activities.

Rather than addressing the practical articulation of Israeli Messianic Jewish identity within the congregation, tackling the complex relationships between faith in Yeshua, Israeliness and

¹⁴³ It is interesting to note that the one family of Arab Believers that attended the congregation became increasingly uncomfortable with the overtly Zionist interpretations of Scripture and eventually left the congregation. Therefore, Israeliness is perhaps a less challenging cultural paradigm than Jewishness, which is known for its emphasis on peoplehood and complex treatment of the *ger*, but a Zionist Israeliness offers its own brand of exclusivity within the Believing community, particularly effecting relations with Arab Christians.

Jewishness, Rami's community chooses to retreat to a non-confrontational, flattened and spiritualized rubric: The congregational vision is "Yeshua the Messiah" (in Israel). As in the case of Harvey above, one wonders whether a simplistic reduction of sociocultural identity issues best serves the long-term needs of the Israeli Messianic Jewish community. At any rate, regardless of the lack of an open discussion of identity, the above Israeli Messianic praxis speaks for itself, establishing a universal Messianism in an Israeli nationalistic context.

Jewishness as ethnicity. Israeli Messianic Jewish congregational leader, Yoni, describes in his interview his congregation's vision to include both Jews and Arabs, according to the New Covenant principle of the "one new man" (*Ephesians* 2:15), the integration of Jew and Gentile and the abolishing of "the middle wall of partition" (2:14) in the Messiah. He is concerned that if congregational praxis is "too Jewish", this will alienate Arabs, just as if he were to attend a Christian church and be alienated by Gentile Christian symbols. The situation as Yoni sees it is mutually exclusive: "For me, their salvation is more important than *this external [Jewish] identity...*" One cannot have an overtly "Jewish" expression and at the same time make Arabs feel at home.

Accordingly, Yoni attempts to construct a neutral space where Jew and Arab can come together without unnecessary cultural obstacles, to worship the God of Israel, in the land of Israel, and in Hebrew (apart from one Arabic song a week). He describes the joint Arab-Jewish "Lord's supper", a symbolic act which unifies the body of Believers (Bossy 1983, Kaplan unpublished), in which Yoni prays a traditional Jewish prayer, and an Arab pastor is free to pray as he sees fit. His goal seems to be symmetry and bi-national co-existence in the Messiah. Yoni's "personal lifestyle" is left unchanged, he claims, consequently resulting in a dual existence. In the congregation, he blesses over the communion bread and wine, and at home, over the *kiddush* wine and bread:

I always do the Lord's supper with an Arab, an Arab pastor who is a part of our congregation. When I pray over the bread, I say, "Blessed are You oh Lord, our God, King of the Universe who brings forth bread from the earth". And he, when he does the wine, he doesn't pray that prayer. I don't expect an Arab to pray a Jewish or traditional prayer like that. So he does it in the way that he understands and it is wonderful! It's possible to see how we fit together... In other words, I don't have to change my personal lifestyle in order to make [the Arab Believer] happy. At home I love to celebrate *Kabbalat Shabbat* on Friday night. I invite [Arab Believers] to my home and they [participate] in *Kabbalat HaShabbat*... We sing songs and bless over the wine and the bread. But in the congregation it's a little different. (Yoni, Hebrew)

For Yoni, Jewishness is culture, a private matter that one practices at home or with non-Messianic family members, which does not represent or shape the Believing community expression beyond a symbolic element here or there intended to emphasize a complimentary unity between the culturally different groups within the congregation. Instead of an open communal embrace of Jewish culture, the congregants dance a cross between Israeli folk and charismatic free-form dance while waving colorful flags according to a new western charismatic tradition. Here, as well as elsewhere in many Israeli Messianic circles, western Christian praxis appears to be a commonly adopted “neutral” common denominator.

Yoni proposes that his congregational formula facilitates the co-existence of two potentially antagonistic social groups within one faith community. In Mary Douglas’ terms, Yoni promotes a collective detachment, or segregation, from the Jewish religious establishment, and an integration into the “universal” body of Messiah. However, we have taken a glimpse at the particular price that the Jewish and Arab sides pay in this fragile union. The Jewish Believers forfeit culturally Jewish and overtly biblical communal faith expressions (among other things, Torah scrolls or high holiday services), and the Arabs forgo worship in their own tongue and at least some form of Arab Christian worship style. For those from a Muslim or Druze background, even the adoption of Arab Christian culture is a revolutionary step, but is western Christian culture indeed the “neutral” common ground suitable for indigenous Israeli Arabs and Jews? Moreover, can the two cultural groups successfully sustain their “external” social identities for generations, when particularistic praxis is denied them in communal space?

Several second-generation Israeli Messianic Jews interviewed recall one of their parents having been quite sentimentally attached to Jewish traditions, which he or she inconsistently struggled to keep to some limited degree at home. The children themselves, now Jewish Believing adults, did not osmotically inherit their parents’ sentiments however, often cultivated in distant non-Messianic Jewish childhood environments of praxis, and generally suppressed in Israeli Believing communal praxis. Though the parents’ unfinished business of identity integration may haunt their children, Israeli children (not to mention those influenced by an array of western Christian trends) are socialized to silence the Jewish ghosts of the past¹⁴⁴ (Almog 1997, Hebrew; Gertz 1997, Hebrew). Rather than taking on the project of integrating their parents’ fragmented, indeterminate Jewish praxis with Messianic faith, the children

¹⁴⁴ Unless those ghosts are mobilized to serve the Israeli nation-state, as in living Holocaust memorials (Kidron 2005).

simply became more secular in practice. Findings indicate that personal memories and sentiment do not constitute a solid foundation for generational continuity.

An additional concern for Jewish Believers is the degree of Jewish education and praxis known to Messianics which might enable them to maintain a Jewish identity and even minimal level of observance in their homes. What of the Jewish Believers raised in non-observant homes that are now not only unaffiliated with a mainstream synagogue, but also members of a congregation that does not teach or promote corporate or private Jewish practice? Many native-born Israelis obtain a cursory “Jewish” education even in non-religious public schools. But what of the Jewish Believing immigrants from non-observant backgrounds? Is it likely that the very communities which refrain from Jewish expressions of faith in the public sphere will at the same time be offering courses or encouraging adult education towards private practice? There was no indication of such private support systems in operation according to the interviews or field observations.

One must also ask these questions in light of the intermarriage rate of Messianic Jews with Gentile Christians, which is by a very conservative estimate over 30% among laypeople (Kjær-Hansen & Skjott 1999:72) and over 70% among leaders in the Jewish State of Israel, and is in most cases a Jewish man marrying a non-converted western Gentile woman, as in the cases of many interviewees. Can these non-Jewish spouses promote and maintain a private, home-based Jewishness when they do not learn of Jewish practice formally through conversion or informally through family socialization or congregational practice? Assuming that some of the Gentile spouses have good enough relationships and language skills to learn from exchanges with Jewish friends, neighbors or in-laws, will they be willing and able to educate themselves sufficiently to maintain significant Jewish praxis in their homes? And what of exposure to Jewish thought and texts? Is it reasonable to expect that these non-Jewish spouses, whose western Christian culture is adopted as the practical “common denominator” for the facilitation of an indigenous “one new man”, would then make a significant effort to maintain much more than a secular Israeli Jewish culture in their homes?

One of the strongest criticisms against bi-cultural frameworks in Israel is that unique particularistic identities are effaced in the attempts to focus on common denominators upon

which to build shared communal life¹⁴⁵ (Bekerman 2003). Yoni's backseat cultural Jewishness promotes an inherent dichotomy between individual and communal praxes, and a public adoption of white American Christian practices in place of potentially exclusive, culturally-colored indigenous ones. In addition, there is no concerted communal effort to sustain the home-ridden particularist social identities represented in the congregation. What kind of fruit or heritage will such an approach yield in the years and generations to come?

In the two congregations noted above there is a clear recognition that God has an ongoing role for the Jewish nation in his global plan of salvation, however this role is not articulated through historicized theological or practical dialogue with the Jewish collective. Therefore Jewishness is reduced to a communally-enacted nationalism and/or a private culture, but does not form an integral part of the Jewish Believer's "spiritual" identity.

Daniella is an interviewee whose Israeli family became Jewish Believers when she was a child, fellowshiped among Jews and Arabs and eventually left for the United States where she connected with both Gentile Christians, observant non-Messianic Jewish family members and Messianic Jews. She describes how the once sharply segregated elements of her identity have softened and melded together over time:

Today I think more and more that everything is softening and integrating. Maybe it was more in the form of blocks. There was the Christian part of my life and the Jewish part of my life and the American and the Israeli... I sort of feel that it's like plastilene that softens and becomes one lump. I say this is who I am. This is who I have created and become and perhaps in someway I accept myself more and more, and accept all of these different elements. They can meld together... to some sort of big lump. It isn't totally homogenous and I think that it never will be. There will always be this part and that (Daniella, Hebrew).

Daniella spent her childhood, youth and many adult years sorting out her dissonant identity elements, which include in different contexts, at various times, Israeli, American, liberal atheist Jewish, Messianic Jewish, observant Jewish and Gentile Protestant, among others. Both of her sisters left the Messianic faith. One married a secular Israeli Jew and focused on her career, and the other married a Muslim and moved to an Arab village. Today Daniella, still single, is working to soften and integrate her identity elements into one self, whom she is learning to love and accept more over time.

¹⁴⁵ It is not surprising that in light of the public blurring of social identities and the high rate of intermarriage, that many local Believers prefer to call themselves Israeli Messianics, superseding their Jewishness with a national Israelianness, or, in the case of Gentile Believers, obscuring their non-Jewishness altogether.

The examples of Rami, Yoni and Daniella reveal that communities and individuals can and do practice according to various segregative and integrative models of Messianic-Jewish identity. In addition to doctrinal issues, the sociocultural question raised by many Israeli Messianic Jews who argue for a more integrative approach in Jewish faith praxis, is simply: What is the price of segregation from Jewish praxis for Believers and for the non-Believers with whom they wish to share their faith, and what kind of fruit can and does it bear in the short and long term, in the Israeli Believing community and in the lives of individual Believers?

Tsvi Sadan, at the first YEHI¹⁴⁶ conference in October of 2002, shared that if Messianic Jews want to be postmodern they can define themselves as they wish and detach themselves from all contexts, including from the Jewish people and Israeli society. However, taking up a common anti-missionary accusation of Jewish Believers, he warned, “our identity in the Messiah¹⁴⁷ must include Jewish elements, otherwise we become *meshumadim* working toward the destruction of the Jewish people.”

Mordechai, an American immigrant involved for many years in Messianic Jewish leadership in the United States, describes what he finds to be the problematic lack of biblical¹⁴⁸ and traditional Jewishness integrated into one’s Messianic faith and the concomitant lack of Messianic Jewish integration into the mainstream Jewish community, both of which limit Jewish life for those Messianic Jews who wish to live more observantly, and wind up producing a poorly-educated, inexperienced second generation of Messianic Jews with a shallow, diluted Jewish identity. The likelihood of intermarriage becomes greater as Messianics distance themselves from the Jewish community, introducing an additional diluting factor, since the non-Jewish spouse most often has even less to offer the child in terms of her Jewish identity:

It takes work to live as a Jew. I think God designed it that way. It is meant to involve daily decisions and commitments that one makes... I have lived long enough to see the results of some of these intermarriages in the Messianic world, including my own daughter who is almost 20 years old. And neither my daughter, who had about as good a Messianic

¹⁴⁶ An acronym standing for “Jewish Adherents of Yeshua” used as the name of an informal organization of Messianic Jews in Israel, active from 2002-2006. In 2006 the organization changed its name to *HaBaita* (Homeward), however the term *YEHI* remains in active use among Israeli Messianic Jews, often used to connote Jewish Believers who emphasize independent, indigenous Jewish faith expression in Israel.

¹⁴⁷ Sadan here is referring to Messianic Jews’ spiritual, not only cultural identity.

¹⁴⁸ Most Messianic Jews make a distinction between commandments which are explicit in the biblical texts, such as the commandment to build and dwell in temporary dwellings during the Feast of Tabernacles, and “traditional” interpretations or commandments, such as how to define the act of dwelling, which appear in the Oral Law.

Jewish upbringing that the movement has to offer, because I saw to it personally, she still doesn't have a fraction of the exposure to the Jewish community and to the Jewish world as I had growing up. And therefore she doesn't have the same commitment to it. She has some idea in her head, she regards herself as a Jew... *Halachically* she is not Jewish except in the reform world. She sometimes says that she would want to marry a Jewish husband. She's not consistent with that. Sometimes she says that on her own, without having me drag it out of her. She is equally comfortable in a Messianic congregation and a church. She attends both and she can get along in a synagogue. She knows her way around enough. Not to be active and participate, but to be there and be comfortable and not feel out of place, or in a Jewish family gathering or a bar mitzvah or something like that. But she doesn't really have *the kind of substance that it takes* to live a really Jewish life... Because there was no environment. As hard as I tried to impart it to her, I didn't even have the environment to live my own Jewish life the way I wanted to. (Mordechai)

Connections with Gentile Christian missions, missionaries, seminaries and financial support, all require Israeli Jewish Believers to regularly travel to speak, study and teach abroad in Gentile Christian settings, or to host, fellowship and even live among Gentile Christian teachers, missionaries or volunteers. If Jewish Believers do not develop or maintain a substantive Jewish identity in which they abide and into which they can graft non-Jewish Believers who wish to work beside them, assimilation into Gentile Christian culture, albeit in Hebrew and mostly in Israel, is strangely enough a likely reality for the Israeli Messianic Jewish community. Among some Jewish Believers like Dov on one end of the spectrum, assimilation into the Christian church is even held to be a biblical ideal.

Golan, who spent most of his teenage years as a devout and actively involved national religious youth, now associates Jewish prayer garb with his former non-Messianic national orthodoxy:

I will show them that I am a new man, and that it is possible to be a good person even without a *kipah*... without *tzitzit*... and without a *talit*. (What do the yarmulke, fringes and prayer shawl mean to you?) Tradition, tradition! [Imitating Tevye from the popular production Fiddler on the Roof] Judaism. Religion. That you belong to a particular group. (Golan, Hebrew)

Golan is issuing a challenge to his old religious community. He argues that he can be a good person and a good Jew without making use of what he deems to be orthodox cultural trappings, and without being socially identified with the orthodox. His rejection of these symbols is part of an internal Israeli Jewish struggle over who and what is Jewish, and has little to do with the Diaspora phenomena of non-affiliation, non-observance and assimilation among Gentiles. However, in both cases, the Jewish Believer does not remain in a culture-less vacuum. Whether the Believer is conscious of the process or not, other cultural symbols and

expressions take the place of those rejected. With whom are the alternative symbols associated and what do they mean?

Below, Shuki compares and contrasts the Israeli Jewish Believing identity of his childhood with the Messianic Judaism of America. Acknowledging the sociocultural aspects of identity, he sympathizes with the American Messianic Jews, whose Jewishness is rejected by both Church and Synagogue, although he thinks they can at times be a bit overly-zealous regarding everything Jewish. On the other hand, Israeli Believers, both rejecting the hypocrisy and corruption associated with the orthodox, and identifying with secular Zionists, have become so Israeli that they've forgotten how to be Jewish:

Americans are... more into traditional Judaism stuff. And they're into wearing *kipot*. We grew up not only that we're not into it but many Believers were like, oh, the religious! They'd been persecuting Believers all the time in Israel... and sucking the blood out of the nation's budget every year... you know, for [the sake of] good old Judaism... It has a very bad reputation with Israelis... When I went to the States... I had heard about American Messianics: "They're crazy, they're totally into Judaism, they're wacko"... But I got to know them. They're great people. And they're very warm and they're very real. And they're not crazy... And they were telling me about Israeli Messianics, yeah, your congregations in Israel are churches in Hebrew. And Israeli Believers are very churchy... There is a lot of truth to both [sides]... I just think that it wouldn't work in the Israeli context to try and be so Jewish, so religious. In America, they're between the Church who says: You've become Christians now, so cut the crap and come to church. And the Jewish population who says: You're no longer Jewish. You've become Christians; you're betrayers. Cut the crap, go to church, be total *goyim*¹⁴⁹, because that's what you've become, *meshumadim*. So they're in the middle and they know they haven't become Gentiles... They're truly real Jews if what we believe is true, which of course we believe it is. And so they're trying to say hold on. We believe like the Christians do in many ways but we're not Christians and we're not betrayers. We're Jewish Believers. It's a very Jewish thing. So they're trying to show it. I think in some of the ways it's been sort of a clumsy way of trying to maintain Judaism. It's almost been too much sometimes, a little bit overdone. In Israel they're like, we're Israelis. We don't need all these complications because, like I used to say and it's true, Judaism here is in the air. The news in Hebrew... Every holiday, the whole Shabbat it shuts down... It's like so we don't need this kind of stuff. On the other hand, we're so comfortable in our Israeli identity that we've forgotten to be Jewish. We're very Israeli like all the Israelis – pay taxes, swear in Arabic, but we've forgotten to be Jewish (Shuki).

Stuart Charmé (2000), in his seminal article on Jewish authenticity, poignantly notes that an authentic Jewish identity cannot be constructed on the lost culture of pre-Holocaust European Jewry, nor on a preoccupation with that loss, in which case Jewishness becomes equated with emptiness. Yet, it appears that most Jewish Believing Israelis construct their Jewish identity on a rejection of orthodox Judaism and/or Jewish study and observance. That is, in a majority of

¹⁴⁹ Gentiles (sometimes used in a derogatory manner).

cases, Messianic Jews in Israel seem to define their Jewishness through rejectionism. Such a Jewishness is inauthentic by Charmé's standards, as it fails to offer a substantive alternative. Dov writes of Judaism and Zionism: "Rabbinicism has failed. Zionism has exhausted itself. The 2,000-year-old rejection of Jesus has led the nation nowhere. Israel cannot even define who is a Jew, except in terms of its rejection of Jesus and any who claim to be his followers. It is high time for our nation to consider the claims of Christ..." ("Jewish Identity in Christ." 2001).

In the face of the rabbinic rejection of Yeshua, have Israeli Jewish Believers nothing to offer but a counter-rejection of rabbinic Judaism and its supersession, through discourse and praxis largely imitating or importing Gentile Christianity, translated to Hebrew and glossed with Israeli nationalism? Despite the charming claim that all faith in Yeshua is intrinsically Jewish, since the Scriptures and the Messiah himself are Jewish, to borrow the words of Adam, such a Jewishness is unlikely to develop a second generation "which would be something more than a copy of fundamentalist Protestantism" ("Dov – Jewish Identity." 2001).

The narratives discussed thus far in this chapter describe a spiritual Messianism alongside a civil Israeli Jewish identity. Judaism, relegated to the back of the bus, finds limited individual and little corporate expression except through the filter of Israeli civil religion. Unsurprisingly, evaluation of the research data reveals that these interviewees most strongly associate with secular Israelis and evangelical Christians.

What happens in the cases where the interviewees attempt to maintain a more observant Jewish identity in combination with their Israeli national and Messianic faith identities? May one expect a more active Jewish observance, that is, a view of Jewishness as a spiritual and worshipful identity, as well as a national identity, integrated with faith in Yeshua?

Integration

There seem to be two parallel minor phenomena which have developed pursuant to the integration of Jewish observance and Messianic faith. Either Messianic Jews follow the traditional or orthodox lines without integrating Messianic faith elements or perspectives in any prominent way; or, in other instances, Messianic Jews reinterpret rabbinic Jewish practice either in their home or in their congregation, integrating or emphasizing Messianic elements or perspectives, and even modern western forms, and removing elements incongruous with their

understanding of God and Scripture¹⁵⁰. Identity integration seems less common in congregational practice than in the private practice of individuals, which can be more flexibly suited to the needs and views of individual families, as in Yoni's case¹⁵¹.

Constructing “natural” environments of praxis. A common complaint against Messianic Jewish efforts to actively flesh out Jewish identity in light of a radical Messianic faith, is the labor, and concomitant sense of “unnaturalness”, as articulated by Dov (“Our Messianic Identity.” 2001), and as discussed above in this chapter under “The grace versus works dichotomy”. Since cultural change does not feel “natural” (Swidler 1986), the dilemma in cultural reform is how to subjectively construct a new social order in so compelling a fashion that it eventually becomes second nature. Interviewees relay that over-explanation of practice in the doing gives it the feeling of a staged act, yet admit that without instilling an alternative ideological vision, practical change cannot take root.

The American Messianic Jewish movement made a significant impact on American Jewish Believers, particularly during the 1980's, through popular embodied, experiential venues of the soul: music, dance, visual arts, an anti-establishmentarian vernacular, and lesser so through written theology, study and traditional liturgy-based service. Discourse was often popularly reduced to radical slogans appealing to the 1970's counterculture generation (“Jews for Jesus”, “The Jewish roots of the gospel”, “Yeshua made me kosher”, etc.). More charismatically-oriented groups often relied upon “supernatural” experience or revelation within mildly culturally Jewish communities of praxis, to cement the integration of their Messianic faith with Jewish identity. In these various ways, the experiential thrust of the Messianic movement through the arts made a powerful impact on an entire generation.

Interviewee Mordechai, wanting to go beyond the slogans of his contemporary American Messianic movement, felt that his congregants needed elementary discursive tools to be able

¹⁵⁰ For example, parts of the *Aleinu* may be interpreted as unnecessarily exclusive statements regarding the nations who are invited to join the commonwealth of Israel in the New Covenant, as wild olive branches being grafted onto a cultivated olive tree (*Romans* 11).

¹⁵¹ Individual practice without congregational support seems limited at best, and at worst, engenders dissonance, confusion and alienation according to interviewee testimonies. Daniella, a woman whose parents became Messianic Jews when she was a child, attended a Christian church, Messianic Jewish fellowship meetings in her home, and a secular Israeli Jewish school at the same time. She remained a Believer, but many, if not most second generation Messianic Jews did not continue in their parents' faith until more recent years, according to the testimonies of many veteran Messianic Jews interviewed. Daniella describes her experience of living in dissonance as follows: “It was like living in two worlds... I was fed up with explaining and trying to clarify for people what was in a way not totally defined for me, because there were many contrasts... contrasts of Jewish identity and Christian identity... or secular identity suddenly combined with Christian identity. We didn't really have a Messianic [Jewish] identity.”

to create an engaging community of praxis. He was seeking to achieve a visionary reality that did not yet exist in his American congregation. Mordechai's solution was mid-week adult study programs to equip congregants with the tools to transform their praxis. In the United States these included basic Hebrew literacy and acquaintance with traditional prayers and praxis. The congregants complied and succeeded in learning basic Hebrew skills, among other things. Yet a few months later when he introduced a partial Torah service to practically apply their learning, one quarter of his congregants left the congregation. Many congregants were willing to participate in decontextualized Jewish learning, but opted out when it came to active engagement in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991). Mordechai slowly proceeded to engage his remaining core of practitioners, but speaks of the indomitable learning curve involved in introducing relevant, contextualized Jewish practice into American Messianic Jewish congregations.

Traditional Jewish forms of faith practice may be more accessible and “natural” for the Hebrew-speaking Israeli, but they are far from the norm in personal or congregational practice in Israel. Some interviewees express the desire to see the day when Jewish Believers in Israel will experience singing the *Shema* or reading from a Torah scroll as a “natural” part of practicing their faith, just as today many find it “natural” to sing translated Christian hymns and place their Scriptures on the floor by their feet.

Congregational leaders like Mordechai, who are exploring ways to observe Torah commandments in dialogue with the history of Jewish praxis, find themselves challenged to strike a necessary balance between experience-based and traditional praxis-based faith, study and explanation. Israelis are only beginning to experience and be disciplined in their Messianic faith within compelling environments of indigenous pro-observant Jewish congregational praxis¹⁵².

The Messianic option as a bold Jewish alternative. Adam, Dov's correspondence partner, recounts that when he first became a Believer, the only stable faith expression that he found in the United States at the time for himself was the Hebrew Christian movement, “which at least tried to maintain something of a Jewish national and spiritual identity.” (“Dov – Jewish Identity.” 2001). However, he found in Hebrew Christianity, which was similar to the form of Christianity promoted by Dov, a fatal flaw from his perspective: “I sensed that the movement

¹⁵² See the following section, entitled, “Two models of integrated Jewish identity”.

was practically incapable of developing a second generation which would be something more than a copy of fundamentalist Protestantism.” (“Dov – Jewish Identity.” 2001).

Again the border dilemma arises, both in relation to the Jewish collective and the Gentile Church: What is the optimal balance for Messianic Jews between total assimilation and complete segregation? David asks rhetorically in his interview: “How can we be a light to the nations when we become the nations ourselves?” Yet for Dov on the far end of the spectrum, and others who hold similar views, raising evangelical Protestant children is not a problem, it is a goal. He is concerned that the development of independent Jewish Believing expressions and congregations threatens the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the “body of Messiah”. Adam’s central response to this concern is two-fold. First, referring to *Genesis* 2:24 and *Ephesians* 5:28-33, he claims that the goal of Messianic Jews should be the cultivation of particularistic God-given identities, that is, unity without uniformity. Secondly, Adam subtly notes that without the maintenance of a distinct Jewish identity and lifestyle, in actuality, Jewish Believers will become like all the nations, that is, adopt the substance and forms of a Gentile Christian culture and faith expression, for all intents and purposes¹⁵³. Consequently, they will not only be personally lost to the Jewish people, but lose the opportunity to provide a “Messianic option” for non-assimilated Jewish people from within the Jewish community, and thereby fail to participate in “Jewish national and spiritual salvation” (“Dov – Jewish Identity.” 2001). As the prolific Israeli Messianic Jewish pioneer, Menahem Benhayim, writes:

There is a kind of Jewish evangelism that only focuses on individual affirmation detached from community. Sometimes it offers an alternative community that is totally alien to the new believer’s natural community. This is another aspect of Evangelicalism particularly threatening to the Jewish development of believers within the New Covenant. This fact has been one of the strongest incentives for the formation of Messianic Jewish congregations and fellowships. It has also been one of the encouraging aspects of the modern Messianic Jewish movement. It addresses, practically, a major concern of Jewish believers who see the importance of a viable community for the restoration of the biblical vision of a dynamic and visible Jewish remnant within the Church and as far as possible within the Jewish people. Such a community must tackle the theological and practical issues of Jewish life in its New Covenant phase in the light of Jewish and Christian teaching and experience. One major issue is the relevance of the Torah. What is its significance in a New Covenant framework to the people to whom the Torah was committed? (Benhayim 1994)

¹⁵³ After all, if some are opposed to Jews and Gentiles maintaining a Jewish faith expression, then what kind of faith expression remains? He writes, “Scripture teaches us that the church is one in a sense that there is to be ‘no difference’ between Jews and gentiles. ‘No difference’, of duty, of prerogative or of privilege.” (“Jewish identity in Christ.” 2001). And again, “We must not presume to reconstruct the middle wall of partition in terms of present duties and privileges or future hopes for Jew as distinct from gentile”. (“Our Messianic Identity.” 2001).

Benhayim supports a distinctly Jewish community of Believers as the necessary forum to explore theological and practical issues of Jewish identity in light of the teachings of Yeshua. Below we discuss two such communal attempts, both of which promote an integrated Messianic-Jewish identity and attempt to “tackle” the theological and practical significance of Jewishness for the Believer, but these two communities differ greatly in their vision and praxis.

Two models of integrated Jewish identity

Orthodoxy with supplements. One spiritual leader who heads one of the only Messianic Jewish congregations committed to observance, explains that in his view, Messianic Jews must first “swallow the frog” of orthodox observance in its entirety before they have the right to begin to adapt and change the tradition¹⁵⁴. Congregation member and interviewee Michael argues below that the Messianic Jewish world should be situated squarely within the borders of orthodox thought and practice, which is the historical and international standard for the Jewish people. He points out that even Jewish Believers in the first centuries practiced a Judaism which was not purely Torah, but included much *halachic* interpretation. He goes on to explain how the Messianic Jewish position of knowledgeable discernment and creative change often requires a great deal of “catch-up” Jewish learning on the part of leaders and laypeople alike:

You can't depart from where you've never been... If we're going to depart, this is true of every Jewish movement, whether it's the Conservative movement, or the Zionist movement or whatever, the baseline is orthodoxy and the tradition, okay? And from within that world then you start to stretch the boundaries... The early Messianic Jewish community was observant of the normative Judaism of their time, which before the destruction of the Temple, revolved around the Temple. Much of that Judaism was not according to the letter of the Torah; it was already according to tradition and custom... And we have Yeshua's words in *Matthew* 23, which is a chapter in which he criticizes, in no uncertain terms, the Scribes and the Pharisees and what they do and their hypocrisy, but the chapter begins by saying, they sit in the seat of Moses, in other words, they have *halachic* authority to discern what is our culture, what is our Judaism. He says, do what they say, not what they do... There's a tremendous paradox in this, tremendous tension in this whole dynamic, which is a difficult one to live with... Paul puts it very succinctly in *Romans* 11 when he says, for the sake of the Gospel, they're your enemies... But for the sake of the Patriarchs they're beloved... If they were observant in the Judaism of their time, it included a lot of traditions that were extra-biblical, from the Oral Torah, I say how much more should... that be our cue today because of the past 1800 years of tragedy... Here's the orthodox world, which is not monolithic... Here's a range... a baseline of least common denominators of what observant Torah and Jewish covenant observance is... things like Shabbat observance and *Kashrut* and *Brit Milah* and, and things around marriage and family and etc. I think our movement should be in this circle *halachically* speaking, and we're going to find our own niche in there and it'll probably bleed down over the boundaries a little bit here and there... We're so caught in the middle, we're not sure... it's because we're... figuring out who we are... In the middle of

¹⁵⁴ Observation of Holy Day Service. September 2005.

all the different streams of thought and community that make us up of American-style Evangelical Christianity, of American-style Charismatic Christianity, of Judaism, of orthodoxy, of secularism, of Zionism, I mean, we've got all this stuff that's just come together... I think it's very important [that] before we depart, before we leave, let's get this circle... I just think that's where we're supposed to be, and I think that's where God wants us to be and I think it should be a place where other Jews within the circle can come to our... community with the least degree of dissonance. (Michael)

Michael's starting position implies that Messianic Jews cannot broaden the borders of centuries-old Jewish tradition when they are not first thoroughly familiar with the baseline of tradition. While Michael's position seems entirely reasonable, in practice, it poses a serious problem, discussed previously in the section entitled, "A 'natural' alternative". How does a community consisting primarily of a group of theoretically pro-observant Messianic Jews from mostly secular backgrounds, induct themselves into the orthodox Jewish world, while keeping Yeshua's teachings in the forefront of their discourse and praxis, to such an effective degree that they are then adequately positioned to challenge the Jewish world from within? This is a process that takes time – perhaps a generation or more – and communal trial and error, just to arrive at the requisite starting point of orthodox theology and praxis, before beginning to "stretch the boundaries" of the orthodox world. In the meantime, orthodox tradition remains intact, determined by others, and the Messianic Jews reinscribe themselves as the outsiders, Jews by association, but lacking the authority or desire to shape the tradition to serve the needs of their unique and growing community.

How much orthodox knowledge is enough? There are no academic degrees in Israel to affirm learning achievements barring rabbinic ordination. Those Messianic *baalei tshuvah* that attempt to learn and practice orthodoxy can never know as much as the rabbis which administer it, so they risk painting themselves onto a Grecian urn, ever striving to attain the impossible level of orthodoxy which will allow them the necessary relevance and authority to reintroduce Yeshua into normative Judaism from the front door.

It is often lamented that the centrality of the figure and teachings of Yeshua is neglected in the process of Messianic Jewish return to the Jewish birthright. Many Messianic Jews who attempt to institute orthodox practice habitually supplement their spiritual lives with additional Believing music, teaching tapes or books and attendance at other types of non-orthodox Jewish Believer meetings in Israel and abroad¹⁵⁵. These Believers are no different from other

¹⁵⁵ Similarly, some Jewish Believers attend orthodox-style Messianic Jewish meetings or even non-Messianic synagogues on occasion, particularly on holidays, in order to fill in where their less-observant congregations fail to meet their needs.

Jewish Believers that also supplement local communal activity with additional materials and/or activities, except that their supplements clash with the orthodox discourse and praxis which they desire to assimilate.

In this way, some orthodox-style Jewish Believers may be likened to a mirror version of interviewees like Yoni, who tend to promote a universal Messianism in the congregation, leaving Jewish cultural practices at home. These orthodox-style Jewish Believers develop an orthodox Jewish congregational praxis while leaving their heterodox Believing practices at the doorstep of the Synagogue. Like Yoni, whose paradigm of public Messianism and private Jewishness institutes a strained dichotomous praxis, newly orthodox Messianic Jews may create a similar dichotomy between culturally relevant and spiritually compelling or “nourishing” faith practices.

Examples of Messianic-Jewish identity combinations in the field can continue ad infinitum: One pro-orthodox observant Jew periodically attends western Protestant charismatic revival meetings in a nearby Arab neighborhood; an entirely secular Brethern Church-style practicing Believer attends Yom Kippur services at his local synagogue; a Believer desirous of increasing her family’s Jewish practice attends a non-observant nationalistic Israeli congregation and regularly listens to Christian sermons from abroad in the privacy of her own car but buys tickets to an orthodox synagogue during Jewish holidays; a nationalistic Israeli congregation proud of their membership consisting mostly of young *sabra* Jews encourages various Jewish practices while intensively translating western Christian literature to “nourish” the local body; a pro-observant family sends their children to western Christian-run youth camps in the summer to fellowship with other Israeli Believing children. The numerous examples of complicated, personally-tailored identity combinations reflect an overall lack of consistent and autonomously viable Jewish identity integration within Messianic Jewish individual and community praxis.

One might easily argue such an integration is not necessarily desirable or beneficial, and that the present situation allows for much flexibility and individual choice. This paper is not attempting to argue otherwise. At the same time, it is the researcher’s distinct impression that the segregation or dis-integration of Jewish and Messianic praxes in Israeli Believing circles, in many cases, is more a present reality and less a desired goal. To say that a majority is seeking an integration of orthodox-style Jewish practice with their Messianism would be far from the empirical findings. However, it seems more than fair to say that many if not most of the

Jewish Believers in Israel desire a more harmonious Messianic-Jewish identity, whatever that might mean for them, and harmony between their home and congregational praxes, than they presently experience. Additionally, juggling complex identity mixes may become a way of life for mature individuals like Daniella, whose various identities have mellowed and melded over her lifetime into one heterogeneous plastiline mass. Yet many Messianic Jews point to identity dis-integration (and not necessarily, but at times, ambiguity) as a much graver challenge for a community with a stated interest in securing generational continuity as well as outreach to non-Messianic Jews.

Integrating new and old. The second approach of more observance-oriented Messianic Jews claims traditional Jewish and modern Israel culture as their birthright, promotes education, and, while maintaining respectful dialogue with rabbinic Judaism, assigns the Messianic Jewish community final halachic authority. From the start, the second approach supports an integration of orthodox and uniquely Messianic Jewish expressions, cantorials and modern worship songs, liturgy and spontaneous prayer, traditional and selected readings. Eschewing the extremes of “eradication” (Deshen 1970) of Jewish faith expression on the one side, or “frog-swallowing” orthodoxy on the other, and even the more common extensive importation and translation of western evangelical Protestant forms, the new-old approach is open to traditional and innovative interpretations of orthodox praxis as well as its integration with original creative Messianic Jewish music and teaching, prayer and prophecy, and fellowship with Gentile Christians in Messiah-focused community-oriented service. This is not a renegade approach which characterizes some of American Messianic Judaism that selects, dismisses or adapts Jewish tradition often out of very partial knowledge and positioning outside the borders of the Jewish community. The Israeli integrative approach requires a much deeper level of Jewish knowledge and understanding, and ongoing study and Jewish communal involvement to maintain Jewish relevancy in orthodox-dominated Israel. Note the following quote from the foundational principles of a pro-observance congregation representative of this approach:

We believe in the necessity of preserving a balance between traditional and modern Israeli elements. We respect the tradition of the rabbis, but do not assign it *Halachic* authority in our congregation. (2006)

As an example of this praxis, David, a congregational *chazan*/worship leader, has begun introducing one liturgical prayer or song each Sabbath in his congregation, musically integrating it with a more modern, original Messianic song with similar lyrical and/or musical

themes. At times he will use well-known *nusach*¹⁵⁶ or traditional melodies, while at other times he will apply more modern Jewish or Israeli melodies from a variety of artists to the texts, just like his non-Messianic cantor friend has been doing in his *Mizrahi*¹⁵⁷ synagogue for twenty years. For example, in David's version of the "*Etz Chaim*" cantorial, he begins with a traditional Ashkenazi melody based on *nusach*, subtly weaves in themes from the Israeli national anthem "*HaTikvah*" since the text speaks of the regathering of the exiles, smoothly proceeds to a recently written Israeli Messianic Jewish melody when the text refers to "David, Your servant" and "your Messiah", then concludes by transitioning back to the traditional melody where the text reads "Return us to you, Lord, and we will return. Renew our days as of old"¹⁵⁸. Oral production and reproduction of worship forms is one of the creative Messianic Jewish venues for integrating routes, roots and birthright in theologically-sound, communally-sensitive and inspiring ways.

The processual, educational approach which combines both modern and traditional worship forms from the start, seems to make traditional faith forms more palatable to those Jewish Believers, and particularly the native Israelis, like Ziva, who instinctively bridle at the slightest hint of religious compulsion, perhaps in the wake of the difficult demands and exclusivity of familiar forms of orthodoxy, the secular Zionist revolt against established Judaism or western antinomian evangelical doctrines.

The Israeli Messianic Jewish population includes few members from orthodox backgrounds, although many claim to have come from some sort of "traditional" household. Both integrative Jewish approaches in principal require a great deal of creative work within the Messianic Jewish community to develop a Messianic tradition within an orthodox framework on the one hand or to seek a viable creative integration of Jewish observance and Messianic faith, on the other. The first approach seems to bog itself down by requiring congregants before innovating to *first* "swallow" whole a highly demanding living tradition, particularly without the institutional support of religious upbringing, family and a broad-based community. While the first approach might be the ideal basis for innovation for a core community of orthodox-background Believers, in reality, the requisite "basics" which this community must acquire are a vast expanse of shifting sands, and the degree of "catch-up"

¹⁵⁶ Cantorial melodies and modes recognizable in many synagogues.

¹⁵⁷ *Mizrahim* is the term most commonly used to describe Jews from eastern backgrounds, mostly those from Arab countries.

¹⁵⁸ Observation of Sabbath worship service, December 2006.

learning is so great, that the result seems to be more like treading water than actualizing authentic Messianic-Jewish praxis.

Levi, a congregational leader attempting to carefully work out these principles, refers to Yeshua's teaching to describe the wisdom of this integrative approach which draws from all the treasures in God's kingdom (or in Swidler's terms (1986), all the tools in their spiritual tool box), new and old:

Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old. - *Matthew* 13:52

Perhaps because the majority of Israeli Messianic Jews hail from secular and traditional homes, the new-old integrative approach takes a patient, long-term, processual route of discipleship, teaching and gradual exposure in the course of integrating various traditional elements in consciously meaningful ways for the community. It neither claims orthodoxy as its starting point nor its goal, but as a reference and a partner in dialogue.

From Nicaea to Ikea?

Through discourse, seemingly simple terms connect to a deeper level of ideology or theology, in the case of the Israeli Messianic faith community. Theology is man's study of the relationship between God and His creation, culminating in a corresponding set of doctrines. That is, theology includes the ways in which theologians approach this God-creation relationship and formulate their religious doctrine, as well as the resulting doctrines themselves. Therefore, a person asked to affirm a particular extra-biblical religious doctrine or term, is essentially being asked to consent not only to a word, but to a particular set of religious doctrines, and also to specific theological approaches to divine truth.

In June of 2002, a National Conference of Messianic Congregational Leaders in Israel was held in Netanya to ensure the Israeli Messianic Jewish leaderships' affirmation of Yeshua's divinity and to make a common public declaration of faith on this point¹⁵⁹. The official subject of the Netanya leaders' conference was "The Divinity of Yeshua our Messiah." The conference was held in Netanya, beside the newly-opened popular Ikea furniture store, leading some to nickname the conference, "The Council of Ikea", after the fourth century Council of

¹⁵⁹ The researcher was given official permission by the Organizing Committee of the National Conference to observe the proceedings of the conference for the purposes of this research.

Nicaea¹⁶⁰, in which steps were taken to simultaneously formulate a uniform Christian doctrine and to de-Judaize faith in Yeshua.

Several speakers presented lectures on the divine nature of Yeshua, then all leaders present were called to publicly come forward and sign on a pre-drafted creed. Perhaps the greatest offense of the Netanya conference, reflected in the immediately publicized opposition, was its jarring of the status quo, the attempt to institutionalize – in the classic form of a Christian creed – the effectively ambiguous “common denominator” discussed above. In fact, the organizing committee of the national conference was accused by at least one community leader of taking on authority which deviated from its original mandate by attempting to ordain a common Israeli Messianic Jewish creed, in response to alleged heretical doctrines.

Menahem Benhayim (1994) writes of the precarious position of Jewish Believers “between Church and Synagogue”, and the pressure exerted upon them by Gentile Christians to swear allegiance to and employ simplified Hellenistic religious formulations:

Jewish critics have often remarked how creed rather than deed is central to Christian faith. This is of course an oversimplification of the faith and works controversy already reflected and resolved in the epistles of Paul and James. The obsession of ancient and medieval Hellenism with definitions and creeds has been carried over into modern evangelism, so that it often appears that a simple declaration affirming a theological statement about Yeshua is a guarantee of salvation...

Israeli Messianic Jewish scholar, Dr. Tsvi Sadan, continues the argument: After all, to whom do Israeli Messianic Jews feel a need to prove their signed and sealed doctrinal loyalty, and why? Sadan preempted a discussion of what may lay at the heart of the Netanya debate, in a short article entitled “The Trinity - Midrash or Dogma?” (Sadan 2001:20). He notes that the Christian theological approach to the spiritual realm can be characterized as an ontological discussion in which uncompromising, ironclad definitive formulations are postulated, and then lines are drawn in the sand. Whoever signs on the axiom is a brother and true Believer, and whoever balks at the axiom or the way in which it is was formulated, is a heretic.

According to Sadan, traditional Jewish theology differs vastly from the classic Christian method of exclusive axiomatic formulations. Rabbinic theology in general, and specifically in the discourse concerning God’s nature, is framed in *midrash*, homiletical exegesis. Sadan warns against launching a Christian crusade over issues which retain a degree of ambiguity and

¹⁶⁰ Ikea and Nicaea rhyme in Hebrew.

mystery even in the Scriptures, in the sense that they are not as clearly and cleanly spelled out as Christians would evidently like them to be. Instead, he suggests that Messianic Jews adopt a theological approach similar to the rabbinic *midrash*.

Midrash allows for cautious, multi-faceted examination of a complex subject, any subject, and the presentation of a variety of theologically “correct” narratives on the same complex issue without taking a singular exclusive stand. The multivocal nature of narrative leaves room for dynamic, ongoing interpretation, avoiding the traps of heresy accusations and internecine inquisitions. It can be likened to a group of blind people, aware of their blindness, who attempt to describe an elephant. Each one brings his own version without claiming that it is the only true and comprehensive version, and with the knowledge that only by examining all of the versions can they approximate an understanding of the mysterious reality. *Midrash* acknowledges and encompasses the fuzziness of spiritual issues rather than erecting a *Kampfplatz* for the purging of infidels.

Not only was a creed presented for signature at the Netanya conference, but at least three of the speakers warned those present of *the danger of a discussion* of Yeshua’s divinity, even though fifty-five minutes were allotted for such a “discussion” in the printed program.

Criticism of the Netanya conference focused on the way that the issue of Yeshua’s divinity was handled – that is, the theological approach to truth, by whom and for whom it was handled (Christian missions/foreign supporters?), and not the theological content of the faith statement itself presented for approval by the Messianic Jewish congregational leadership of Israel.¹⁶¹

In summary, it seems that the majority of Israeli Jewish Believers, in their attempt to reclaim their birthright as Jews, segregate their Jewish identity from their Messianic and Israeli identities, often constructing them as a dichotomy. Jewish praxis is commonly constructed in mutual tension with Messianism, criticized as threatening Messianic theology (Morris) and Yeshua-centeredness (Rami), distracting Jewish Believers from the urgent priority of sharing the gospel (Harvey), threatening the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah (Dov), and

¹⁶¹ The faith statement presented for signature read as follows in English: “Principles of Faith of the Conference: God: ‘The Lord our God, the Lord is One.’ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the only God and Creator. There is no other besides Him and all the divine attributes are His alone. His unique unity consists of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Each of them eternal and divine in the perfection and fullness of deity. The Son, our Messiah, who was born without sin by the Holy Spirit to the virgin Miriam, is also human in the full sense of the term.” (“Statement of Faith.” 2002.).

offending Arab Christians (Yoni). Accordingly, Jewish identity is assigned a backseat to Messianism, a lower status as a national or cultural identity rather than a spiritual one, is often viewed askance, considered a private matter rather than integral to communal praxis, and relegated to individual or home observance. Not surprisingly, “segregative” Jewish Believing practitioners maintain more open borders with Gentile Christians and western Gentile Christian faith ideas, values and strategies of action, and draw a clear boundary between themselves and observant Jews, often viewing observant Messianic Jews with a mixture of suspicion and pity.

Messianic Jewish criticism of the segregative position includes pointing out the tendency toward anti-semitic and orientalist stereotyping of Jews and Judaism¹⁶²; ignorance of and alienation from the observant Jewish community and Jewish practices (Juster), and a consequential cultural irrelevancy of the gospel thus presented (Michael); Gentilizing, assimilatory tendencies (Mordechai); the confusion of uniformity as unity (Adam); problematic generational continuity as Jews (Adam); and the lack of a substantial, distinctly Jewish alternative to rabbinic Judaism (Adam & Dov).

In addition to the mainstream segregative approaches, the research analysis identifies two minority integrative positions among Israeli Messianic Jews which argue for an “authentic”, in other words, proactive and informed, Jewish identity that integrates with, rather than stands in stark opposition to faith in Messiah. Integrative Jewish approaches require willingness to grapple with rather than ignore, negate or spiritualize¹⁶³ 1600 years of loaded history during which Jews barricaded themselves behind a fence of rabbinicism against the fall of Second Temple Judaism, the Dispersion and the onslaught of Gentile anti-Semitism, symbolized in the west by the cross.

The two minority approaches stress the integration of Jewish identity with Messianic faith, promote Jewish education, Jewish environments of praxis, and a conscious long-term vision of Messianic Jewish communal identity construction and generational continuity. Both advocate theological autonomy for Messianic Jews in the broader context of an ongoing

¹⁶² See for example, Moshe’s letter to Eyal which he closes with the following blessing, “God bless you and our struggle for liberation and freedom from Ecclesiastical Colonialism.” “RE: from Dov – continued exchange of ideas.” 4 September 2001.

¹⁶³ To spiritualize is a term in the Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular meaning the act of attributing spiritual meaning, cause or quality to something which is by common estimation better engaged through more mundane discourse. It is to make a spiritual issue out of something which is a putatively non-spiritual issue. Spiritualization can be used as a mechanism to avoid social realities.

dialogue with other Jews and Gentile Believers. One espouses the adoption of orthodoxy in its entirety unless very specific elements contradict Messianic faith. The other promotes a more moderate, processual fluency in orthodox praxis integrated with Messianic Jewish teaching and forms as well as modern Israeli culture. The second approach emphasizes integration and relevancy in Israeli Jewish society among both traditional and secular Jews, while maintaining open fellowship with Gentile Christians, with a measure of wariness toward western Christian influences which can lead to assimilation, dilution or confusion of Jewish identity, calling and indigenous praxis.

Since they both promote dialogue, the integrative approaches seem better positioned than their segregative counterparts to equip their constituents with a common language in the midst of their mostly non-Messianic Jewish people. The second integrative approach of the two also appears more likely to enable a cautious complimentary relationship with Gentile Christians.

Lastly, the conference in Netanya (which unlike the research narratives, included many non-Jewish and even non-Israeli players), offers a glimpse at the layers of discourse, theology and authority which constitute the struggle over Messianic Jewish theological autonomy in Israel.

The struggle over spiritual authority

In February of 2003, eight months after the Netanya conference, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel offered a seminar addressing the concept of faith in the Trinity, a hotly debated topic of the day. Dr. Gershon Nerel gave the opening lecture in which he intimated that the discussion of terminology - whether to use the term “Trinity” or not - as well as the deeper question of whether to adopt Christian doctrinal concepts, must also address the ways in which terminology, doctrine and consequent accusations of heresy were historically used by the Church to exclude and oppress Jewish Believers who sought to maintain a Jewish lifestyle¹⁶⁴. According to Nerel, a sect called the Ebionites indeed denied Yeshua’s divinity and

¹⁶⁴ Probably more common among non-theologian counselors and laypeople is a psychologistic treatment of the Messianic Jewish identity “problem” as a pathology more than a theological heresy. For example, at a gathering of Israeli Believers (December 2006), an Israeli Messianic Jewish immigrant took me excitedly aside claiming that she had a “fool-proof identity test”. If you ask a Messianic Jew to say “Jesus” (in English), and they have difficulty, then this is a sign that they have an identity “problem”, cannot accept Jesus for who he is, are perhaps ashamed of the gospel and feel the need to hide him behind a Hebrew name, Yeshua, in order to feel more comfortable with their faith. I asked her about those that wish to emphasize his original identity as an Israeli Jew or that believe it is more accurate to use his original Hebrew name, rather than take upon themselves all of the Christian connotations of the Hellenized, Anglicized name Jesus. She insisted that this is pathological, and that in order for the damaged Jewish Believer to be healed and set free of his feelings of rejection or other psychological problems, he must learn to embrace the English name of Jesus.

preexistence. However, the Nazarenes did not hold to any such “heresies” and yet were excommunicated together with the Ebionites by Eusebius and Augustine for their distinct national identity as Law-observant Jewish Believers. The Church Fathers didn’t bother to distinguish between the heretic and the Messianic Jew.

Nerel implies that struggles over issues of Messianic Jewish vernacular are most often about the right of Jewish Believers to define themselves and their faith expression, while it is the Gentile church leaders and their allies, in the attempt to supersede Messianic Jewish leadership, who have historically framed the struggle as a christological issue. Yet many Messianic Jewish leaders today have led their sheep to believe that the body of Messiah in Israel is facing the possibility of a terrible christological division. For example, one spiritual leader writes:

Lately discordant voices have been heard from the margins of the Messianic camp, which shed doubt on the divinity of Yeshua the Messiah or negate it entirely. Attacked by half-lies seeking cracks in our faith in order to inject the drug of death into the body of Messiah, this is the hour for every Messianic, whoever he may be, to awake and stand on guard regarding everything that has to do with the truth. (Yahav 2002, Hebrew)

Not surprisingly, it seems that the war drums succeeded in rallying the soldiers to task. Note that both laypeople quoted below in response to the MJAI seminar make it clear that the battle over the theological concept of the “Trinity” in their eyes, is a principled struggle over a black-and-white, self-evident truth, and has nothing at all to do with language, culture, history or politics:

I think that a person that truly seeks God in earnest cannot arrive at any conclusion other than that the Trinity exists, and *it doesn't matter what we call it*. (Miri, This is the Covenant, June, 2004. Italics added.)

I want to say that if you thought that the verses that H. used were too harsh, then what do you say about what is written in 2 *Peter* 2:1-3: “But there are also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute... Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.” *Here we are told to fight on behalf of our faith. Pure and simple*. (Dudu, This is the Covenant, June, 2004. Italics added.)

The heart of the struggle over a Messianic Jewish vernacular is not simply about specific terminology in a common “Statement of Faith” or whether the word “Trinity” should be

adopted into the Israeli Jewish Believing idiom. It is a “*Kulturkampf*”¹⁶⁵ over who will determine and control the means of cultural identity production, defining and policing the borders of Israeli Messianic Jewish identity. This struggle points to the last and deepest level of Israeli Messianic Jewish discourse: the level of authority.

Professor Daniel Boyarin extends the Christian tendency toward strict theological boundaries and declarations of heresy to the Pharisaic rabbinic tradition, specifically in the case of a certain Rabbi Eliezer who dared to challenge the earthly authority of his colleagues’ leadership councils by exercising a supernatural gift of healing (Boyarin 2000). Boyarin claims that both Christian and Jewish leaders have historically preserved their power and control, and exercised their authority through exclusion. The difference is that Christianity has traditionally required the “believer” to publicly declare his faith according to various church formulations, whereas the Jewish “practitioner”, when he practices, is expected to do so according to certain historically-evolved rabbinic conventions. Perhaps more importantly, both religions offer the straying brother the opportunity to submit himself to the appropriate religious authorities who are the ones that respectively determine orthodox creeds and deeds. Therefore, when an individual refuses to submit to a particular doctrine or practice, the first question must be whether he opposes the creed or deed at hand, or the means, motives and authority of the ones promoting it.

Bourdieu’s analysis of “doxa” provides an excellent analysis of the above phenomenon (1977:164-171). Bourdieu’s “doxa” is where the culturally constructed world is “seen as self-evident and natural order”, or in the words of several Netanya conference leaders, “axiomatic”. A doxic order is where “what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying”, hence the heart of the conference program – the non-discussion discussion of the question of Yeshua’s divinity. However, the doxic basis of community is continuously challenged by competing opinions in what Bourdieu calls the “universe of discourse”. Marginalized groups “have an interest in pushing back the limits of doxa and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken-for-granted”, whereas proponents of the dominant position “have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, orthodoxy” (Bourdieu 1977:169). We see the attempt to defend doxa and the struggle to establish a Messianic Israeli orthodoxy occurring simultaneously at the Netanya conference. With the failure to quell indications of heterodox

¹⁶⁵ *Kulturkampf* is used here to mean a struggle between cultures, a culture clash. The term is introduced by Adam quoted in “Our Messianic Identity.” 14 August 2001.

arguments which “recognize the possibility of different and antagonistic beliefs” (Bourdieu 1977:164; also Brow 1991:4), the threat of unorthodox “heresies” became the real focus of discussion, serving to establish the borders of an orthodox authority.

The push to downplay the significance of language by the influential publisher and host of the translators’ conference, the taboo of discussion during the “discussion” in Netanya, or the tendency to ignore “semantics”, as in Miri’s quote above from the MJAI Trinity seminar, are efforts, whether politically-conscious or not, which reify the black-and-white paradigm of axiomatic truth versus heresy, and conceal the socio-politics at work behind discursive scenes, effectively preserving the authority of reigning hegemonies.

A few months after Netanya, and one month after the publication of the leader’s call to battle stations, during the YEHI conference in October of 2002, one leader gave a Hebrew message entitled “Turn to Jerusalem”. Among other things, he said, “I won’t let any Christian who was given authority in Westminster or whatever to determine who is a Believer... That (same) spirit exists today in Israel – whether it was 1600 years ago in Nicaea or in Ikea – if you don’t say the certain things the way we want you to.” Another leader added that for two thousand years the authority of the body of Messiah has been in Gentile hands, but he believes that the universal body of Believers is in the process of transferring authority from Rome back to Jerusalem.

The two leaders’ heterodoxy challenges a hegemony that silences attempts at Messianic Jewish subjectivity. Rather than addressing the more elementary question of subjectivity which formed the title of the YEHI conference, whether Jewish adherents of Yeshua have the right to self-definition, these two veteran leaders covered all three struggles at once – subjectivity, theology and authority. The bottom line for these two leaders is that they refuse to acquiesce to foreign Gentile authorities who deny their putative role and calling as Jewish Believers. Furthermore, rather than yielding to a disempowering trend linking Ikea to Nicaea, they promote an empowering restoration of authority from Rome to Jerusalem, a shift of worldwide Believing authority back to the Believing Jewish people in Zion.

To conclude Chapter nine, analysis of a combination of narratives, participant observations and textual exchanges illustrates a temporal strategy of return to the birthright, and three identity border disputes among Israeli Messianic Jews. The series of identity-related seminars held by Israeli Messianic Jews between the years 2001-2003 poignantly reveals the intense

identity struggle taking place within the community, and demonstrates the connection between discourse, theology and authority in this community's identity border construction and contentions.

The first dispute involves the issue of Messianic Jewish subjectivity: Whether Messianic Jews have the right to define and represent themselves within the community and in out-group relations. The second is the central theological dispute of the community, a struggle over whether Jewish Believers have a unique "spiritual" as well as national identity, and if so, how this identity should be realized in practice. Two conflicting theological styles are discussed, one more integrative, anecdotal, emphasizing deed and permitting heterogeneity, and the other segregative, dogmatic, emphasizing creed and constructing exclusive uniformity. In the framework of the third and last struggle, a hegemonic strategy is analyzed which historically enabled the Church to deny Jewish Believers good standing, let alone authority, in the universal "body of Believers". This strategy involves the conflation and confusion of christological issues with issues of Jewish observance and cultural expression, implying that observance, or culturally Jewish rather than Greek-based theology, constitute heresy. In the third struggle, despite hegemonic efforts to silence Jewish Believing subjectivity and theology, many Israeli Messianic Jews are seeking "to restore" their spiritual authority over themselves and ultimately, exercise their birthright "prophetic calling" from Jerusalem as Cohenic priests to the universal "body of Believers".

Chapter ten

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings open with a brief lexicon and introduction to the multivocality of Israeli Messianic Jewish discourse. The researched community is shown to be highly sensitized to the ideological and political constructedness of language, its social contingency and quiescent layers of meanings; its multivalency to include and exclude people and praxis; and its potential for crossing and policing borders. It is argued that the liminal position of Jewish Believers fosters a cross-cultural polyglot fluency among vastly different reference group members (orthodox non-Believing Jews, western evangelical Christians, secular Israelis, Arab Christians, etc.). This same social liminality positions Israeli Messianic Jews to more consciously reify or subvert reigning hegemonic religious discourses.

Chapter six, “The reader’s road map”, develops an analytical model for Israeli Messianic Jewish identity analysis and explains the layout of the findings. Identity is approached as travel – routes, roots and borders – by the subjects and subsequently by the researcher, to structure and interpret Messianic Jewish discourse and praxis. It is posited that Israeli Messianic Jews narrate their identity as a restoration to Zion, their tri-fold source and destination – returning to the God of Israel, re-rooting in the land and re-defining the borders of their birthright.

Chapter seven addresses routes as the first leg of Messianic Jewish identity-as-travel, commencing with a journey which culminates in a professed faith in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel. From this point onward, what began as a spiritual quest is retold as a metaphysical returning to God. Furthermore, it is argued that hegemonic Jewish and Christian discourses employ a linear narrative construct of the faith journey to imply that a definitive rupture occurs when a Jew “comes to faith”: he disavows his Jewishness and crosses over to Christianity. However, the structure of empirical Israeli Messianic Jewish faith journey narratives reveals a spiral course of returning to Zion, and continuity rather than rupture. The empirical findings call into question why, despite the emic spiral construct of the Messianic Jewish faith journey, Jewish Believers nonetheless choose at times to invoke a hegemonic linear interpretation of “conversion” – newness rather than renewal – which seemingly denies their unique ongoing identity as Jews. It is argued that the linear “conversion” interpretation forms part of a larger antinomian Jewish Believing discourse, in which Jewishness is defined as a national (Israeli), rather than a spiritual identity.

Identity as roots, in Chapter eight, delves into Israeli Messianic Jewish visions and challenges of indigeneity, independence and cultural relevance. The chapter explores how the subjects endeavor to return to the “true roots” of their faith in the land through Yeshua, in light of the ongoing influences of secular Israeli culture, orthodox Judaism, the Protestant mission, Christian Zionism and western consumer colonialism. *Aliyah* becomes a complicated issue for Jewish Believers legally denied citizenship in Israel under the Law of Return, and *Yeridab* holds a particular allure for those with strong ties with the Christian west. Also explored is the tension between indigenous rooting and the putative need to raise foreign support whose demands threaten to uproot local works. Similarly, Jewish Believers striving for indigenous “authenticity” in Israel find themselves continually struggling to remain progressive subjects rather than objects, manipulated by the gaze of patrons and tourists.

An interesting cultural schema precipitates from the narratives in which foreign (particularly western) means, manners, products, presence and patronage are compared to and measured against the slow, organic standard of the tree. Do they resemble the barren, uprooted, ephemeral, commercialized Christmas tree, entirely out of place in the heart of Israel, or, like the olive tree, do their roots dig deep into Israeli soil, endure droughts and wars, draw from and replenish indigenous resources, bear fruit for local sustenance, and slowly but surely reclaim the barren wastelands? Finally, Chapter eight explores two models that offer an Israeli indigeneity coupled with emissaryship to the west, bridging between east and west while preserving their respective characteristics and callings.

Lastly, Israeli Messianic Jewish identity is examined through the metaphor of borders and border work. Chapter nine focuses on how Israeli Jewish Believers struggle to reclaim and restore their birthright, beginning with a temporal return back in time, the construction of a uniquely Messianic Jewish historiography and collective memory to inform the “restoration” of a contemporary Messianic Jewish identity.

The return to and redefinition of the borders of the birthright is expressed through three cumulative border struggles. The first border struggle involves the question of Messianic Jewish subjectivity, that is, whether Jewish Believers must submit themselves to hegemonic discourses and praxes of the Jewish and Christian establishments, or whether they can subjectively define a distinct discourse and praxis for themselves. The second dispute analyzes the question of theological autonomy. On the one hand is the hegemonic argument that a Believer’s Messianic and Jewish identities should be segregated, maintaining a hierarchical or

dichotomous relationship, implying a spiritual segregation from the Jewish community and concomitant integration into the “universal” body of Believers. On the other hand is the uniquely Messianic Jewish challenge in which Jewish Believers strive for an integration of body, soul and spirit in their discourse and praxis, and at the same time, whenever possible, seek integration with the non-Messianic Jewish and non-Jewish Messianic communities at large.

The third and last dispute involves the issue of spiritual authority. This final struggle includes a hegemonic strategy of conflating christology with Jewish observance (from Nicaea to Ikea) in order to effectively tarnish the reputation of Jewish Believers, and in some cases ostracize them as heretics. Here Messianic discourse emerges as a Foucauldian *Kampfplatz*, as community members struggle to either maintain a hegemonic religious status quo, or alternatively, to restore a spiritual authority to Jewish Believers in Zion (from Rome to Jerusalem) after an exile of nearly two millennia among the nations.

Discussion

Hegemonic ideologies and power structures work together with dominant discourse, giving discourse a “natural” taken-for-granted feel. Together they construct *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977). *Doxa* is the matrix that defines and pervades everyday social existence; like the air around us, it is nearly imperceptible. However, marginalized peoples, by their very existence, expose the constructedness of doxa, highlighting the deficiencies of mainstream society (Deleuze 1985). Due to their unique perspective, they may rather easily deconstruct the doxic codes of “settled” peoples and controvert present social realities (Swidler 1986), practicing a heterodoxy alternative to the doxic reign. The result is the transformation of doxa to orthodoxy¹⁶⁶, which is all that was taken for granted and has now been challenged by heterodoxy. Generally the “orthodox” do not easily relinquish their position of hegemony. This is where political battles ensue: between orthodox and heterodox, between hegemonic and alternative, emergent social orders.

The construction of doxa and the rise of orthodoxy in the face of heterodox challenge, are particularly helpful concepts when addressing the identity border struggles of the Israeli Messianic Jewish community both without and, particularly in Chapter nine, within the community itself. This dissertation has endeavored to analyze the ways in which Jewish, Christian and Israeli establishments challenge the heterodox existence and expression of Israeli Messianic Jews and vice versa. Yet the same political struggles described between in and out-group members are reproduced within the community itself. Bourdieu’s and Swidler’s theories explain why some Messianic Jews, such as Levi, so consciously emphasize an alternative discourse, and why those holding to a dominant faith praxis, like Annie, criticize Levi’s critical consciousness as unnatural, inauthentic, unspiritual, or downright heretical¹⁶⁷. Identity is at stake in this power struggle – the present and future identity of Israeli Jewish Believers in Yeshua.

Messianic Jews claim that their faith in Yeshua is not simply a halfway house on the road to Gentile Christianity, despite Glick’s assertion in his 1958 study of American Hebrew Christianity. Yet for Jewish Believers to realize a vision of Messianic Jewish continuity, that is identity maintenance and the raising of subsequent generations of Messianic Jews, rather than

¹⁶⁶ Orthodoxy here refers to hegemonic rule, rather than Jewish religious orthodoxy, discussed elsewhere in this paper.

¹⁶⁷ See “The struggle over subjectivity,” in Chapter nine.

a gradual cross-over to either non-Messianic Jewishness or non-Jewish Christianity, they must succeed in creating and maintaining a sustainable social alternative, a unique Messianic Jewish modality.

Our findings indicate that currently, a majority of Israeli Messianics are hegemonically aligned with western Protestant Christians, their power and their capital, while adopting a construction of themselves, in the classic image of Yeshua, as the rejected, persecuted brother of the Jews. Emergent attempts to construct Jewish Believers as integral members of the larger Jewish community, to reintegrate faith in Yeshua into existing Jewish practice, are perceived as a threat to the Messianic alliance with western Gentile Christianity, particularly by those whose self-definition, *modus operandi* and base of support is reliant upon Jewish rejection and persecution and based upon a preferred position within this Hebrew-Christian alliance.

Chapter nine touches on this issue by highlighting the internal border struggles waged between community members. Based on our findings and in light of theories presented in the Introduction, this Discussion explores the use of hegemonic strategies of action by Believers within the Israeli Messianic community. Five successive offensive strategies of action are employed variously by a large number of community members, effectively preserving the current Messianic hegemony in Israel while suppressing emergent Messianic Jewish expressions which might challenge such hegemony in favor of a “more Jewish” expression. These strategies are discussed below from the most benign to the most extreme. It is argued that the very existence of such an in-group struggle over identity issues attests to the presence of emergent, uniquely Messianic Jewish discourses and practices.

Nature

Heterodox Messianic Jewish identity, like every other identity, is socially, not naturally, occurring. However there is a difference between the way that orthodoxy and heterodoxy are subjectively perceived. Heterodox reform, by its very nature, challenges the orthodox status quo and must, in order to effect real change, reorganize taken-for-granted habits and modes of experience to model new styles of social and political interactions. Due to its challenge of the status quo and attempts to alter social reality, heterodoxy often “feels” unnatural, whereas orthodoxy represents “nature” itself (Bourdieu 1977).

The first offensive hegemonic strategy of action in Israeli Messianic circles is the claim that Jewishness is natural, and should therefore require only maintenance, but certainly not laboriously articulated cultural consciousness¹⁶⁸. Identity pursuits putatively draw adherents' attention away from what should be their central focus, Yeshua-based faith. Figures who invoke this reasoning construct themselves as the defenders/crusaders of religious purity against an onslaught of spiritually destructive concerns of the flesh.

One leader claims, for example: "Ethnocentric churches are, by inevitable logic, not Christocentric... I do not labour at distinctiveness; it is a *natural* consequence of what God has made me to be... My greatest concern... is that we are not engaged in what are the core issues." ("Our Messianic Identity." 2001. Italics added). By discursively constructing Messianic Judaism as an "ethnocentric church" in Jewish-dominated Israel, Messianic Jewish identity work seems absurd and carnal, if not racist. After all, Jewish identity – construed as Jewish ethnocentrism – can only seemingly exist to exclude non-Jewish minorities in Israel and engender ethnic pride.

Other examples include the many Israeli Messianics who claim that their practices of singing translated Christian hymns and placing their Scriptures on the floor before them are more "natural" than singing the *Shema* or reading from a Torah scroll during their services¹⁶⁹.

As Charmé (2000) demonstrates, there is nothing "natural" about Jewish identity; the hegemonic strategy which "naturalizes" Jewish identity is just as socially constructed as the heterodox one which problematizes it. The claim that Jewish identity work is "unnatural" and ethnocentric, is a strategy of action to silence and subordinate heterodox Messianic Jewish discourse and praxis to the religious discourse, theology and politics of the dominantly Gentile Christian world. Furthermore, such a claim fails to acknowledge the political and sociocultural ramifications, particularly in Israel and in congregations of primarily Jewish people, of the marginalization of Jewish identity in faith discourse and praxis.

Authenticity

The discourse of Jewish "nature" leads to the more aggressive discourse of authenticity. Clifford (1997:10) points out that scholars need to perk their ears when the word "authentic"

¹⁶⁸ Even though the intensive reconstruction of Jewishness in Israel is abundantly documented. See for example, Almog 1997, Hebrew; Zerubavel 1995.

¹⁶⁹ See "Constructing 'natural' environments of praxis," in Chapter nine.

is being tossed about, and inquire who is using the concept against whom, and with what power to sustain hegemony. That is, the seal of authenticity intends to include or exclude people and their pursuits, by issuing a claim on “the real thing”.

Throughout the narratives, observations and emic texts, authenticity talk emerges as a hegemonic strategy of action in relation to issues of Jewish observance among Israeli Jewish Believers. If a Messianic Jew were not born and raised observant, his “new” Jewish praxis is judged as “inauthentic” or “put-on”, while if he was raised practicing, there is no need for him to continue in the old ways of his unredeemed past¹⁷⁰. Either way, according to this strategy, Jewish observance is constructed as an inauthentic reflection of faith in Yeshua. Furthermore, if a Jewish Believer observes the commandments in an unorthodox or selective manner, his behavior is deemed particularly “inauthentic”. Stuart Charmé (2000) criticizes this approach to authenticity since it constructs culture as a romanticized essence frozen in time and space¹⁷¹. He expects authentic subjects to continually seek greater depth and renewal of praxis:

An authentic identity, therefore, is never an entity or substance that we possess, but rather a project situated in time and space... For this reason life develops in spirals: it passes again and again by the same points but at different levels of integration and complexity (2000:143).

The hegemonic authenticity idiom in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community includes three varied approaches. First, observant Messianic Jews are perceived to be taking on elements of another culture which is alien and perhaps even contradictory to their own. The implication is that Jewish religious culture is “other”. The reader may recall the stylized black-and-white images of “un-Believing” and “unenlightened” ultra-orthodox Jews employed in some Messianic Jewish parlance¹⁷².

Second, it is argued that the Messianic adoption of Jewish religious elements is partial, reflecting only partial knowledge of the “other” culture from which it is taken. Often these cultural fragments are used differently than in their orthodox Jewish context. The different usage is then interpreted as inaccuracy and lack of authenticity. The assumption is that identity comes in wholes, and that one has to be a cultural master before beginning to practice. For

¹⁷⁰ The spiral Messianic Jewish schemas of rebirth and a “new creation” aren’t applied here to the critique of commandment observance or Jewish tradition. According to this paradigm, Jewish observance is always “old”. The linear newness schemas are employed here to reify antinomianism. See section entitled “Linear and spiral courses: Newness or renewal” in Chapter seven.

¹⁷¹ See “The struggle over subjectivity,” in Chapter nine for narrative examples and the full application of Charmé’s analysis.

¹⁷² See “The grace versus works dichotomy” in Chapter nine and “Our Messianic Identity.” 2001.

example, use of liturgy is perceived to obligate the adoption not only of an entire body of liturgy, but also a monolithic orthodox Jewish worldview and other accompanying conventions.

This argument involves much more than questions of cultural relevance or competency. It implies that the orthodox Jewish establishment holds sole proprietorship on observance, so that any use of traditional Jewish content or forms must be monologically subordinated to orthodox Jewish convention. There are a few observant Messianic Jews on the extreme end of the spectrum that share this position and live according to a consistently orthodox lifestyle. For the most part, however, pro-observance Messianic Jews feel free as Jews to dialogue with the orthodox establishment, selectively adopting certain orthodox forms and content, but do not at the same time feel fully beholden to orthodox ideology or authority. They may use orthodox tropes as they are, in whole or in part, or reinterpret them into different contexts, adding additional meanings or reviving hegemonically suppressed orthodox ones.

Social constructivism argues that culture exists only among practitioners; there is no body of culture that exists apart from praxis. By this line of reason, Jewishness exists among those who practice it. Additionally, all tradition, even Jewish orthodoxy, changes and develops in different social contexts and over time. Moreover, different groups (including various other Jewish streams, such as Conservative and Reform Judaism) very often dialogically negotiate meanings and usages of the same discourses (Eriksen 1993). Therefore, according to the theories employed in this research, the cultural dialogue led by Messianic Jews with other Jewish streams in issues of observance, rather than a mark of Jewish inadequacy or artifice, is the genuine articulation of living practitioners, the very indication of Jewish authenticity.

Thirdly, according to the authenticity idiom, observant Messianic Jews are accused of putting on a “show” for others (and perhaps for themselves). This accusation often hints at moral turpitude, as the “show” is not only false, but deceptive, “trying to prove that they are something that they are not”¹⁷³.

Swidler explains that during unsettled periods, cultural activity does not feel “natural”, precisely because it is at these times that cultural praxis is consciously constructed to effect change. “Unsettled lives” require people to humble themselves and relearn the most basic of habits, sensibilities and worldviews, much like a stroke victim re-learning how to walk, speak

¹⁷³ See “The struggle over subjectivity,” in Chapter nine.

and properly manage himself in social contexts or like someone beginning life in a new country, language and culture (Hoffman 1989). A Messianic Jew who begins to observe commandments to some degree, traditionally or otherwise, is not necessarily involved in proving that he is something which he is not; he is, however, actively transforming himself into someone he believes he should be. This process of transformation, of learning to “walk the walk” is nothing new in Believing discourse. If, for example, there were a former womanizer who became a Believer, and began cultivating faithfulness to his wife, no one would think to accuse him of trying to prove he is faithful, when he never was before, and still really has a long way to go before he is truly reformed. His fellow Believers would do everything in their power to help support and encourage his efforts. However, the hegemonic response is quite different when it comes to a Believer grappling with Torah or traditional observance.

Social change requires the concerted effort of social actors taking on new roles and behaviors which may at first “feel” or appear to be awkward (Goffman 1959, 1963). It is certainly not natural in this day and age for a Jew to believe in Yeshua, yet Messianic Jews see this step as part of a larger process of individual and national returning to God. Similarly, some Jewish Believers view a returning to Scriptural commandments and to Jewish cultural heritage as part and parcel of the reclaiming of their birthright, not as the victory march of righteous law-abiding saints, but as the regathering of a wayward remnant.

Just as scholars have tried to hegemonically delimit Jewish Believers by linking them to a historiography of unfaithfulness¹⁷⁴, Israeli Jewish Believers also sometimes try to limit and control the boundaries of Messianic Jewish identity by conjuring up narratives of past lives. As Eriksen notes, “history is not a product of the past, but a response to the requirements of the present” (1993:72). Yet, what matters most to the observant Messianic Jew is not her secular or observant upbringing. Whether those Messianic Jews who are newly observant are “trying to prove” something is a supposition that must be empirically tested. In this study, subjects do not express the need to “prove” their Jewish identity. Many, however, do express an intense desire to return to God in concrete ways, to live in a manner consistent with their theology, to practice what they preach. To borrow Charme’s terminology (2000:143), it appears that on the whole, Israeli Messianic Jews interviewed and observed who have chosen to take on various elements of Jewish observance, frame their practice in the broader context of processes of spiritual growth which include increasing levels of identity integration and complexity. As we

¹⁷⁴ See “Historiography of Messianic Jews,” in the Introduction.

have shown, the Messianic Jew speaks of herself *en route*¹⁷⁵, unencumbered by her previous Messiah-less state of faith, or at least struggling to overcome its Godless constituents. It is through walking in observance that she *becomes* a Law-abiding Jew. Whether or not the observant talk and walk are enacted in a compelling manner is a matter of art and experience, but evidently not imposture.

Cooptation

The third strategy of action against Messianic Jewish heterodoxy is discursive and practical cooptation: the inoculative adoption of a mild dosage of a subversive Messianic Jewish idiom, while rejecting and replacing its substantive content, in an attempt to control and convert heterodox discourse. Adopting Messianic Jewish lingo and practice to a limited extent and using them universally, effectually blunts the cutting edge of heterodox discourse. Rather than subversively encouraging Believers to challenge the status quo in faith discourse and praxis, it gives them the sense of being fresh, up-to-date, politically-correct and united, all the while insuring ongoing submission to the same hegemonic structures.

The empirical research findings concur with Eriksen (1993:73) that the same discourse and praxis can be used to legitimate two or more highly differing ideal social orders. It is the multivocality of symbols, like any other cultural text, that leaves them open to political manipulation¹⁷⁶. Hence the significance of critical ethnography in order to dig beneath the surface of language in social context to explore its ideological and political constituents, not assuming that when subject A says “Messianic” he means the same thing as when subject B utters the same four syllables.

A simple example is the term “Messianic Jew”, which once only referred to those Jewish Yeshua-Believers who affirm the significance of and seek to maintain a Jewish identity and lifestyle, yet has commonly been expanded in Israel to an all-inclusive term, meaning any Jewish Believer, regardless of ideology or lifestyle. To the uninitiated, the two usages in context may appear to be the same. In actuality, the original use subverts the hegemonic religious order which permits only a cultural or national Jewishness, subordinated to a Christian religious identity, i.e. Hebrew Christianity. In an age where Israelis rarely speak of themselves as Hebrews, and when Jewish Believers wishing to integrate more fully into Israeli

¹⁷⁵ See Chapter seven, “Identity as routes: Returning to God”.

¹⁷⁶ See “The struggle over spiritual authority,” in Chapter nine, for a more detailed discussion of the multiple connotations and political usages of Messianic Jewish vernacular

society tend to eschew the term “Christian”, the second use is a cooptation of the subversive idiom, which empties the term “Messianic Jewish” of any challenging “Jewish” content, using it as a more up-to-date version of “Hebrew Christian”. Reformers attempting to restore the social critique implied by the original usage, can then be accused of bringing division, by upsetting the hegemonic uniformity promoted as “unity”.

A few Jewish Believers interviewed went so far as to abandon the term “Messianic Jew” since it has become so worn-out and over-inclusive a rubric that it no longer reflects how they see themselves¹⁷⁷. One leader declined an invitation to be interviewed for this study specifically because he refused to be identified with the broad spectrum of Jewish Believers encompassed under the Israeli Messianic Jewish umbrella, some of whom he considers *epikorsim*¹⁷⁸ who have willingly abandoned their Jewish identity and praxis. In conclusion, cooptation is a hegemonic strategy of action serving to practically neutralize the subversive thrust of heterodox discourse.

Spirituality

Mary Douglas’ theory (1970:195-196) helps us explain the ways in which Messianic Jews construct their concepts of spirituality. From our Introduction, the reader will recall Douglas’ theory which equates Messianic Jews’ view of the relationship between spirit and body with the Believers’ relationship to a social group. The spirit symbolizes the Believer, while the body represents the social group. A socio-religious group struggling to preserve its hegemony will fully equate itself with *the* body of Messiah; any Believer unwilling to submit to its corporate views of spirituality is accused of having a divisive, rebellious or heretical spirit. Believing activities associated with heterodoxy are likewise perceived as “unspiritual” or “carnal”. Hence, Nurit’s worry for her orthodox friend who continues to pray from the *siddur* at times even after coming to faith in Yeshua, or the spiritual leader’s hesitant approval of singing the *Shema* in his congregation with the caveat that it be sung “in a spiritual manner”¹⁷⁹.

Furthermore, Jewish Believers in Israel commonly teach that the mind and body of the Believer exist in enmity with the spirit, and therefore must be renewed and purified. For example, the *Ha’Ikar*¹⁸⁰ discourse discussed in this paper, interprets Shaul’s teaching

¹⁷⁷ See Chapter five, “An introduction to Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular”.

¹⁷⁸ Infidels.

¹⁷⁹ See “The grace versus works dichotomy” in Chapter nine.

¹⁸⁰ *Ha’Ikar* means “the essence”. See explanatory footnote under “Two models of segregated identity” in Chapter nine.

concerning the war in his members (*Romans* 7:23) in order to selectively reject various mind and body-engaging faith practices on the premise that these are a distraction from pure spirituality. Of course not all embodied practices are eshewed. The reigning hegemony defines *Ha'Ikar*, the spiritual essentials. Presently, Jewish practice fails the selection, bearing the reproach of the non-essential practice that competes for the Believer's attention while distracting him from what should be his true, spiritual focus.

Ha'Ikar discourse interprets embodied Torah or *halachic* observance as carnality, the weakness of the flesh. Messianic Jews incorporating commandment observance in their spiritual service of God "miss the mark" by focusing on peripheral matters rather than the spiritual essence [*Ha'Ikar*], revealing dangerous sectarian trends. The commandments are understood to be only shadows pointing to higher, spiritual truths realized in Yeshua. Once the Believer has realized faith on this higher plane, he is no longer obliged to literally practice the Law. Again, the question here is not one of salvation since all Messianic Jews interviewed and observed, all along the observance spectrum, unanimously agree that salvation is freely given by grace through faith in Yeshua. The point here is that according to the *Ha'Ikar* discourse, the saved-by-grace Believer is not required by God to keep the Law, not even in his spiritual service to God.

From all of the complex detail of the Torah, all that remains is the spiritual essence – Yeshua. In practice, the *Ha'Ikar* approach leads to a "spiritualization" of faith. This does not mean that the *Ha'Ikar* discourse lacks an accompanying praxis, but simply that explicit, embodied biblical practices are shunned and replaced with amorphous spiritual virtues in the Believer's "heart" and an unarticulated public service remarkably reminiscent of western Protestant practice. The intangible nature of *Ha'Ikar* "spirituality" also compliments an ideology of anti-intellectualism which grows proportionately with the sophistication of heterodox culture. The more mind and body engaging the heterodox discourse (the more the practitioner must think and do), the more unspiritual it is perceived to be.

Just as with the challenge of any other hegemonic strategy of action, when dominant articulations of "spirituality" are challenged, the challengers are perceived as "unspiritual" deviants or "weak" in their faith, because quite logically they deviate in some way from the dominant concepts and articulations of spirituality (Boyarin 2004, Gager 1992). Furthermore, should such heterodox efforts involve sophisticated explanation, study or embodied praxis, they are rejected as "carnal", versus the hegemonic discourse, which often goes without saying

(or study or consciously embodied observance), and is therefore “spiritual”¹⁸¹. Many Believing Jews trying to live according to the guidelines of the Law lament in their interviews and personal interactions that their non-observant “brothers” judge them to be “less spiritual” due to their concern with concrete praxis. Let the reader recall Mordechai from Chapter nine who lost one quarter of his congregants the moment he encouraged them to practically apply their traditional learning by introducing a partial Torah service into their congregational meeting.

At the same time, heterodox streams may also respond, à la Eriksen (1993:73), by associating spirituality with their own collective efforts, and carnality with those of the dominant parties resisting reform. Thus, when discouraged by such opposition from fellow Believers, David quotes *Psalm* 119:49-51:

Remember the word to your servant upon which you have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for your word has given me life. The proud [i.e. those who might judge him as unspiritual for his pro-observance stand] have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from your Torah.

To summarize this strategy, in Israeli Jewish Believing culture, spirituality is most often associated first and foremost with submission to hegemonic religious discourse and praxis, which involves to some degree a rejection of commandment observance in one’s service to God. Secondly, efforts to challenge dominant conventions are also considered unspiritual since they contradict and subvert the hegemonic version of spirituality. Thirdly, should such heterodox efforts involve sophisticated explanation, study or embodied praxis, they are rejected as carnal. Conversely, non-hegemonic streams can also use the spirituality idiom to buttress their heterodox position.

In addition to the internal struggle over spirituality, Israeli Jewish Believers use the spirit-body equation to inform and explain their relations with three larger reference groups: Zionist Israeli society, non-Messianic Jewish streams¹⁸² and Protestant Christian circles¹⁸³. Firstly, all Israeli Messianic Jews promote the integration of Jewish Believers (spirit) with Zionist Israeli society and civil religion (body). They find no need to rebel against this civil body since it is a fulfillment of prophecy. Therefore societal participation is encouraged, including secular work, tax-paying, military service, Hebrew language usage, remaining in Israel despite opportunities to live and even “serve God” abroad, etc¹⁸⁴. Jewish Believers are so pro-integration into Israeli

¹⁸¹ For a more detailed description, see “The grace versus works dichotomy” in Chapter nine.

¹⁸² “Non-Believing Jews” or simply, “Judaism”.

¹⁸³ The “body of Messiah” at large.

¹⁸⁴ See in Chapter eight, “The primacy of the land”.

society that many circles are willing to avail themselves of Israeli legal and media channels to publically fight government policies which attempt to deny them civil rights or prevent Messianic Jewish *Aliyah*.

However, within the Israeli Messianic Jewish community, there are opposing positions in relation to the other two reference groups. The hegemonic position often relates orthodox Judaism to a carnal body which wars against the Spirit (represented by the Believers), and should therefore remain segregated and excluded from Jewish Believing culture. This same dominant position welcomes integration with the Christian Zionist establishment. Alternatively, there are those Messianics who take the opposite position, seeking to find points for integration with non-Messianic Jewish streams, and rejecting Christianity or Christian missions in Israel as warring against Jewish Believers, the Jewish roots of the faith and Israeli rootedness¹⁸⁵.

A rarer third position exists¹⁸⁶ which seeks to find common ground with both Jewish and Christian religious establishments, and at the same time to respectively challenge their problematic anti-Yeshua or anti-semitic elements from within. This is the most inclusive of positions, requiring the greatest discursive and practical breadth and flexibility. Rather than labeling the other as unspiritual, this third Messianic Jewish position is in favor of developing relationships of trust and fostering dialogue with the aforementioned reference groups.

Heresy accusations

When the argument of the “unspirituality” of heterodoxy is no longer convincing, heresy accusations, the last stand and most proscriptive of all strategies, are employed in order to restore and maintain hegemonic status quo at the expense of ongoing relationships. Thus, heterodoxy is acknowledged as a spiritual phenomenon but rejected as spirituality gone awry. The reader will recall the adaptation of Mary Douglas’ theory (1970b) from the Introduction according to which such accusations are made where social interaction is intense but relations are ill-defined, competitive and include significantly disparate goals. An accusation of heresy imposes clearly defined borders on previously ill-defined social relations, elevates hegemonic goals, and significantly reduces heterodox competition by banning the accused (or implied) “heretics” from fellowship within the hegemonically delimited community, thereby also denying their authority to shape or represent the community or access its resources.

¹⁸⁵ See “Foreign evangelism,” in Chapter eight.

¹⁸⁶ Briefly explored in Chapter nine in the section entitled “Integrating new and old”.

The Netanya “Ikea” leadership conference showcased a strategy of action similar to the accusations described by Douglas. That is not to say that there are not individual Jewish Believers that do in fact hold putatively heretical positions regarding the divinity of Yeshua, vis-à-vis the accepted Messianic Jewish theological consensus on the matter. The matter discussed here is not theological, but rather social and political. There were those active in the correspondence following the conference who clearly stated in print that they indeed support the dominant position on the matter of Yeshua’s divine nature. However, their opponents continued to imply that they, too, are heretics. Why?

The leaders who voiced opposition to the Netanya proceedings did not oppose the affirmation of Yeshua’s divine identity, but rather the means, purpose and product of this affirmation. When dissenting voices questioned the purpose of a creed, presented without allocating true opportunity for discussion and debate among fellow congregational leaders, with an urgency implying a sudden need to placate worried Christian supporters in the west, they were labeled dissentious and their actions were associated with the sinister, amorphous threat of heresy. Moreover, leaders returned to their congregations and literary channels to battle the “heretical menace”, often without calling the heretics by name. Heresy became a nebulous cloud looming over the Israeli Messianic Jewish community. Mere association of various figures with the threat of heresy was sufficient to cast a shadow upon their reputation and sow fear in the hearts of other Believers.

Over one year prior to the Netanya conference, Dr. Tsvika Sadan had offered an alternative, more inclusive means of faith definition. Rather than adopting western Protestant formulated dogma, he suggested leaving obscure theological matters to midrashic-style narrative (Sadan 2001). Dr. Gershon Nerel spoke of this matter months later when he explained the history of Gentile Christian conflation of christology with anti-Judaic doctrine and praxis (qtd. in “This is the Covenant.” 2004). Nerel diplomatically explained that forced submission to universal creeds was an historically Gentile strategy of action used to exclude observant Jewish Believers from ecclesiastic leadership, and eventually from fellowship, through similar accusations of heresy. Menahem Benhayim (1994), years before the current controversies, also encouraged his Messianic brothers to shift their focus from culturally problematic creeds to socially relevant deeds, as a surer sign of the fruit of good faith.

Rather than stimulating a fruitful dialogue to help build unity and mutual understanding between various streams among Israeli Believers, the Netanya proceedings sought to force an exclusive hegemonic agenda, insinuating that opposition or reticence to sign a monologic creed are signs of heresy. Nerel, Sadan and Benhayim urge their fellow Messianics to consider the historical context and ramifications of credal practice, and offer two alternative means to delimit faith, one advocating a Jacobian¹⁸⁷ emphasis upon deeds which bear witness to good faith, and the second, which taps into a centuries old Jewish tradition of *midrash* in matters which lack Scripturally specific, unambiguous terminology to nail them down.

Thus, dominant religious paradigms exist not only in out-group Israeli Messianic Jewish relations with their larger religious reference groups, but have also taken deep root within. According to opponents of the Netanya conference, the way to prevent a historical rerun of the infamous council in Nicaea, which married the formulation of the basic Christian faith creed with anti-semitic doctrine and policy, is to allow open discussion of possible faith formulations by indigenous Jewish Believers. Truly open discussion might even lead to a non-credal solution along the lines suggestion by Benhayim or Sadan.

A Distinct Israeli Messianic Jewish Modality?

To apply theory from literature on regional conflict resolution, without true, non-axiomatic dialogue among Israeli Messianic Jews, rather than true unity, the indigenous community will continue to reproduce the same exclusive ideologies and power structures of domination and subordination (Bekerman 2005), which have historically plagued Messianic Jewish in-group and out-group relations. Furthermore, in a community which displays dominant trends of cooptation and accusations of unnaturalness, inauthenticity, unspirituality and heresy against more observance-oriented Jewish Believers, it is questionable whether the majority of Israeli Jewish Believers will succeed in creating and sustaining a unique Messianic Jewish modality, rather than simply reproducing dominant religious identity models and gradually leading members toward assimilation into forms of non-Jewish Christianity or non-Messianic Judaism.

On the one hand is the rare alternative of Jewish Believers embracing a non-Messianic Jewishness (orthodox Judaism), which they simply pepper with the name Yeshua here and there, without addressing the revolutionary implications of faith in Yeshua for a Jew, foreshadowing assimilation into normative Judaism. Our empirical findings rule out the existence of the latter phenomenon as any substantial expression, even among the most

¹⁸⁷ See *James* 2:14-26.

observant of interviewees. The only kind of assimilation that seems to empirically threaten affiliated Messianic Jews in Israel is assimilation into western Gentile Christianity.

Many Jewish Believers argue that Israeli nationality maintains the requisite Messianic Jewish distinction. However noble, self-sacrificing and exclusive it may be, nationalistic Israeli Messianism is not distinctly “Jewish”¹⁸⁸; both Jews and Gentiles can be good nationalistic Messianic Israelis. Nationalistic Israeli Messianism allows for identification with the Jewish people without the adoption of Jewish religious ideas, values or strategies of action. The narratives attest that any Jewish Believer can feel called by God to make *Aliyah*, and/or return to a deeper Jewish identification because of some understanding of the ongoing spiritual significance of God’s covenant relationship with the Jewish people and the supernatural establishment of the Jewish State. He may see himself as a light to his people, continuing patriarchal and first-century faith, bringing the message of Messianic salvation to Israel and the nations. All of this may be accomplished by replacing Torah or traditional observance with Israeli civil religion¹⁸⁹ (rather than the two existing in harmony).

Thus the Believer’s national identity is “Jewish”, his operative language is Hebrew, his theology includes “biblical Zionism” and even his faith is “Jewish” because of its biblical Jewish roots. But in terms of discourse, ideology and politics, he can remain a Hebrew Christian, without practical vision or effort to dialogically integrate his faith identity with historically recognized forms of Jewish faith discourse or praxis. In fact, he conceptually interprets such integration as the carnal adoption of unnecessary external trappings. The secular Israeli “negation of the exile” discourse serves here to annul the significance of such an historicized religious connection. Two thousand years of history are circumvented, accomplishing a selective return to a “biblical” Jewish nationalism rooted in the land of Israel. The Torah’s perpetual statutes, everlasting ordinances and covenants which do not directly serve a discourse of nationalistic Messianism, are simply “selected” out, and superseded with one universal new covenant through Yeshua. Family ties and memory then become the only

¹⁸⁸ Nationalistic Messianism may explain the unusually high percentages of intermarriage with Gentile Christians in the Israeli community, over 30% among laypeople by very conservative estimate (Kjær-Hansen, Kai & Bodil F. Skjøtt 1999) and over 70% among leaders.

¹⁸⁹ Similarly, American Messianic Jews abroad may maintain a cultural or ethnic Jewish identification without religious discourse, praxis or normative Jewish social networks, through symbolic Jewish cultural practices such as the use of Yiddishisms, frequenting kosher-style delis, wearing Jewish stars, telling Jewish jokes, or emphasizing education and liberal values. In Ida’s mother’s case (see “An introduction to Israeli Messianic Jewish vernacular.”), lighting *yahrzeit* candles, eating gefilte fish and matza, and singing Al Jolson signified her ties to her Jewish heritage.

differences between the nationalist Messianic Israeli and his veteran permanent resident Christian Zionist co-worshipper.

It is also no wonder that Jewish Believers that hold to this national Israeli form of “Jewish” identity become distressed by the possibility of themselves or their children leaving the country. *Yeridah* in this case is more than abandoning one’s efforts to personally realize the prophecies of *Shivat Zion*¹⁹⁰ or to remain true to the national Zionist cause. It also puts the Jewish Believer in danger of losing his Jewish (Israeli) identity to a non-Hebrew speaking, non-Israeli Messianism (Christianity) of the nations. In such case, *Yeridah* is tantamount to becoming a Gentile, one of the nations. The chances for “Messianic Jewish” continuity of this sort are practically non-existent since the Jewish aspect of this Believer’s identity is eliminated with his departure from the land. If not for him, due to his memory and social networks, then certainly for his children raised among the nations.

Furthermore, our evidence suggests that Jewish sentiment and memory are not the substance of Messianic Jewish generational continuity¹⁹¹. This paper emphasizes the role of praxis because identity is constructed in social interaction, and cultural continuity is about the ongoing rhythms of interaction in environments of praxis. The findings concur with social constructivist theory that first generation personal memories, experiences and sentiments of Jewishness are not substantial enough bases to sustain the Jewish cultural identity of the Israeli Messianic Jewish community in the generations to come without ongoing engagement in environments of Jewish practice.

The establishment of a new Hebrew society free from the burdens of Jewish religion and sense of alienation among the nations was already tested in the Zionist experiment. Zionist pioneers who came with their heads filled with revolutionary ideas to perform heavy labor in the fields or otherwise build the young new Jewish state, often later bemoaned their failure to raise a second generation of powerful, deeply ideological, thoroughly committed, self-sacrificing leaders like themselves. Their revolution was so “successful”, they had so thoroughly silenced or erased the memory of exile and Jewish oppression, that many of their children became coarse provincial laborers, often with a fragile circumstantial basis for staying on their own land rather than migrating to richer, foreign fields (Merom 2000; Zerubavel 1986). They had realized their dream to build a nation like every other nation.

¹⁹⁰ The returning of the Jewish exiles to Zion.

¹⁹¹ See “Two models of segregated identity,” in Chapter nine.

Similarly, in an environment of praxis in which Jewishness is limited to good Israeli citizenship, and western Christian discourse and praxis provide some sort of universal “common denominator”, a second generation, whether by birth or by discipleship, is unlikely to develop a significant sense of commitment to Jewish ideas, values, strategies of action or continuity from their Israeli Messianic environments of practice.

In the wake of a young people’s conference discussing Messianic Jewish identity in Israel, Harvey assesses that for this second generation, Jewish identity has already become a “non-issue”¹⁹². He happily reports that the conference left the young adults “wondering what significance the [Jewish] identity issue would have in God’s vast eternal plan for the redemption of our Jewish people”. Afterall, as he writes in his report: “We need to concentrate our energies and time and activities as Israeli Messianic believers on those things that bring glory to His Name and count for eternity.” Harvey and his colleagues claim that the troublesome, distracting “Jewish problem” has been solved.

In light of the mainstream construction of “Messianic Jewishness” as a Glickian halfway house, that is, as a modality which is not in any substantial way both distinctly “Messianic” and distinctly “Jewish”, the question remains, what would comprise a distinct Israeli Messianic Jewish modality? Indeed this question brings us to the Israeli Messianic Jewish border disputes, because it is exactly these struggles which trace the borders of an emergent, distinctly Israeli Messianic Jewish modality. The presence of continual border fire attests to persistent resistance, and the contended emergence of heterodox alternatives. The three struggles discussed in Chapter nine, “Identity as borders: Returning to the birthright,” form the three basic fronts in the Messianic Jewish battle over their birthright, against hegemonic strategies of action intended to suppress heterodoxy from without and from within.

First is the battle over the right to a distinct modality, that is, whether Messianic Jews can subjectively define their own discourse, rather than subordinate themselves to hegemonic Jewish and Christian religious discourses which deny their autonomy. Second is the battle over Jewishness as a theologically distinct spiritual identity, inseparably integrated with faith in the Jewish Messiah. Third and last is the battle over spiritual authority, in which Messianic Jews not only fight for the right of self-definition, but resist the hegemonic religious ideas, values and strategies of action which deny them not only distinct Messianic Jewish subjectivity and

¹⁹² See “Body, soul and spirit?” in Chapter nine.

theology, but also fulfillment of their perceived calling to lead their Jewish people and the universal “body of Messiah”. This last front ultimately seeks to restore Jerusalem as the seat of Messianic spiritual authority.

The border disputes which materialized from our empirical findings point to the ongoing struggle within the Israeli Messianic Jewish community to construct a viable identity somewhere between the current extremes of non-Messianic Jewishness and non-Jewish Messianism. One of the strengths of the emergent Israeli Messianic Jewish modality is its maintenance of the dynamic tension between total segregation from and complete assimilation into the larger Jewish and “Messianic” communities. These three struggles on the borders of Israeli Messianic Jewish identity over subjectivity, theological autonomy and spiritual authority, indicate that there is indeed evidence of a minority, emergent, distinctly Messianic Jewish modality in Israel¹⁹³.

In conclusion, our findings have shown that throughout the process of individual identity construction, a battle rages over the legitimacy and expression of the Israeli Messianic Jewish faith community between out-group (normative Jewish, Christian and Zionist) and in-group members, and within the community itself. The discussion above illustrates the similar hegemonic strategies, described and illuminated through social theories, which are utilized from without and within the community to suppress emergent Messianic Jewish discourses and practices. Nonetheless, in contradiction to suppositions of certain social scientists, it is concluded that this very struggle to suppress emergent Messianic Jewishness testifies to the existence of a subjectively-defined, theologically autonomous and politically authoritative emergent Messianic Jewish modality in Israel.

¹⁹³ See also brief empirical descriptions in “Integrating new and old,” in Chapter nine.

Implications

This is the first contemporary study of Messianic Jews in Israel, a small, but growing marginalized minority in Israeli society. A deeper understanding of the identity struggles of this ethno-religious group is a valuable research goal in and of itself. It is also hoped that the insights and information gleaned from the study will serve and equip the Messianic Jewish community in dealing with complex social and communal issues. Additionally, there are methodological and theoretical implications from this empirical study, including a theoretical model of identity-as-travel, which impact our understanding of broader social phenomena, and more specifically, the fields of identity and Jewish identity research.

Methodology

Open methodologies

One contribution of this qualitative research is its challenge of standardized research methods which employ predetermined categories for the study of Jewish identity. Many contemporary studies seek to measure Jewish identity according to levels of religious observance among Jews, often through closed-question questionnaires. Such an approach presents an extremely narrow version of Jewishness, often dictated by Jewish orthodoxy. From our findings we see that if specific practices or degrees of practice were the primary measure of Jewishness, many Messianic Jews would receive the grade of “Jew *par excellence*”. The methodology will have failed to situate praxis in relevant discursive sites; lived identity cannot be fully and fruitfully delimited through predetermined multiple choice. More open methodologies which allow for subjective discursive and practical interpretations yield far richer and more critically relevant empirical findings.

Studies focusing on praxis must also take into consideration the multivocality of symbols. The interviewees succeeded in surprising this researcher time and again, through their open narratives and emic explanations. A closed questionnaire, however, leaves no room for subjective discourse, often takes for granted an understanding of praxis, and lacks a mechanism for subject-researcher dialogue.

Methodological openness is particularly important in studies of non-hegemonic groups, such as studies attempting to assess and interpret global trends of Jewish assimilation, since assimilation is by nature a rejection of orthodoxy. Research combining in-depth open-question interviews, observations and textual analysis, perhaps in addition to more traditionally

structured questionnaires based upon empirical categories, and introduced at a later point in the research, will better inform Jewish community research and policymaking.

Multiple methodologies

This study also demonstrates the contribution of multiple methodologies to a study of social identity. Interviews alone would have made analysis of collective struggles over group identity difficult to pursue, eliminating key findings in the section of empirical findings dealing with border disputes. The use of textual analysis alone would have allowed for depth in the emic treatment of specific issues, but would tend to over-represent the views of select leaders and writers, and lack the overall picture of communal interactions and individual perspectives of a wide spectrum of Believers, which, for example, constitutes the greatest weakness of Cohn-Sherbok's study (2000). Ethnography allows the researcher opportunity to build relationships of trust with her subjects. Due to the prolonged visible presence of the researcher in the field, subjects began to offer comments, dilemmas and interpretations on their own volition (Punch 2000:189), sometimes forwarding materials that were not otherwise available.

Participant observations alone would also lack the rich narrative material obtained through interviews and necessary for detailed discourse-oriented ethnography, limiting analysis mainly to etic academic parlance and interpretations. The reader will recall from the Introduction, Robert's Sabbath-observant ex-girlfriend, Yulia, who only appeared to be open to more traditional observance and instead turned out to be a former Seventh-Day Adventist¹⁹⁴. Multiple methodologies contribute to thicker, more balanced, and more finely-tuned empirical findings from a wider variety of contexts and perspectives.

Theory

Early anthropologists hoped to find fruitful alternatives to problems of western modernity in "primitive" societies. Similarly, identity literature in anthropology and cultural studies primarily investigates or philosophizes about post-colonial/post-nation-state migrants in search of alternative, non-antagonistic identity constellations in response to the strife and injustices engendered in the modern era by western colonialism and the nation-state (Appadurai 1992; Braidotti 1994; Deleuze 1985; Akhil & Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992; Morley & Robins 1996).

¹⁹⁴ See "Methodology. The advantage of multiple methodologies" in Chapter three.

Routes & Roots

For example, Braidotti's ideal identity model is represented by the nomad: "The nomad's identity is a map of where s/he has already been" (Braidotti 1994:14). Her feminist critique tends to romanticize nomadism in an effort to sever the oppressive union of national identity with the female body (Delaney 1995). For Braidotti, a subject is not the embodiment of the homeland; she is a bricolage of her journeys.

Indeed, fixed time-place models of identity, also criticized in the anthropological musings of Clifford (1997), miss the entire thrust of Israeli Messianic Jewish discourse, which narrates an identity *en route*. Thinking about routes emphasizes the mutable, processual nature of identity. To focus only on places of birth and degrees of nativeness is to forsake the multiplicity of attachments that people form with places through living in, remembering and imagining them (Malkki 1992:38). Routes, or movement through time and space, must be included in identity models.

Yet the problems of exploitative hegemonic social relations attracting anthropological intervention in much of the identity studies of late, are not "rooted" in rootedness, nor are they entirely uprooted through routedness. Empirically, routedness, too, can lead to a hardening of hierarchies, in which the outsider vantage point of the migrant becomes another tool in an intensified struggle for social and political capital and hegemony (Warshawsky 1999, Hebrew).

Identity as *curriculum vitae* provides only a partial identity picture of the Messianic Jew, who cannot be fully characterized only by the sum of his past journeys. Nor do Messianic Jews follow Bauman's model of postmodern nomadic identity (1996:23-25) which may similarly be summarized as perpetual wandering erratically suspended by chance associations. Stable social relationships of long-term production and reproduction, of the collective and the community, require more than metaphors of individually-paved routes or individuals randomly and temporarily associating with one another *en route* (Battersby 1998:194-5).

The arborescent metaphor, and a broader parlance of roots in the narratives focuses on the individual's relationship to the collective, and the harmonious functioning of the collective itself. Examining identity as roots serves to highlight aspects of cultural connectivity and continuity. Calling to mind Cohen's (1981) and Eriksen's (1993) critiques of historiographically delimited identity, identity is not only a map of where we have been; it also

delimits where we are going, and before whom we stand. As Israeli Messianic Jews demonstrate, roots are not only where one comes from; they also often constitute one's destination (the tri-fold destination of Zion, in this case). Indeed, the narratives of Israeli Messianic Jews portray their lives as a logically-progressing, purposeful faith "walk" through this present world *en route* to rootedness in Zion. Therefore, Israeli Messianic Jews provide us a case study of the complimentary tension between routes and roots in identity discourse and praxis (Gilroy 1993:133).

Replacement of subjects' rooted nationalisms by more diffuse "alternative patriotisms" (Appadurai 1993) or a feminist "multiplication of allegiances and consequent division of passions" (Mouffe 1994:111), is also no guarantee of non-hegemonic power relations. Which empirical community considerably demonstrates alternative devotions and a broad range of nearly oxymoronic allegiances, if not Israeli Messianic Jews? Nonetheless, as our present study amply illustrates, hegemony is often urgently reproduced *within* socially marginalized minority groups. Therefore we conclude that alternative and multiple allegiances do not necessarily lead to the establishment of non-antagonistic relations, and neither roots nor routes are the source of or solution to hegemony, although both should be present in a comprehensive model of social identity.

Critical Consciousness

In the end, the heart of scholarly concern is not the hegemonically imposed rootedness or routedness of nationals, colonials or nomadic strangers but the critical consciousness, the Deleuzian "nomad thought" (1985), which can emerge from the experience of marginalization through uprooted routedness. This is a critical consciousness of the state of inequality and disempowerment which opens the door for social change toward potentially non-antagonistic, non-hegemonic relations.

The cultivation of a "culture of critical discourse" which is reflexive, problematizing and concerned with metacommunication (Hannerz 1990:246), is not the exclusive purview of forced migrants, political exiles or privileged globe-trotters. Activist educator Paulo Freire took quite the opposite approach to Braidotti's nomadism, arousing the Brazilian working class to a critical awareness through reflexivity *within the deeply-rooted native context* of their social oppression (for example, Freire 1970). Deleuze concurs that migration is not at all a necessary trigger for the critical nomadic thought that can lead to social reform:

But the nomad is not necessarily one who moves: some voyages take place *in situ*, are trips in intensity. Even historically, nomads are not necessarily those who move about like migrants. On the contrary, they do not move; nomads, they nevertheless stay in the same place and continually evade the codes of settled people (Deleuze 1985:149).

Exiled Palestinian scholar, Edward Said, directly ties the gestation of critical consciousness to the personal experience of social inequality, but does not guarantee its birth:

Only to those who are excluded from the social nexus comes the idea of raising a question about the limits of human nature because they need a human that includes them (Said qtd. in Stewart 1988:237).

Critical researchers are attracted to marginalized social groups because they often contain elements of alternative discourse and praxis, which can harbor tremendous creative potential for social change (Ben Ari & Bilu 1997; Cohen 1997). Israeli Messianic Jews are no exception, for they all, to differing degrees, are protesting and challenging the western socio-religious status quo. The Messianic Jewish community in Israel, composed of individuals existing on the borders betwixt and between, by definition challenges and blurs essentializing social divisions. By upsetting the status quo, Messianic Jews render identity negotiation and dialogue all the more visible, helping to ground social constructivist theory, which currently lacks a broad empirical base.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates the presence and ramifications of both segregative essentializing and integrative dialogic approaches to identity *within* the Israeli Believing community. It also reminds research practitioners of the violence and distortion incurred by collaborating with (rather than challenging) reigning hegemonic forces in imposing exclusive identity boundaries. When people are perceived to be fixed essences, not given to reasonable intervention or change, the logical conclusion in intra- or inter-group conflict is a simple annihilation of “problematic” populations according to some “final solution”. Excommunication of the converse “heretic” (or burning the *converso*, for that matter) is sometimes chosen as the simpler and more socially cathartic response to muddy heterodox challenges. Social constructivist theory, on the other hand, perceives people as living, changing subjects whose identity is established and maintained through discursive interaction and negotiation. A fluid, discursive concept of social identity requires a more complex, dialogic response in the face of diversity.

The works of Bourdieu, Deleuze, Foucault and Swidler posit that all identity is constructed, however only heterodox identity is perceived as such since by definition heterodoxy challenges

the taken-for-granted doxic social order subjectively perceived to be nature itself. Acknowledgement of the constructedness of identity and identity work allows for conscious, critical reform within a given community or society. Minority groups which fail to recognize the social dynamics of identity – even faith identity – will continue to mirror and reproduce hegemonic idioms, ideologies and dominant-subordinate power relations within their community, stifling any creative potential to realize an alternative, non-antagonistic social order.

The exchange of hegemonic relations of control and exclusion for emergent Israeli Messianic Jewish border cross-ings of fruitful, non-antagonistic relations requires intra-group as well as inter-group dialogue. Without reaching dialogic relations, Israeli Messianic Jews will not succeed in emancipating themselves from the Jewish and Christian establishment hegemonies from without, merely exchanging their sources of domination and subordination for in-group versions of the above (Bekerman 2004, develops this concept in reference to Arab-Jewish relations). Therefore, Messianic Jewish social liminality can lead to an urgent scramble to reproduce hegemonic order, or alternatively, to critically conscious dialogue in diversity among researchers and practitioners alike.

Despite the expected internal *Kulturkampf* within the community, our findings offer many glimpses of the creative “unsettled” Deleuzian potential of the Israeli Messianic Jew to controvert and transform reigning hegemonic conventions by presenting viable practical and discursive alternatives. Let the reader recall the following three in-group narrative examples. First is Gamliel’s spiral faith journey narrative¹⁹⁵ which indicates his conceptualization of Jewish faith in Yeshua as continuity, a complete subversion of the hegemonic Jewish and Christian “conversion” models of linear rupture. Far from abandoning his Jewish identity, he repeatedly “returns” to his “Jewish roots” for *tikkun* and renewal, each time enriching himself with another level of reconnection and revelation.

Second is Yishai’s arborescent growth rule of thumb¹⁹⁶. Yishai is repulsed by the missions’ colonialistic tradition of uprooting the best and brightest young Israeli Jewish Believers, transplanting them to the west and pruning them into glorified, commercialized performers with big names and obese bank accounts. Appealing to the Scriptural command to tend a tree for years before eating of its fruit, Yishai offers a remonstrative Israeli Jewish model of

¹⁹⁵ See “Linear and spiral courses: Newness or renewal,” in Chapter seven.

¹⁹⁶ See “Foreign evangelism,” in Chapter eight.

spiritual leadership development in the farmer working his land, delaying gratification, cultivating indigenous faithfulness and only after a significant frontload investment by faith, possibly being remunerated through the fruit of his labors.

Third is the example of David's *Etz Haim* cantorial composition¹⁹⁷ that not only conforms to the strictures of orthodox *nusach*, but seamlessly integrates traditional Jewish liturgical form and content based on Scriptural texts, modifies the melody to weave in musical themes from the Israeli national anthem when the text speaks of the regathering of the exiles, transitions into an Israeli Messianic Jewish melody when the text contains references to the Messiah, then returns to the traditional *nusach* at the end of the prayer which reads: "Restore us to you, Lord, and we will return. Renew our days as of old." In one cantorial, David literally weaves together biblical, traditional, Messianic and Israeli Jewish forms and content, mobilizing all of his cultural resources to restore his Messiah to a relevant Israeli Jewish context, and to lead his people into Messianic worship.

Emergent Messianic Jewish approaches which emphasize cultural continuity, integration and inclusion while respecting particularistic identities also extend to inter-group relations. Two examples of reciprocal, mutually respectful relations between Israeli Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians are found in the electronic mail description of one emissary's outreach to other cultural minorities¹⁹⁸, and in the fascinating efforts of a handful of people building a bridge of faith from Egypt to Assyria, centered in Israel¹⁹⁹.

Israeli Messianic Jews tend to see themselves as following in the footsteps of a great revolutionary fomenter of social change, Yeshua, in order to realize a Messianic *tikkun olam*. Jewish Believers essentially challenge the common conceptions and understandings of the two fundamentally constitutive social categories of Jew and Christian. Moreover, concurring with a contemporary trend of Israeli minority groups (Ben Ari & Bilu 1997), Messianic Jews in Israel are controverting the authority of the religious Jewish and civil Israeli establishments to determine who is a Jew, and advocating that it is legitimate and right for Israeli Jews to acknowledge and include other types of Jews and Judaisms within the Jewish collective.

¹⁹⁷ See "Integrating new and old," in Chapter nine.

¹⁹⁸ See "Bridging between Israel and the nations," in Chapter eight.

¹⁹⁹ See Chapter six, "The reader's road map."

Herein lies the potential of hegemonically marginalized communities in research and in praxis: to stimulate critical consciousness, revealing the socially constructed discourse, ideology and power structures, and their mechanisms for reproduction, which constitute reigning hegemonies, while at the same time presenting creative, alternatively-constructed, at times far more inclusive and peaceful practices.

Theoretical Model of Identity-as-Travel

Our findings therefore support the thesis that experiences of inequality, social marginalization and exile can, but do not always, serve as a trigger for a critical awakening, the necessary precursor to social change. In other words, the uprooted, routed state of migrants, exiles, post-colonials, Deleuzian nomads or enlightened Freirean workers is less about roots and routes, and more about the experiential potential of social marginalization to trigger the transcendence of social borders toward an existence beyond the borders of reigning hegemonies.

Routes and roots alone do not sufficiently model in-group diversity, tension or relations with reference groups, or the awakening of a critical consciousness. Hence the additional need to discuss how Israeli Messianic Jews negotiate the discursive and practical borders of their community. The negotiation of identity borders forms the essential third element in this work's model of identity. A focus on the construction, maintenance, crossing and violation of sociocultural identity borders stresses the dynamic social and political contingencies and struggles with both in-group and out-group members, which are involved in identity construction and articulation.

While theories of roots, routes and borders have all existed separately or in various constellations, no other existing theories or empirical studies have yet incorporated all three elements into a dynamic relationship of identity-as-travel as it is drafted and empirically demonstrated in this research: an analytical model of identity *en route*, composed of routes, roots and borders. This three-pronged approach to identity as travel, consisting of routes, roots and border work, is a fruitful research model to help us better understand people, not as static embodied essences, but as socially-interactive, politically-contingent, discursive subjects.

Future Research on Israeli Messianic Jews

There are many issues in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community which deserve development in future research. Some ideas for future papers and additional issue-specific research are listed below:

1. **The Russian-speaking Messianic Jewish community.** Members of Russian-speaking congregations make up approximately 40% of the current Israeli Messianic Jewish community (Kjær-Hansen & Skjøtt 1999). It is likely that many of their children will join Hebrew-speaking congregations in the future. In Israel today where one individual with one Jewish grandfather and his Gentile spouse may enter Israel as Christians under the Law of Return, one must ask how many of these Russian Believers are indeed Jewish and furthermore, in which ways are they connecting to Israeli Jewish society. How have they been influenced by a combination of underground Church movements, the anti-semitic atheist communist regime and a secularization and nationalization of Jewish identity in the former Soviet Union? What relationship exists between Russian-speakers associating with Israeli Messianic Jewish congregations, and the Gentile Russian Christian immigrants who attend churches in Israel, the circles of Russian-speaking immigrants who see themselves as the future cultural and intellectual vanguard of Israel (Warshawsky 1999), and the circles of Russian-speaking immigrants who have chosen to adopt orthodox lifestyles in Israel? How do their Messianic and Jewish discourse and praxis resemble or differ from those of this research population, and how are they likely to impact the Hebrew-speaking Messianic community in the future?
2. **The Ethiopian Messianic Jewish Community.** The Ethiopian immigrant community in Israel consists mostly of former subsistence farmer immigrants from a fourth-world black African country. The immigrants have experienced a widespread breakdown of traditional familial and religious structures following immigration, approximately 90% live at or below the poverty line in Israel today, while their children show very low academic achievement (Almaya 2004). The Jewishness of the entire Ethiopian community has also been a lingering question. Despite official government decisions and programs to receive them as Jews, much like the experiences of the North African Jews of the 1950's, they have also experienced discrimination and forceful government-backed "socialization", including a clear push toward national orthodoxy, and the regular sending of their children off to distant boarding schools. How many of the Believers in this immigrant community

are Jewish by ancestry, discourse or praxis? Do they reflect the same socio-economic characteristics as the rest of the Ethiopian Israeli community, and what are the relations between the two groups? Which religious influences (Beta-Israel, Coptic Christian, African spiritist cults, western missions, western Jewish delegations to Ethiopia, etc.) have helped shape the community discourse and praxis and how are they connecting with Messianic Jewish, Jewish or Christian discourses and practices in Israel? How are they likely to impact the Hebrew-speaking Messianic community in the future?

3. **Intermarriage and assimilation.** According to the only statistics available, there is a general intermarriage rate between Jews and Gentiles of over 30% in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community (Kjær-Hansen & Skjott 1999:70-72). In what ways do the partners and children of these intermarriages see themselves as Jews and/or as Christians, and how is this reflected in their discourse and practice? How does intermarriage inform the visions and practices of indigeneity and Israeli Jewish socio-cultural relevance? Is the trend related to the assimilation of western and western Christian cultures?

Additionally, community leaders and laypeople alike continually bemoan an unusually pronounced lack of mature, employed, marriageable Jewish Believing men. At the same time the vast majority of those intermarrying are men. Together, these two trends are leaving the women, who compose the majority of the Believing community, without available Jewish Believing spouses. Also approximately 70% of Israeli Messianic Jewish spiritual leaders within Hebrew-speaking congregations are Jewish men married to western Gentile Christian wives. How does the prominence of western Gentile women in leadership inform the image and roles of the Israeli Messianic Jewish woman, and shape the gender concepts, communal culture and domestic relations of the community and its second generation?

4. **Gender discourse and praxis within the Israeli Messianic Jewish community.** From the interview material, it appears that in some circles Israeli Messianic Jewish women feel that they are subject to conservative and even misogynist discourses and practices which stem from a combination of influences, including orthodox Judaism, a militarized Israeli society and conservative western Christian culture. Educated women express frustration at the lack of acceptance of their talents and skills in both lay and leadership roles, and the constant pressure to conform to a 1950's-style model of the submissive suburban housewife lacking personal aspirations or support for self-development. Single women in

particular feel judged if they do not conform to this conservative standard, and give examples of people warning them that otherwise they will not find a spouse. The older the woman, the more her personal power is sensed to be a threat, particularly if she is single, unless her involvement in the community is limited to work with women, children, food or communal celebrations.

The community also boasts a high proportion of stay-at-home wives and mothers in a society where most women choose to or must work outside the home to provide a second income. Women's prayer meetings are often held mid-morning during work days, whereas men's prayer meetings are held on Fridays or very early on workday mornings during hours when most people do not work. The few professional women whom the researcher encountered spoke of the difficulties in balancing professional, home and congregational life, and the lack of support which they feel in their congregations where only working men and their careers tend to be acknowledged and encouraged, and where they often feel under scrutiny as though they are thought to be lesser wives or mothers. In the raising of children, few families seem to hold significant dedication celebrations to welcome baby girls into the community, or *bat mitzvah* ceremonies to mark a daughter's physical and spiritual coming of age, as a parallel to the boy's *brit milah* and *bar mitzvah*, even though these ceremonies are common in liberal and secular Jewish communities with whom most Israeli Messianic Jews tend to identify most.

Several interviewees mention the misinterpretation and abuse of male authority by men who lord their putative roles not only their wives, but also over other, primarily single women. In general, there was very little positive gender discourse. In fact, it seems that gender is an issue that has yet to be widely addressed openly. This is often the case in minority or revolutionary groups who perpetually silence issues of gender in favor of the "grander" cause of the group (Massana 2004, Swirski & Safir 1991). The conservative models of femininity which interviewees feel are promoted widely in the community may reflect the conscription of the female and the female body as symbols of the purity of the social group as in the struggle for a Turkish republic (Delaney 1995), the anti-colonialist Algerian revolution and its cultural backlash (Massana 2004) and more recently, the civil war in Kosovo (Human Rights Watch 2000). A study exploring gender role expectations and gendered experience in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community, as well as the reasons for an absence of a common gender discourse, may help shed light on the role of gender

in religious minority groups, particularly one which claims to challenge both the Jewish and Christian establishments to extensive reform.

5. **Israeli Messianic Jewish relations with evangelical Christian Arabs and Muslims.**

Israeli Messianic Jewish relations with Arabs are as varied as the Messianic Jewish community itself. Messianic Jews cover the political spectrum in Israel from the pro-transfer far right to the leftist liberal *Meretz*. While the conservative right bolsters claims of land inheritance promised to the descendants of Isaac, leftists and liberals refer to principles regarding the treatment of foreigners in the midst of Israel; the responsibility of Believers to treat their neighbors/cousins with humility, respect and honor; the need to know when to peacefully part ways with one's kin like self-sacrificing Abraham with Lot, rather than maintain relationships of strife and exploitation; and God's promises to a variety of nations in the region in addition to the Jewish people.

Some Messianic Jews have no contact at all with evangelical Arab Christians, some have warm fellowship with these Believers, and most seem to fall somewhere in between. Most Messianic Jews and Arab Christians seem to have their hands full maintaining their own congregations and local communities, and must truly make a concerted effort to expand these circles to include their cousins. Since Arab congregations tend to be located in Arab cities, villages or neighborhoods, operate in Arabic and are influenced by a Christian-Muslim calendar, and because Hebrew-speaking Jews tend to live in Jewish areas and according to a Jewish calendar, meetings between the two are logistically challenging even when the desire for mutual fellowship exists. The situation becomes more complex when groups hold meetings or conferences in areas legally forbidden to one side, or in areas where one side feels unsafe or uncomfortable. In addition, relations vary with 1948 Arabs and those from lands annexed in 1967, allowing for greater interaction in the north rather than in the Jerusalem area.

There is a general tendency to view Islam as a dark power responsible for oppressing Arabs and other peoples and driving them to war with the Jewish state and with true Believers. However Messianic Jews also tend to manifest varying degrees of suspicion toward Arab Christians because of their tendency to reject the Zionist reading of Scripture regarding the State of Israel as a fulfillment of prophecy, effectively embracing some form of Replacement Theology which also denies the ongoing role of the Jewish people in God's plan for the world today. Also prevalent among intellectuals and leaders is a

Palestinian form of Liberation Theology, which frames the New Covenant as a message of liberation for the poor and oppressed (i.e. the Palestinians, not the Jews), advocates activism, “restorative justice” and reconciliation, and possibly supports class struggle and a call to arms, at the same time that most young Messianic Jews serve mandatory Israeli military service, some live in Judea or Samaria (the West Bank), and virtually all support some concept of a Jewish state. Despite these significant differences in theology, worldview and experience, there are individuals on both sides who work hard to build trust between the two groups, and see joint prayer and worship as a powerful prophetic experience and the key to true peace in the Middle East.

In order to better explain the relatively small degree of Jewish Believing-Arab Christian interaction despite well-funded local peace initiatives and the Israeli Messianic Jewish agenda of radical reform, further research would do well to explore the ways in which these relations are informed by the classic Zionist erasure of the Arab (Almog 1997:300) and left and right-wing political ideologies and theologies, including the concept of the universal “body of the Messiah” and theological interpretations of the historical and eschatological relationships between the peoples of the region, in addition to socio-economic and political factors associated with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

6. **Discrepancies between local and international Israeli Messianic Jewish self-representations.** The need to raise foreign funds has birthed a system of regular newsletter communications between local ministry workers and foreign Christian and Jewish Believing supporters. In which ways are Israeli Messianic Jews framing their local experience differently for foreign consumption, and how does this habitual self-presentation effect indigenous discourse and praxis? These questions relate to literature on the political, economic and artistic aspects of the objectifying “gaze” and performance in indigenous self-representation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, 1998), as well as more recent studies on the objectification and promotion of self in reality television (Andrejevic 2004) and internet blogging (Cho 2006).

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Appendix

Interview Schedule

Introduction

- ❑ This is an anthropological doctoral study on the Messianic Jewish community in Israel through the Hebrew University.
- ❑ The study is anonymous. Pseudonyms will be assigned in the case that short quotes are used in papers or publications, and every effort will be made to remove identifying details. The researcher alone will have access to the raw interview material apart from a transcriber who will type out the interview.
- ❑ You may choose not to answer anything which makes you feel uncomfortable.
- ❑ Under these conditions do you agree to be interviewed and recorded? Please state your name, the date and the location of the interview.

Biographical Opening

1. Please tell me about yourself, your life history... where you were born, raised, studied, most meaningful experiences, family, spouse, work, faith, etc.

Definitions / Expressions

2. What do you call yourself when describing your faith?
3. Who is a Messianic Jew?
4. If someone were to enter your home, would he know that you're a Believer? Would he know that you were Messianic Jewish?
5. How would you want for:
 - An Israeli to understand/define/describe you?
 - A Jew to understand/define/describe you?
 - A Christian to understand/define/describe you?
6. In a telemarketing poll, do you define yourself as *dati*, *masoreti* or *hiloni*²⁰⁰?
7. What did you do for *Yom Kippur* last year?

Group Identifications / Memberships

8. What groups or kinds of people do you identify with?
 - Like to belong to?
 - Wish you could converse with?
 - Differ from?
 - Oppose?
9. Who are your friends?
10. Who are:
 - Israelis? In what way are you an Israeli like that?
 - Jews? In what way are you a Jew like that?
 - Believers? In what way are you a Believer like that?
 - Messianic Jews? In what way are you a Messianic Jew like that?
 - Christians? In what way are you a Christian like that?
11. What does it mean to be Messianic Jewish rather than Christian? Rather than Jewish?

²⁰⁰ Roughly religious, traditional or secular.

12. If I am a:
 - Jew and want to become Messianic Jewish, what should I do?
 - Gentile and want to become Messianic Jewish, what should I do?
13. How do I stop being Messianic Jewish?

Sharing Faith

14. What were the reactions of your family / friends / co-workers / acquaintances when they found out that you were a Believer?
15. How did they find out?
16. Have you ever felt the need to avoid mentioning that you're a Believer?
17. Do you believe in sharing your faith with others? How do you go about doing that?
18. Do you speak to your children about sharing their faith?

Fellowship

19. Where do you fellowship? Why?
20. Have you attended other fellowships in the past? Why did you leave?
21. Do you attend other kinds of religious or Believers' meetings as well?
22. What is your involvement in congregational/Believers' groups and activities?
23. Describe your ideal Messianic Jewish congregation.
24. What would you like to see happen in the Israeli body of Believers?
25. What is the role of the Gentile in:
 - God's plan?
 - The Israeli Messianic Jewish congregation / community?
 - Your life?
 - Does this role include marriage to Jewish Believers?

Politics

26. What are your political views and how are they related to your faith?
27. How do you relate to Arabs?
28. Describe your experiences as a Messianic Jewish woman (where relevant).

Miscellaneous

29. In what capacity do/did you serve in the IDF?
30. Do/will your children serve in the IDF?
31. What is your current employment?
32. Why did you make *Aliyah* (where relevant)?
33. What keeps you in Israel?

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פרופ' גבריאל הורנצ'יק

&

ד"ר צבי בקרמן

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