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Protestant vibrations? Reggae, Rastafari, and conscious Evangelicals

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Abstract

The globalisation of reggae continues to engender a wide range of highly poignant re-inscriptions and re-interpretations of reggae's sound and of Rastafarian thought. One of the most compelling of these has been the negotiation of Rastafarian and Christian ideologies within the context of Protestant reggae bands and artists. The application of Rastafarian thought, dress and language to the evangelical concerns of Protestants – at times paradoxical, at others ingenious – signals an important moment of inter-religious contact that opens a window onto the complexities and multiple meanings that attach to music and to religious systems as they travel between the local and the global. This essay considers music by Christafari (United States), Sherwin Gardner (Trinidad and Tobago), and Stitchie (Jamaica), and considers questions related to the parallel globalisation of reggae and Rastafari. It does this by interrogating the extent to which authenticity, positionality, and religious context inform the use of and interpretation of Rastafari symbols within gospel reggae. In so doing, I introduce a concept that I call the negotiation of proximity, and offer some reflections on the ways that the Rastafari elements within gospel reggae might be understood in new, global (and newly localised) contexts.

God provides an anointed music for each age. Dancehall is the music of this age. (Sherwin Gardner)

Word Sound & Power (The Word of God; The Sound of Reggae Music; The Power of the Holy Spirit). (Christafari)

The globalisation of reggae continues to engender a wide range of highly poignant re-inscriptions and re-interpretations of reggae's sound and of Rastafari thought. One of the most compelling (if marginal) of these has been the negotiation of Rastafari and Christian ideologies within the context of *gospel* reggae bands and artists. While scholars have long recognised the negotiations that make possible Buddhist Rastas, Japanese Dreads, and Conscious Aboriginals, they have yet to address their efforts to an exploration of the musical and textual results where Rastafari and Western Christian religious world views come to share expression in and through reggae.

Gospel reggae bands inhabit a highly marginal niche in the global reggae scene. Their numbers are small (as are their album sales), and even the most well-known artists are relatively *unknown* outside the small community of fans who support them.[1] Most artists self-identify as 'Full Gospel' evangelicals and their fans are drawn primarily from among the younger generations of Full Gospel congregations throughout North America and the Caribbean.[2] It is hardly possible to think of a pair

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of religious ideologies less disposed toward sharing a soundstage and less open to mutual interpenetration than are Rastafari and evangelical Protestantism. And yet, as I will illustrate in the pages that follow, gospel reggae artists have, for the last fifteen years or so, worked through this challenge in quite interesting ways (and with mixed results). In this article, I suggest that gospel reggae – partly because of its marginality and partly due to the unique negotiations that it engenders between competing religious ideologies – provides an important perspective from which to explore some of the larger processes of reggae's globalisation.

The application of Rastafari thought, dress, and language-use to the evangelical concerns of Protestants (at times paradoxical, at others ingenious) signals an important moment of inter-religious contact that opens a window onto the complexities and multiple meanings that attach to music and to religious systems as they travel between the local and the global. In order to explore these complexities, this article analyses in comparative fashion the gospel reggae music of three artists: Christafari (United States), Sherwin Gardner (Trinidad and Tobago), and Stitchie (Jamaica). By focusing on the multiple localities and ideological challenges with which reggae and Rastafari are confronted and against which they construct themselves in the process of 'going abroad' (which in this case includes Protestant traditions in various regional [Caribbean] and North American spaces), I will argue for a reconsideration of the ways that Rastafari elements within reggae might be understood in new, global (and newly localised) contexts.

A series of questions occupies me in the pages that follow. How and to what ends is Rastafari thought and symbolism being mobilised within gospel reggae and what might this contribute to our understanding of the globalisation of religious belief? In what ways are reggae music and Rastafari faith and symbolism linked (and/or uncoupled from one another) in the process of globalisation? What role, furthermore, do questions of authenticity play in determining the extent of these linkages? Because Rastafari is rooted in and grew out of specifically Jamaican socio-cultural and religious contexts, I begin by briefly tracing some of the basic outlines of Jamaican religious histories, thereby providing both a framework within which to consider these questions and a set of issues against which the case studies that follow can fruitfully be explored.

I. *Real Power*:[3] of history, Anglicanism, and other Protestants

I choose as a starting point the moment at which the Anglican church, which had been established in Jamaica in 1661, found itself in competition with other Protestant groups such as the Moravians, Methodists and Baptists – a moment that can be fixed around 1754 with the arrival of the first Moravian missionaries to Jamaica. Prior to 1754, the political and social realities of British colonialism were, in part, justified through recourse to the rhetoric of civility, a rhetoric that translated into the practical responsibility of bringing slaves out of darkness and into the light of cultured, European day.[4] Not coincidentally (but tragically), this trajectory of enlightenment, from the barbaric/heathen to the civilised/saved, from black/evil to white/good, seemed to satisfy the 'great commission', the mandate given by Christ and recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Mark: 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'.[5]

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That this noble enterprise of converting the slaves, an enterprise expressly articulated by the colonial office in Britain, was, in practice, reduced to a rhetorical gesture, remained a constant threat to sensitive consciences around the Empire.[6] Prior to 1754, the clergy of the Anglican church assigned to parishes in Jamaica did not, in general, actively concern themselves with the task of conversion, choosing instead to heed the economic and political commission handed down by their white, European parishioners. The basic accomplishment of the Anglican clergy from 1661 to 1754, then, was to ensure a good Christian conscience for the planters and a slave population that would continue to provide a great commission.

This state of affairs continued rather unabated until the Moravians (1754), followed in quick succession by British loyalists and their slaves (Baptist preachers such as George Lisle, Moses Baker, and George Lewis among them) (1776), Methodists (1789), and London-based Baptists (1813), began establishing a mission presence in the colonies, confirming by their presence Steven Bruce's assertion that 'the consequence of the reformation was not a Christian church strengthened because it had been purified but a large number of competing perspectives and institutions' (Bruce 1996, p. 22). Not surprisingly, the nonconformists, and especially the Baptists, met with tremendous resistance in Jamaica, where both the Anglican clergy and the planters were furious at their intrusion. Keith Hunte notes, for example, that, 'following the outbreak of the slave revolt of 1831, it was widely believed that the Baptists were implicated. The meeting houses and chapels of nonconformist missionaries were attacked, and some of them were burnt to the ground' (Hunte 2001, p. 108).

Yet, even the Baptist missionaries, whose initiative spawned the Free Village System, engendering the suspicion and anger of the planters in the process, found it difficult to avoid playing into the economic structures of plantation society. The Free Village System, thus, succeeded at one level and failed at another; it managed to relocate a (still) captive labour force and to replace the master with the church.[7] As Jean Besson points out, 'this paradox in the role of the Baptist missionaries was fully perceived by the slaves and their descendants, who responded with a paradox of their own: supporting the Baptist Church in a formal context, while remaining committed to their African-Caribbean traditions' (Besson 1998, p. 53).

The moment that the nonconformists entered the religious economy of Jamaica, then, Christianity came to be engaged in a constant and active (although by no means new) 'struggle for possession of the sign' (Hebdige 1979, p. 19).[8] Diane J. Austin Broos has characterised this struggle as follows:

> [A]s the nineteenth century proceeded, they [Afro-Jamaicans] became increasingly Christian, but not in ways that the missionaries could always recognise or endorse. This was the beginning of a struggle neither especially conscious on the part of Jamaicans nor precisely articulated. It was, rather, a negotiation of meaning, practices, symbols, and powers through which people sought to address, control, and understand their environment, both in slavery and in the post-emancipation period. (Austin Broos 1997, p. 7)

The cumulative effects of this protracted struggle, including the gradual translation of faith and belief to hierarchies of race and class within Jamaica as well as the practice of retaining dual membership, have shaped a socio-cultural atmosphere that leads Stuart Hall to remark that, 'it is impossible, in my experience, to understand black culture and black civilisation in the New World without understanding the cultural role of religion, through the distorted languages of the one Book that anybody would teach them to read' (Hall 2001, p. 35). He elaborates as follows:

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What they felt was, 'I have no voice, I have no history' . . . Against this sense of profound rupture, the metaphors of a new kind of imposed religion can be reworked and become a language in which a certain kind of history is retold, in which aspirations of liberation and freedom can be expressed for the first time, in which what I would call the 'imagined community' of Africa can be symbolically reconstructed. (Hall 2001, p. 35)

The emphasis that Stuart Hall places on the role of language, and, by extension, on symbols, in the development of religious culture in the Caribbean provides an additional perspective from which to consider the wealth of creole/syncretic religious practices/discourses that emerged in Jamaica during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for it points analysis in the direction of *use*. Michel de Certeau has argued that,

The presence and circulation of a representation (taught by preachers, educators, and popularisers as the key to socioeconomic advancement) tells us nothing about what it *is* for its users. We must first analyse its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilisation. (de Certeau 1984, p. xiii)

Under the tutelage of missionaries who were genuinely interested in conversion and religious education, the language and metaphors of the bible thus provided a seedbed for the process that Rex Nettleford (following Absolom Vilakazi and Jean Chernoff) has called 'wresting the Christian message from the messenger' (Nettleford 1998, p. 315). Myalism, Native Baptists, Revival (both Zion and Pukumina), Kumina, and Convince all flourished at various times, and this atmosphere of religious competition, denominational strife, and local reinterpretation, then, illustrates the powerful role that language and symbolic orders played in providing the 'groundation' upon which Rastafari ideology came gradually to be articulated in 1930s Jamaica.[9]

II. *Word Sound & Power*:[10] Rastafari challenges and reggae music

The atmosphere in Jamaica had, by the 1930s, reached a particularly critical moment – a moment that was characterised by the increasing disenchantment of the lower class with its socio-economic position in Jamaica. Under the influence of individuals such as Marcus Garvey, movements like the Harlem Renaissance, and charismatic leaders such as Leonard Howell, Rastafari gradually emerged as an oppositional alternative to Protestant faith, middle- and upper-class wealth, and Euro-centric cultural, racial, and social paradigms. In the wake of Haile Selassie's crowning as emperor of Ethiopia in 1930, Rastafari, moreover, came to set itself up as an *explicitly* oppositional system, rejecting the basis of Christian interpretations of the Bible as well as the cultural and social conditions of diasporic life.

Thanks in part to the careful mythologising (in the Barthian sense of that word) of biblical and socio-cultural symbols, Rastafari gradually emerged as a means toward articulating alternative political and racial ideologies and also constructed a new religious view onto life.[11] Nathaniel Samuel Murrell has maintained much the same, saying that, 'Rastafari is more than a religion. It is a cultural movement, ''a system of beliefs and a state of consciousness'', that advances a view of economic survival and political organisation and structure that challenges the dominant cultural political ''narrative'' (ideology) in the ''politics of Babylon'' ' (Murrell 1998, p. 4).

By positioning itself in this space, Rastafarianism set itself against the more mainstream Christian denominations, especially with regard to the beliefs of Full

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Gospel churches. It may be helpful, just briefly, to spell out the terms of Rastafari opposition to Christianity and the politics of Babylon. Rastafari belief was, first of all, concerned with subverting the racial dynamics of conventional Christianity. This meant that God must, necessarily, be black – a claim that changed rather dramatically the racial lines of authority, effectively inverting the master/slave hierarchy. Second, Christianity, as part of the system of Babylon, was viewed as a means of keeping blacks from recognising themselves and this was redressed, in part, by re-interpreting passages of the bible in black nationalist terms. Third, Jesus was re-incarnate in the person of Emperor Haile Selassie, establishing Ethiopia as heaven on earth and grounding in religious belief the black nationalist idea of repatriation to Africa.[12]

Added to these rather stark doctrinal differences with Christianity was the political rejection of diasporic existence and Rastafari's concomitant opposition to the terms of race and class relations in Jamaica (and throughout the Americas in general). In order to illustrate their misidentification with Babylon, Rastafari gradually deployed a range of outward symbols ranging from hairstyle to dread speak, from marijuana consumption to dietary changes.[13] Many of these outward symbols and lifestyle choices also ran counter to conservative Christian worldviews, further marking Rastafari as anti-Christian. Thus, the explicit and multi-dimensional nature of Rastafari opposition, it should come as no surprise, thus caused a great deal of consternation not only among Protestants but also among secular elites, leading to its violent and sustained marginalisation within Jamaica. Picking up on these themes, Diane J. Austin-Broos argues as follows:

> Rastafarianism . . . is easily cast as the critical religion in the face of Pentecostal hegemony, as Jamaica's religion of *explicit symbolic defiance*. Rastafarianism also constructed a world – albeit an avowedly African one – out of a biblical poetics that is integral to Jamaica's creole religious discourse . . . The Rastafarian figure, and his engagement with Haile Selassie, the emperor of Ethiopia and the re-incarnate Christ, subverts the master–servant relationship embedded in relations between the pastor and Christ, especially when those relations are infused with notions of a Euro-Christ and an African disciple. No Pentecostal with whom I have spoken has proposed that God and Christ are other than 'colourless'. Yet centuries of European iconography are a formidable legacy to contest. This Rastafarianism does in one powerful stroke, conferring on the biblical text an explicit politics of race. (Austin Broos 1997, p. 239)

This powerful stroke, however, was made possible by the long history of the 'struggle for possession of the sign' in Jamaica. Rex Nettleford, for example, sees the progression from slave religion to Rastafari thought as a continuum along which religious symbols came increasingly to be reinterpreted to meet local spiritual, cultural and social needs – a gradual demarginalisation of their own subject positions. He elaborates on this theme as follows:

> The slave forebears of Rastafarians understood fully that there are areas of inviolability beyond the reach of oppressors, and that these are what guarantee survival and beyond. Such exercise of the creative imagination and intellect remains, then, the most powerful weapon against all acts of inhumanity; and the Rastafarians have drawn on the tradition, which was nurtured since the eighteenth century, to cope with and defy the harshness of twentieth-century indulgences. Wresting *the Christian message from the Messenger* as a strategy of demarginalisation helped bring slaves and the free peasantry nearer a perceived mainstream as 'children of God'. Rastafari were to extend this by proclaiming selves as 'pieces of God'. (Nettleford 1998, p. 315; emphasis mine)

Rastafarians, as 'pieces of God', saw in reggae the perfect medium for their message and, with the emergence of Bob Marley, they found a spokesman able to translate/transmit the message to the world. As Barry Chevannes notes,

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> After being shot in 1976 Bob left Jamaica. For the next four years he virtually toured the world, taking his music and message to its four corners: Europe, the Americas, Asia, and, of course, Africa. Those final years of Robert Nesta Marley may yet prove to be the most decisive turning point in the history of Rastafari movement, and in future decades could well be regarded as the Rasta version of Paul's decision to preach to gentiles. (Chevannes 1994, p. 270)

The suturing of popular culture to socio-religious ideology – accomplished by Bob Marley in particular – was to form the backdrop against which even *this* article is written, for it captured the imaginations of the world and proved *use*ful in a wide variety of contexts. The globalisation of reggae is, thus, significantly about the degree to which a particular vision of the world came to affect the world's vision of itself, and this due in large part to the world's experience of the time-space of reggae. Or, in Nathaniel Samuel Murrell's words, '[i]n many ways, to feel the reggae beat is to *think* Rasta' (Murrell 1998, p. 9). This, then, is one of the most salient features of reggae's globalisation. Reggae has, it would seem, successfully brought Rastafari to the world and, in so doing, managed to link musical style with religious ideology, leading Neil Savishinsky to remark that, 'what is perhaps most interesting and unique about Rastafarianism is that it may represent the only contemporary socio-religious movement whose diffusion is directly linked to various mediums of transnational popular culture, most notably reggae music' (Savishinsky 1994, p. 260).

And yet, while the combined effect of Rastafari and reggae music is powerful indeed, reggae's travel abroad has also succeeded in clearing space for readings that find artists and fans incorporating Rastafari *symbols* into their lives and music without necessarily subscribing to the spiritual dimensions of Rastafari ideology. Reggae and Rastafari, thus, remain separate and distinct from one another in important ways, allowing both for reggae of a decidedly non-Rastafari bent and, at least theoretically, for Rastafari belief without reggae. It would seem, then, that Murrell's adage does not always hold – that 'to feel the reggae beat is *not necessarily* to think Rasta'.

In addressing this aspect of the popularisation of reggae/Rastafari, Rex Nettleford has described the use of Rastafari symbols within popular culture as a tendency to wear Rastafari as a form of bourgeois, 'designer Dreads' (Nettleford 1998, p. 317). The application of Rastafari symbols to popular culture has, similarly, led Velma Pollard to posit two types of engagement with Rastafari: 'Rasta as style' and 'Rasta contemplative' (Pollard 2003, p. 74). Such either/or propositions, however, risk missing other possibilities and tend to write out some of the nuances attendant to the globalisation of reggae and Rastafari. Pollard's attempt to delineate the difference between a sacred and a secular range of Rastafari practices does not, for example, account for the project in which some of the gospel reggae artists I am concerned with here are engaged – a project that stands firmly outside *both* categories. And this because gospel reggae artists like Christafari are attempting to incorporate symbols vested with religious meaning (whether image, music, or text) into a different *religious* context. More to the point, they are attempting to make Rastafari mean something *new* (or, more accurately, something *old*). They are in the business of *re*-fashioning Rastafari symbols in their own doctrinal image. Dreadlocks, *I-ance*, tropes such as Babylon, Lion of Zion/Judah, and the red, gold and green are, thus, all up for re-inscription and re-definition within gospel reggae.

This is, it seems to me, a project caught on the horns of a dilemma: how can re-appropriated symbols with sacred meanings be re-circulated without implicitly and automatically calling forth the context of their initial articulation – Rastafari faith?

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Gospel reggae artists are, after all, not attempting merely to borrow Rastafari symbols intact. They are, instead, striving to vanquish Rastafari *usage* of these symbols by way of two alternative strategies. On the one hand, they are consciously working toward re-articulating a 'Christian' understanding of concepts such as Babylon, Lion of Judah, and Jah. On the other hand, they are pressing other Rastafari symbols such as dreadlocks, *I-ance*, and the red, gold and green into service in specifically Christian contexts without accounting for the fact that they were deployed, in part, specifically to resist Christianity. I suggest that neither strategy fares well in the face of the power of Rastafari symbols. Another way of thinking about this dilemma is suggested by Mikhail Bakhtin, who has observed that words [symbols] lead a 'socially charged' life (Bakhtin 1981, p. 293). This idea comes into focus nicely with reference to Velma Pollard's work: Gospel reggae artists who incorporate Rastafari symbols into their music are, in my opinion, always already attempting to use 'Rasta as style' within their own sacred context but confronted with inescapable 'Rasta contemplative' meanings in the process – a dilemma that makes the negotiation of these symbols interesting indeed!

The resurgent popularity of 'conscious' reggae in recent years has caused many young Christians in the United States and the Caribbean to gain an appreciation for the sound of roots reggae as well as for the values and ideology of Rastafari and the power with which Rastafarians use language and other symbols to convey their message. In spite of the concern expressed by their detractors, the sound world and symbolic order of reggae/Rastafari provides these musicians with a wealth of opportunities. While I do not mean to suggest that gospel reggae artists are seeking to invest their lyrics with the power of word-sound, I do believe that they are deliberately accessing a vocabulary (I-n-I, I-rie, Jah, overstanding, Babylon, Lion ah Judah, etc.) freighted with a palpable gravity; they are, in short, confronted with and influenced by the *power* of these symbols. And yet they are not ready to accept them at face value, choosing instead to work toward a specifically Christian rendering of these Rastafari vocabularies and symbols.

Not surprisingly, this has caused a great deal of concern among church leaders, many of whom consider it borderline syncretic. By way of example, Roddie Taylor, a Baptist pastor in Trinidad and Tobago puts it this way: 'Jah-Jah, the clothes and plats, the colours . . . all that's missing is a 'Haile Selassie' and you have a conscious reggae artist. Sherwin [Gardner] and Melchizedek [Order] are crossing over the line' (Taylor 2000).[14] And, if one is to take Rastafari understandings of word-sound at face value, it is possible to sense the extent of Roddie's concern. John P. Homiak makes the following observation about word-sound:

> Words must be used judiciously and precisely because, in Rasta ontology, 'word-sound' *is* power. Word-sounds, moreover, are conceptualised in a fundamentally African way as 'vibrations' which have the power to impact directly upon the material world. Thus, when the Rastaman says that Rasta comes to 'destroy powers and principalities not with gun and bayonet, but wordically', we gain a better sense of how the Rastafari conceive of the agency behind words. (Homiak 1995, p. 175)

I remain convinced, however, that the appropriation of these relatively few words/concepts into gospel reggae is calculated to add social depth, 'consciousness' of a specifically Christian persuasion, and a certain density to the lyrics. Identification with conscious lyrics and Rastafari ideology, moreover, enables gospel reggae artists to imagine themselves as introspective, prophetic, and philosophical by association. And yet, none of the artists would consider themselves 'conscious' in the Rastafari sense of

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the word. Rather, they have tried to recontextualise these vocabularies/ideas for Christian application and believe that they are fulfilling the 'great commission' by, in the words of Paul, becoming 'all things to all men' (1 Corinthians 9:22).[15] The most obvious place to explore the workings of the dilemma I have begun to trace here is in the reception history of some individual projects, an endeavour to which I now turn.

III. *100% Sold Out*:[16] Case studies in red, gold and green

The following pages introduce the artists/bands with which I would like to think about the negotiation of Rastafari and Christian ideologies in gospel reggae.[17] By exploring the degree to which they incorporate Rastafari symbols in their music and style (clothing, album art, etc.) and the nature of their relationship to Protestant theological and denominational spaces (both local and global), I begin to trace the outlines of a comparative study that illustrates gospel reggae as the stage upon which powerful ideological, cultural, political, and theological themes are put into play and re-inscribed in quite divergent ways.

Excursus I: Christafari

Christafari, a Los Angeles-based reggae band, has, since 1989, been engaged in a process of reclaiming and *redeeming* Rastafari symbols for use in Full Gospel contexts. The band was founded and is still led by Mark Mohr. As with many reggae fans in the United States, he grew up in a middle-class, white suburban family. Drawn to the Rastafari worldview during his mid-teens, he later experienced a conversion to Christianity that changed his outlook quite dramatically. During his collegiate work at Biola University, Mark Mohr decided to form the band and Christafari quickly established itself as a pioneer in a genre that they call gospel reggae. Although Mark Mohr is now an ordained pastor, he maintains no denominational affiliation, choosing instead to operate outside the politics of denominationalism in the United States. Christafari is, as such, a non-denominational band. While this position affords Mark Mohr a certain artistic and doctrinal freedom that he would not experience within a specific denominational framework, it also creates a more difficult battle for legitimacy within the Full Gospel community – a struggle that manifests itself to some degree in the reception history of the band's various albums.[18]

One of the original aims of the group was to reach Rastafarians with the Protestant gospel, an interesting (if somewhat paradoxical) goal given the fact that Rastafari articulations of faith were historically deployed in direct opposition to the claims of Western Christianity. Mark Mohr was, nevertheless, convinced that he could reach Rastafarians for Christ through reggae music and dialogue. With that goal in mind, the band worked toward striking a balance between Rastafari and Christian elements in their lyrics, album art, clothing, and overall image. Thus, for example, the red, gold and green are employed extensively; Dreadlocks are heavily featured; concepts such as Babylon, Lion of Zion, and Jah are re-interpreted (again); *I-ance* is incorporated into the lyrics; and patwah as well as prevalent themes borrowed from the early years of reggae, such as rebellion and resistance, pervade the presentation of their message.

The musical material is part roots reggae, part dancehall, part dub, part ska, and is calculated to sound as authentically Jamaican as possible, thereby illustrating Mark

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Mohr's deep familiarity with the development of Jamaican popular musics. The desire/need for authenticity of sound and style is one of the main reasons that Christafari pays such close attention to reggae's great exponents and it also explains, at least in part, their decision to re-use Rastafari ideas and symbols. 'Authentically Jamaican', then, does not mean merely playing good reggae (which comes from all corners of the globe these days) but rather, involves creating the impression that the band knows Jamaica and the history of its popular music and culture. Christafari remains very selective about the symbols it chooses to incorporate into its creations, however, drawing a clear line between their own doctrine and some of the principal tenets of Rastafari faith. By way of example, Christafari does not consider Haile Selassie to be divine (Christ reincarnate), and the band does not believe in the sacramental nature of marijuana. Christafari is, thus, attempting to achieve authenticity of sound and style, working within the framework of 'Rasta as style' in order to gain entrance into the reggae world.

When I asked Mark Mohr how he felt about being engaged in a project that essentially seeks to re-appropriate or re-absorb Rastafari symbols into a Christian context, he deftly turned the tables, stating that, '*they* [Rastafarians] used ideas, concepts, and symbols that were already ours [Christian]. Things like Lion of Zion, Babylon, and the Star of David are all a part of our own religious heritage and they took them from *us*. I'm just taking them back' (Mohr 2003a). What strikes me as particularly fascinating about this approach to gospel reggae is the fact that Mark Mohr circumvents the question of *use* entirely, configuring his answer instead in terms of *ownership*. The claim to ownership is, for him, thus established by the pre-history of these symbols – by time itself – and this history is the trump card in any discussion that might ensue regarding Rastafari elements in Christafari's music.[19] That the question I asked concerns itself with the ethics of *use* leaves Mark Mohr rather unaffected, not least because he believes that he *is* using these symbols correctly. In fact, any alternative use of these symbols, whether by Rastafarians or not, fails to meet the burden of doctrinal truth that Mark Mohr uses to test the validity of a given usage. The only legitimate *use* of these symbols, then, is one that takes place within the proper context of 'ownership' and, by this logic, Rastafari articulations of these ideas are, for him, always already invalidated.

And yet, Christafari's selective appropriation of Rastafari symbols has generated its share of scepticism among Protestants and has, by Mark Mohr's own admission, failed to affect the Rastafari community in as powerful a fashion as the band had hoped. This state of affairs has prompted a change in direction, which Mark Mohr calls a broadening out, in order to address their music to a larger audience. Christafari's latest release, entitled *Gravity* (2003), finds the band no longer using the word Jah, cutting back on the red, gold and green, and, in general, making the image of the band more regional (pan-Caribbean) in scope. This broadening out is reflected most clearly in the band's music, which now incorporates other Caribbean genres such as chutney, jamoo and soca, and is also evident in their new slogan – 'Reaching the World through World Music'.[20] Given this short introduction, it should come as no surprise that the recording and performing career of Christafari reveals some interesting disjunctures between vision and reception.

In order to trace some of these moments, I trace three themes through their five studio albums as well as through some additional singles released on compilations and dub versions. The themes include the use of Rastafari symbols in their musical and lyrical presentation, the use of Rastafari style in their cover art

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and in their own dress and press image, and the incorporation of lyrical themes carried over from the golden years of reggae, including resistance, rebellion and violence.

Reggae Worship

The first album recorded by Christafari, entitled *Reggae Worship* and released by Sanctuary, a division of Frontline Records, in 1993, offers a glimpse of things to come from the band. It rose to No. 20 on Billboard's Top Contemporary Christian charts and remained on the charts for seventeen weeks.[21] The debut album was produced on a relatively small budget and for an audience that was more in line with the record company's targeted market niche than it was with Mark Mohr's vision for the band. Thus it is a worship album as opposed to a true gospel reggae album. That said, however, the roots reggae style comes through quite clearly. Rastafari language-use is also evident throughout. By way of example, the chorus of the song entitled 'Jah is I Light' offers this catchy hook:

Jah is I Light & I salvation – He gives us everything.
Jah is the ruler over all Creation – of His goodness I sing.[22]

While this line is explained later in the song, the Rastafari overtones are clear and the band's obvious struggle with its reception by Protestants is evidenced by the bold-faced explanation offered in the liner notes to the album: 'Note: The name ''Jah'' is found in Psalm 68:4 KJV. It is an abbreviated version of the name ''Jehovah'' or ''Yahweh''. The name is also found in many biblical names such as Elijah (My God is Jah) & Abijah (Jah is my Father, ''Abba'')'.[23] Even with this early effort, then, Mark Mohr was faced with the challenge of explaining and defending his re-interpretation of Rastafari concepts, and this primarily because the ambiguity of the language allows for a certain amount of slippage. And although Christafari attempts to use this ambiguity to their advantage, it is this very ambiguity that forces the band to specify the meaning of *their* use of 'Jah' in the liner notes.

A final note about the album concerns the cover art, which depicts a coastal scene in rural Jamaica, complete with a church building toward which a mother and child are walking. This art is rendered in soft water colours. The pastoral nature of the artwork, enhanced through the predominance of pastel hues, establishes a connection between the musical content of the album (roots reggae) and the socio-cultural spaces of rural Jamaica. However, by appealing to these types of authenticities, the cover art suggests an image of what Jamaica *is*, sculpting a new vision of Jamaica in the process – a vision that, in fact, romanticises many of the biases and stereotypes with which rural Jamaica has been burdened throughout centuries. In their attempt to create a sense of authenticity for themselves (an authenticity that Tim Taylor might refer to as an appeal to a kind of authenticity of positionality), Christafari portrays rural Jamaica by means of colours that obscure the harsh realities of life in the 'country'.

The band's attempts at generating authenticity in *Reggae Worship* thus fail on at least two scores. First, their application of Rastafari language use and symbolism generate (or at least play on) an ambiguity that requires explanation in the liner notes. Second, the cover art, rather than producing a *realistic* sense of Jamaica, offers a mythical, unreal, quasi-colonial, and rather romanticised image of rural Jamaica – an image that can hardly contribute to a sense of the band's authenticity.

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Figure 1. Cover art from Christafari. Soul Fire *(1994)*

Soul Fire

Soul Fire, Christafari's second studio album (and first big-budget effort) was released by Gotee Records in 1994. The album charted on Billboard's Top Contemporary Christian Albums, topped out at No. 14, and remained on the charts for a modest six weeks. The cover art for the album gives an indication of the calculated authenticities that the band was attempting to convey (Figure 1). Rendered in red, gold and green against a black background and complete with dreadlocked musicians, the cover symbolically sets Christafari up as a Rastafari band. The cognitive dissonance created by the band's *name* in relation to the cover art and symbolic context within which it is embedded provides an intriguing paradox that is amplified by the musical material found on the album. The song entitled 'Spirit Cry' offers a case in point. The lyrics incorporate references to Babylon, use Jah in place of God/Jesus, and employ the signature Rastafari personal pronoun 'I-n-I'. All of this sung in a particularly *North American* (US) dialect to a solid roots-reggae backdrop. Some of the lyrics follow:

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Wipe away your tears my children, dry your eyes and rise again.
Lift up your heads Jah people turn your hearts from Babylon.
Cast off all those things that hold you down,
Come break these heavy chains that bind you now.

Chorus: Lord I say Spirit – CRY. Earthman – CRY. Spirit – HIGH. Jah love for – I AND I.[24]

If these lyrics of freedom and self-empowerment trigger memories of themes so often explored by Bob Marley or Peter Tosh, it is not entirely by accident, for Christafari's lyrical approach is predicated on generating authenticity by means of an iconic similarity to or stylistic link with recognisable models. I should quickly add, however, that the album is full of very explicit references to Jesus Christ, providing a context for Mark Mohr's usage of the symbols and leading anyone who carefully listens to the songs to an understanding of Christafari's evangelical project.

And yet, it strikes me as significant that these symbols require so much decoding and re-positioning in order to function within a Christian framework. It is in this sense that Michel de Certeau's idea of *use* provides an intriguing point of entry onto this music. Christafari is, in short, engaged in their very own 'struggle for possession of the sign', a struggle that has become particularly difficult to win not least because Rastafari articulations of meaning and their *use* of these symbols have been coupled with/to *music*. Christafari, in struggling to re-appropriate these symbols, is faced with the uncomfortable task of explaining themselves at every turn, primarily because they are using a musical style that is historically linked to Rastafari ideology and which is largely responsible for its very globalisation; to recall Murrell's words, 'to feel the reggae beat is to *think* Rasta'.

Valley of Decision

Valley of Decision, released by Gotee Records in 1996, reached No. 7 on the Billboard Reggae Charts and stayed in the top fifteen for thirty-two weeks.[25] Christafari, who had toured with the Reggae Sunsplash tour in 1995, was subsequently invited to participate at Reggae on the River 1997, the biggest reggae festival in Jamaica. Although the cover art for *Valley of Decision* was decidedly different from that for *Soul Fire*, having been imbued with CCM (Contemporary Christian Music) respectability, the muted red, gold and green are still present (Figure 2). Mark Mohr confirms that the change in the cover art reflects a response to concern over the album art for *Soul Fire*. 'It was the record label's desire to change the cover . . . They wanted something safe, not so dark' (Mohr 2003b). However, the lyrics continue to explore the same themes that came to define *Soul Fire*. Once again, the words are sung in a particularly North American (US) dialect (with occasional chats, delivered in Jamaican patwah, thrown in for good measure). By way of example, the song entitled 'Surrender' explores Babylon, emancipation themes, Zion, and the idea of Jah as 'His Majesty'.

Each day's a battle here in Babylon,
And every moment that we live's just another day to struggle on.
But still I find my rest under the strength of the Almighty.
We must let go and let Jah lead the way, surrender to His Majesty.

Surrender, surrender, surrender, surrender.
Long is the road to Mount Zion strong are the arms that carry me there.
Narrow is the road to Mount Zion so mek we walk with nothing to fear.

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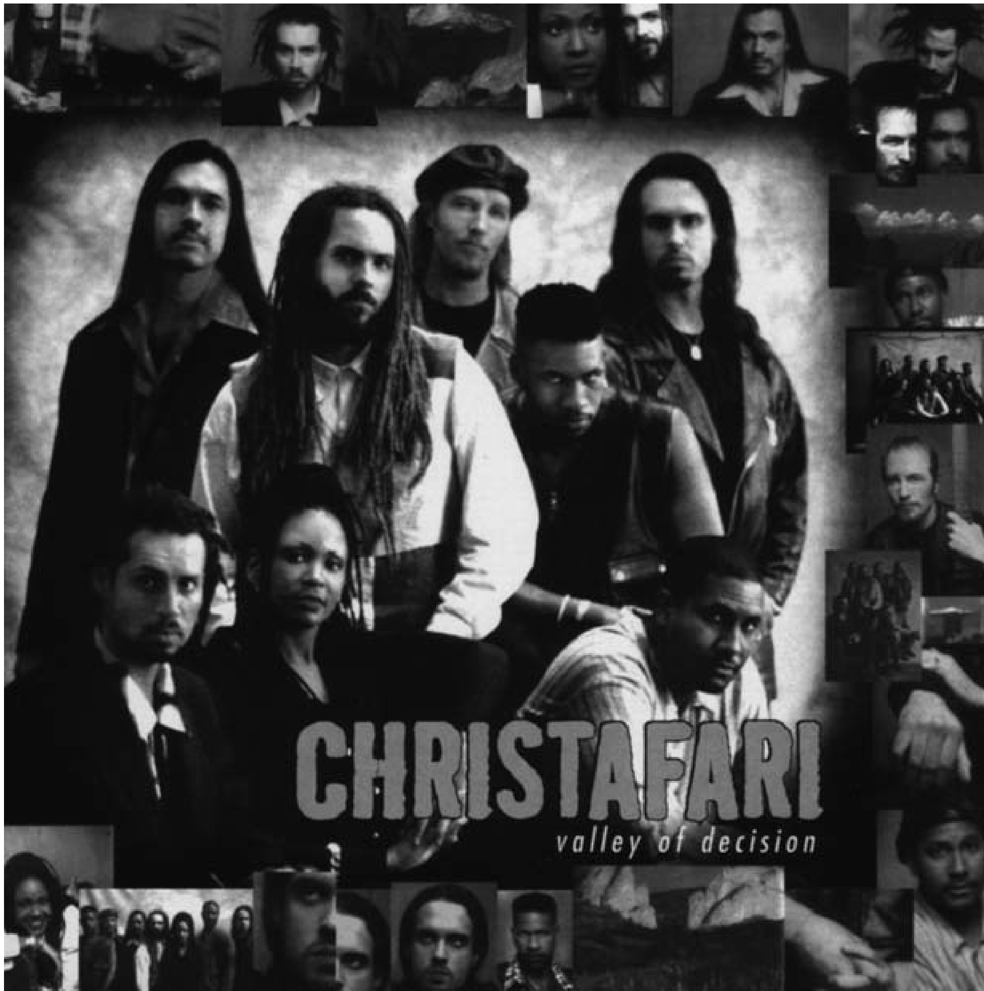

Figure 2. Cover art from Christafari. Valley of Decision *(1996)*

Once I was a slave, now I've been set free.
And though I thought I was a free man, my soul was in captivity
Each moment I possess a single thought of your love for me
My heart's so full, the joy it overflows, I know just where I want to be.[26]

Emancipation themes – expressed here in terms of an analogy about slavery and freedom that is intended to represent the soul's journey to salvation in Christ – are, in this context, difficult to separate from the historical fact/reality of slavery in the New World. When Christafari sings, 'Once I was a slave, now I've been set free', thereby drawing a contrast between life before and after conversion, the musical context, combined with the Rastafari symbols that the band incorporates into the song, their image, and the overall album, suggests a more literal, socio-political meaning. When compared to Bob Marley's deeply personal reflections on the evils of slavery, Christafari's lyrics risk serious misreading, which, in this case, can only reflect negatively on the band's bid for authenticity. Here is, then, another example of the ambiguity that plagues Christafari's project.

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Another song, entitled 'Can't Stop', finds Christafari singing 'AlleluJah' as they 'trod' on. The incorporation of this well-known Rastafari contribution to Jamaican patwah is significant not only in terms of its calculated bid for authenticity but also because it signals Mark Mohr's familiarity with Jamaican language patterns.[27] The juxtaposition of North American and Jamaican uses of the personal pronoun and of typically North American (US) pronunciation with Jamaican patwah make this song an excellent example of the interesting blend of sounds and ideas that Christafari achieves throughout *Valley of Decision*.

AlleluJah! Can't stop praising the Lord!
I can remember when I was younger puffed up and full of pride.
Well I needed no one, I had **my** own fun, then Jah came in and changed **my** life.

Me singing alleluJah, Giving out thanks and praises to di Father.
Me singing alleluJah, Giving out thanks and praises to no other.

I'm on the free road, Jah carry **I** load, onward and forward trod on.
And I'm under His wing, unto Him I sing songs of praise and Jubilee.[28]

Toward the end of 1997, Christafari came to a cross-roads. Many of the band's members wanted to explore a different musical vision, left the band, and subsequently expressed the motivations for their decision in an interview with Billboard Magazine:

As Christafari, we were a real reggae band trying to sound Jamaican, trying to sound real and authentic . . . we came to the realisation that none of us are from Jamaica. Most of us are from Los Angeles. We all have diverse musical influences. For the longest time, those influences were stifled in our music because we were trying to sound like something else. With this new vision, we basically threw everything out the window, so to speak, and just relied on our influences. That was the most exciting thing for us, that we went into the project with a clean slate and just built a sound by trying to be as true as possible to ourselves. (Evans Price 1999)

The result of these creative differences between the members of Christafari (aside from the frayed feelings still on display in this interview) was a split that saw the band's instrumentalists form a new group called Temple Yard while Mark Mohr retained the Christafari name for future projects. The split also resulted in Mark Mohr's separation from Gotee Records and the eventual creation of his own independent label, Lion of Zion Entertainment (1999). Mark Mohr stayed true to his initial project of gospel reggae, whereas Temple Yard went on to explore reggae fusion with a more conscious twist to the lyrics as opposed to a message of outright evangelism.

Word Sound & Power

By the time Christafari's fourth studio album, *Word Sound & Power*, was released in 1999, Mark Mohr's lyrics were often blatantly autobiographical. The turmoil of the band's split and the burden of years of Protestant resistance to gospel reggae are, undoubtedly, partially responsible for the more personal tone of the album. Lyrics such as, 'Some of best friend dem are friendenemy, dem wan kill de one Tan-so-Back (Mark Mohr) like me a Kennedy;' 'Woe yes, I am a radical – different in every way – controversial – the talk of the town, hear dem say I'm not a Christian because of these dreadlocks I display, cha!'; or, 'When the going gets rough say ''No compromise'', and the battle is tough say ''No compromise'', and *them want change your stuff* say ''No compromise'' ', illustrate the personal character of the lyrics quite clearly.[29]

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Figure 3. Cover art from Christafari. Word Sound & Power *(1999)*

The cover art for this album returns to and exceeds the Rastafari imagery of *Soul Fire*, featuring a painting of a dreadlocked head which is half lion, half man and inscribed over a Star of David complete with red, gold and green colour schemes (Figure 3). The name of the album is, itself, a significant re-definition of a Rastafari concept (word sound) *and* a play on an alternate name for reggae music (word sound & power). Christafari makes *their* usage explicit by pointing out that they *mean* Word (the word of God), Sound (the sound of reggae), and Power (the power of the Holy Spirit). The half lion/half man art work reminds me of a painting that Patricia Mohammed photographed in Jamaica in 1998. It was painted on the wall of a house in the southern part of the country and depicts a lion with a Rastafarian head (including dreadlocks), carrying a Jamaican flag, thereby representing a very common theme in Jamaican popular art. Patricia Mohammed analyses the image as follows:

Rastaman Lion represents the Conquering Lion of Judah, the result of Garveyism of the 1920s and 1930s, the later Rastafarianism of the 1950s and 1960s, and the musical glamour and messages of Bob Marley and Peter Tosh in the 1970s, a new invention of the black Caribbean

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male removed from slavery and metaphorically reinvented. The new image resonates with a pan-African one – the lion, the master of the jungle, who controls and is in control, both of his tribe and his space. This totemic image of human head on animal body is an old and powerful one, and a particularly relevant one for a people who were wrested out of Africa. (Mohammed 2001, p. 234)

Mark Mohr is, thus, playing with images and symbols that carry a great deal of historical and social weight and re-claiming them for evangelical purposes. His is, without question, a free and open approach to these symbols, and it plays into pragmatist philosophical approaches to truth, language, and ethics, where words and images are viewed as completely contingent.[30] I suggest that Mark Mohr's decision to use these symbols in so free a fashion raises important questions regarding the power relationships that are embedded in the re-use of these signs. Is Mark Mohr not, in effect, attempting to reclaim as Christian an oppositional narrative (complete with a symbolic vocabulary) and, in so doing, re-marginalising the voices that articulated the narrative in the first place? To that line of questioning, Mark Mohr replies as follows:

That is not how I see it. I see it as using the colours of the flag of a Christian nation (Ethiopia), . . . I see it as becoming all things to all men so that for the sake of the gospel I might reach some. How do Rastafarians see us? Many of them see us as Babylon Christianity. Some see us as deceitful and [as] wolves in sheep's clothing. But I am not trying to participate in the politics of Babylon [by appropriating these symbols], I am simply trying to win souls by any means. (Mohr 2004)

Ultimately, then, Mark uses these symbols because he is convinced of his fundamental obligation to do so as a Christian and as a messenger of the [T]ruth of the gospel. And this paradox (one of wanting to claim contingency while appealing to absolutes) rests uneasily at the *heart* of Christafari's project.

The lyrics of *Word Sound & Power* offer Christafari's most pervasive application of Rastafari ideas and of Jamaican patwah. The song entitled 'Food for the Hungry' illustrates this assertion well not least because the entire song is set in Jamaican patwah, but also because it is narrated from a Jamaican perspective. Thus, when Mark Mohr sings lines like, 'The slave masters took the shackles from we ankles, put the chains pon we brain', he is identifying as a Jamaican. This lyrical choice raises some question about whether or not he is in a position to garner authenticity/credibility by identifying with that particular chapter of Jamaican history. A brief excerpt of the lyrics follows:

The slave masters took the shackles from we ankles – put the chains pon we brain. It seems insane but Jah workers them nah labour in vain, they shall be saved all of them who choose to call on His name. So from the sweat off we brows, the sweat off we backs, we shall work all day and we nah going relax. Due to sin through thorns and thistles we must toil pon the earth. Only the righteous will find what life's worth. In God's metamorphosis they shall find a new birth (and Sing)

Woe! . . . So help them Jah, the whole of them in Mother Africa. Woe! . . . they are the sufferers, In Uganda and Kenya. Uganda, Somalia, Nigeria and South Africa. Ithiopia, and Kenya, in China and the whole of Jamaica.

They say you give a man a fish and you feed him fi a day, but teach a man fi fish and you feed him fi life. But me can't buy no reel, me can't find no pole, me can't by no hook and me can't afford no knife. You have to beat the system before it beats you, yet we already black and so blue. Judging by race and class must be through, we want justice fi all and not just fi few! Broke pocket! And so me tell them, say, Lord have His mercy yeah! Jah know them suffer real bad.[31]

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Another interesting development that appears in a few songs included on *Word Sound & Power*, including 'Food for the Hungry', is the noticeable bow toward conscious lyrics (although I should add that the essentially evangelical and Christian focus of the album still comes through quite clearly on every track). That said, however, racial and class politics are up for discussion on *Word Sound & Power* to a greater degree than on any of Christafari's previous albums. The song entitled 'Cry No More', for example, is a song of grief for the loss of innocent life due to violent crime in Jamaica. Acoustic guitars and a very rootsy arrangement, including nyabinghi drums, not to mention Mark Mohr's lyrical play on Bob Marley's 'Johnny Was', complete the conscious feel of the track.

Dry your weeping eyes my brethren. Cry no more, no. Dry your teary eyes my sistren. Cry no more, no.

(Chorus:) Woman hold her head she bawl and cry. Wo yoy, Wo yoy, Wo yoy. Because her son was shot in street and die. Wo yoy, Wo yoy, Wo yoy.

Father hears the news, him hold it in strong. Wo yoy, Wo yoy, Wo yoy. He wonder how dem things can go on in this here Babylon. Wo yoy, Wo yoy, Wo yoy.

Woman hold her head she scream and cry because her only son was shot in street and die. Here is the question she ask the Most High; 'why do the wicked prevail and the righteous die?' For every notch on him gun another mother lost her son, and every brag him a make another man heart break. Oh reality, Jah know it's too much to face. How could you let a good life go to waste?[32]

Having thus far traced the first two themes – Christafari's use of Rastafari symbols and ideas in their musical and lyrical presentation, and their use of Rastafari style in their cover art and in their own dress and press image – I turn briefly to an example of the band's incorporation of lyrical themes carried over from the golden years of reggae, including resistance, rebellion and violence. The song, entitled 'Babylon Has Fallen – Burn Babylon', a bonus track included on the album *Dub Sound & Power* (2000), identifies with and elaborates upon the Rastafari reading of the United States as the belly of the Babylonian beast. Mark Mohr simply works with that idea and adds a bit of prophetic language from the book of Revelation to the mix. It is a dread lyric, chatted to a dancehall beat that enhances the aggressive character of the piece.

Cha mi say Babylon is fallin the Kings are bawlin. Burn Babylon!
Tell me which country makes slaves of all men and think de world it just depend pon dem?
Tell me which country makes slaves of all men and think the world it depend pon dem?
Jah nah mek it happen. Him loose angel with Flames.
Jah nah mek it happen, so watch it go down inna pain.
Jah nah mek it happen. Him loose angel pon dat day.
Come watch de whole a dem go down inna Flames.[33]

This rhetorical move, which illustrates Mark Mohr's political leanings, his identification with Rastafari world views, and his intention to mediate these through the focusing lens of evangelical eschatology, raises the final lyrical theme that I wish to explore here; that is, violence. In many ways, violence is easier to work into a Christian message than is Rastafari language/style, not least because there is biblical precedent for much of the language (especially in the Old Testament).[34] This aspect of Christafari's music is, I believe, mirrored in the dancehall/reggae artists that have been developing in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas since 2000. In fact, violence and rebellion may well be one of the most powerful unifying threads between bands

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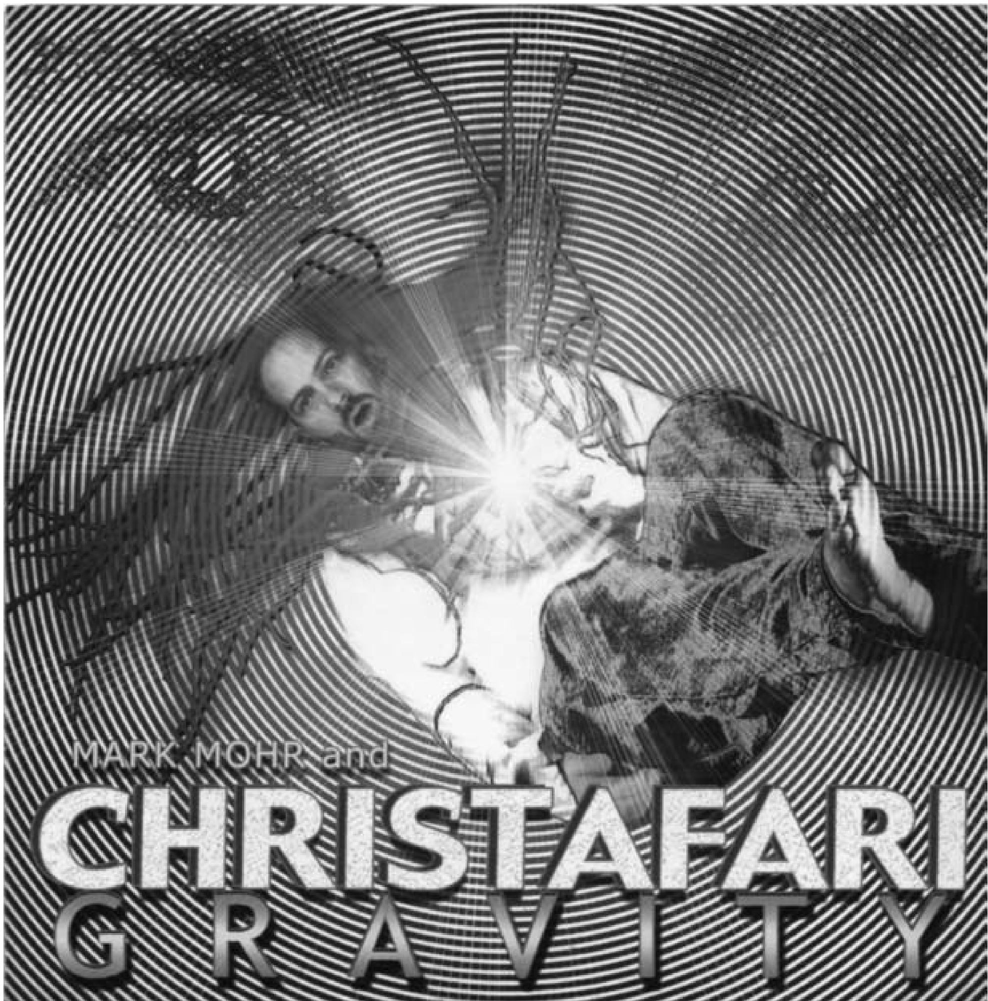

Figure 4. Cover art from Mark Mohr and Christafari. Gravity *(2003)*

like Christafari, dancehall artists such as Sherwin Gardner, and the sounds created by Bob Marley and Peter Tosh.

Gravity (2003)

Christafari's most recent album finds Mark Mohr changing direction rather dramatically. He no longer uses the word Jah, stays away from themes such as Babylon, does away with the Rasta-inspired cover art, and, in general broadens out the musical scope of the project to include regional styles in addition to reggae. He also includes his name on the front cover of the album for the first time since founding Christafari (i.e. Mark Mohr and Christafari) (Figure 4). With *Gravity*, Mark Mohr is deliberately distancing himself from Christafari's original project, and this move raises interesting questions regarding the effectiveness of gospel reggae and of Rastafari symbology within gospel reggae.

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I should point out that Christafari operates within a particularly open socio-cultural and religious context that affords the band a great deal of flexibility and freedom in terms of its chosen subject material and image. While Mark Mohr does bemoan the harsh reception of his music by conservative elements within the Protestant mainstream in the United States, he is, nevertheless, free to ignore their reviews or criticism as such. I would argue, in fact, that he was rather successful at pushing his own agenda during the early years of the band. But how to explain *Gravity*? The most significant departure from the original project comes in terms of his relationship to Rastafari symbols. The lyrics on *Gravity*, for example, do not so much as mention Jah, a decision that he explains as follows:

> When I started Christafari and Lion of Zion [Entertainment], my primary goal was to see the Rasta church become Christian, yet one of the regrettable fruits of my labour, (due to uneducated imitation by other artists) is the Christian church becoming more Rasta. This was never my intention. It was not my desire to have a Christian congregation in Trinidad and Tobago shouting out the name 'JAH!' in their church services. (Mohr 2003)

He has, as a result, consciously chosen to change the image and musical content of Christafari in order to reach a broader, more diverse audience with his message. Although he retains the dreadlocks, he casts himself in the mould of an alternative artist as opposed to a Rasta; the image is enhanced by the neo-psychedelic cover art for *Gravity*. This alternative image is further supported by the more experimental musical content of the album. It would be cynical to suggest that this change of direction was motivated strictly by financial considerations. While Mark Mohr would, undoubtedly, enjoy more album sales, he remains fiercely committed to the evangelical goals that he articulated when he initiated this project in 1989. It would be more fruitful, then, to consider Mark's change of direction from the perspective of use-value. As such, Christafari spent four albums and thirteen years attempting to reach Rastafarians and non-believers through a language and musical style that has been inextricably linked to Rastafari. When it became clear that the symbols and imagery burdened rather than assisted Christafari in putting their message across, a change of strategy became a natural choice. With *Gravity*, then, Mark Mohr signals his surrender to the power of Rastafari symbols and moves toward finding alternative routes of evangelisation. I turn now to a brief exploration of an artist who takes a markedly different approach to Rastafari symbols in his own music from that of Christafari.

Excursus II: Sherwin Gardner

Sherwin Gardner is a versatile, Trinidadian artist who performs in a wide range of styles, including r'n'b, soca and reggae. His albums play on some of the themes discussed earlier, focusing more heavily on imagery of war, rebellion and resistance than do Christafari's. This tendency is reinforced through his more thorough identification with the current developments in dancehall music. He appeals to dancehall culture not only in order to draw musical inspiration, but also in order to construct his image, choosing not to incorporate Rastafari themes to the same degree as does Christafari. In fact, there is very little evidence of direct re-use of Rastafari symbols in his music. His album art is, consequently, devoid of Rastafari references, focusing instead on images of Sherwin in dancehall and hip-hop moods. Lyrically, he offers a steady diet of secondary ideas derived from the themes of resistance and rebellion that have filtered from reggae into dancehall throughout the years.

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Dancehall does, indeed, give a particularly powerful voice to aggression, both lyrically and musically. To be sure, no other genre available to Full Gospel artists in the Caribbean is as suited to channel the types of sounds and lyrics that artists like Sherwin are producing. Themes previously under-explored (in Christian popular music, that is), such as war between good and evil, descriptions of hell, and eschatological/prophetic messages based on materials from Revelation and Daniel have, thus, become the Full Gospel corollary to gangster and rude-boy dancehall.[35]

One of the biggest Trinidadian gospel radio hits of 1999, for example, was the song entitled 'War'. It was written and arranged by Sherwin Gardner and features another Trinidadian gospel artist, popularly known as Mr. Mention. The lyrics of this song illustrate some of the thematic possibilities opened through recourse to dancehall style:

It is a war you want, war you going get
Cause when you check it out, see Jesus never fail me yet.

Ey boy me is a killer, big exterminator,
Mashing up the walls of Satan the hater
But when you check it out, Jesus Christ is the father
Love you and me, now and forever.
No matter what the enemy fi try
Me beg up Jesus Christ, the Addonai, the ruler on high
Boy, ey, me don't want you, no Mr. Satan.
Me hold on to my God and never never let him go.

Every night some pestilence one that may come again
Well religion, you're next in the church you are fake
Oh man, don't cause problem or we will break down your bus
And we will tear down your fence upon the devil kingdom
Execute the judgement now shut up, now let up, now keep silent
Cause the battle getting hot and the war is raging
And releasing Mr. Mention and the youth culture.[36]

Aggression is targeted here at a particularly interesting spiritual enemy, the church, and it is targeted for being 'fake' or hypocritical. These types of lyrics could not have found a home before dancehall and, not surprisingly, cause their share of consternation and frustration among church leaders. Even more fascinating is the fact that a musical style originally deployed in part as a means of resisting Christian world views from without is now being employed for similar purposes from *within* the church. This song can be compared to Christafari's 'Modern Day Pharisee', which chastises Protestants for judging one another (and specifically Christafari) without acknowledging their own shortcomings.[37]

However, violence is not reserved or promised exclusively for the Full Gospel community, and Sherwin Gardner spends time making the soteriological position of unrepentant sinners quite clear. An excellent example of this lyrical strategy is found his song entitled 'Hotta Redda Fire':

Hotta Redda! Hotta Redda fire going fi burn for all of Babylon dem who no want fi learn.
Pon judgement day you can't hide from the king you can't run from the almighty one.

Remember Sodom and Gomorrah? When master God him have fi send down the fire?
Burn down dem kingdom him a burn dem forever.
'Cause dem disrespect the rules of the almighty maker.
'Nuff lickle youth say dem want go Ethiopia, don't even know the history of South Africa.
Yet, still them say it is roots and culture Selassie I the Christ is dem rightful ruler.

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Where is he now in the midst of disaster nuff poor people inna di ghetto just a suffer?
Just to get a bread man a shot down he brother. See another lickle youth a lost he sister.
See another lickle youth a lost he mama. See another lickle youth a lost he papa.
Tell dem they nah seek the almighty maker dem a burn up inna . . .[38]

Sherwin Gardner's strategy parallels that of a preacher/prophet with a message of dread (in this case, fire-and-brimstone). His message, moreover, is directed specifically at Rastafarians and succeeds implicitly in linking human suffering and the impotence of the Rastafari deity, Haile Selassie I, through the structure of the narrative itself (one might wonder, of course, why it doesn't occur to him that human suffering might, just as easily, be redirected to indict his own theological leanings?). He takes care, furthermore, discursively to link Babylon with Rastafari, redefining the concept of Babylon to stand in for human sinfulness and a lack of God's presence. According to Sherwin's logic, since Rastafarians are not Christians, it follows that they are part of 'Babylon system', as it were.

It should be clear from this example that Sherwin Gardner is, in fact, working hard to maintain a clear distinction between the music he performs and Rastafari ideas. It is worth pointing out that this aggressive move is *not* adopted by Christafari, who prefer to use the symbols without turning them back on Rastafarians in such explicit ways. One of the motivations for Sherwin Gardner's more combative methodology is, I believe, tied to the pervasive presence of Rastafari thought and lifestyle in Trinidad and Tobago. In other words, unlike Christafari, Sherwin Gardner is daily faced with young Christians who are being drawn toward Rastafari and away from the church. Thus, it is imperative to provide a clear distinction between heaven and hell, as it were. Sherwin accomplishes this in part by setting Christianity against Babylon, which includes all unsaved people, including Rastafarians. By making this distinction clear, he reinforces the need for Christians to maintain their difference/distance from Rastafari modes of thought. The song entitled 'Yuh Don Know' illustrates this trend in Sherwin's lyrics quite clearly:

From yuh dun know only one man rule and reign – Jesus Christ now
Hear me tell them, hear me warn them again
Hey, ho, hey, hey, youth don't stray again now.

From yuh dun know only Jesus Christ we praise. Lift up unnu hand unto the ancient of days.
From yuh dun know only Jesus Christ is Lord. Open up your mouth and hollar, shout my God.

Babylon system, true me go burn them
True me a go done them. In the name of Jesus a run them.
Want cause we problem. Christ could a solve them.
And yuh dun know there's none above him
So let me tell yuh truth no lie. Christ him reign on high.
Yagga yuh ya ya ya yea
So have no fear! Christ is always there.
All a me Christian people throw your hand up inna the air.

And yet, even as he reinforces the divinity of Christ and the [T]ruth of Christian doctrine, the medium that Sherwin has chosen (dancehall), along with some calculated bows toward authenticity of sound which necessarily include markers such as patwah, using the dancehall riddims of the season, a few instances of *I-ance* (I-n-I), and the occasional use of Jah in place of Jesus, make his strategic moves a great deal more complex than he would like, introducing a certain degree of tension into the fabric of his music in the process.

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Excursus III: Stitchie

Stitchie, perhaps better known as the dancehall deejay, Lt. Stitchie, has, since 1997, been a gospel reggae/gospel artist. His debut album as a Christian artist is entitled *Real Power* (2000) and was produced by Mark Mohr of Christafari for Lion of Zion Entertainment. In stark contrast to the other bands and artists discussed here, Stitchie chooses not to identify with *any* Rastafarian symbols, focusing his image instead around Pentecostal paradigms. Thus, while the cover art for *Real Power* incorporates red, gold and green, it does so in a very diffuse manner and Stitchie is sporting a suit and bald head more reminiscent of televangelists and North American gospel artists than of Rastafari. This image is, of course, calculated to meet certain expectations that the Jamaican Full Gospel community has of artists who have 'crossed over' into the gospel music sphere. Artists throughout Jamaica continue to struggle with the controversy that gospel reggae engenders within the local Protestant community. Patrick Kitson, founder of the Jamaican band, Change, for example, notes that:

> The resistance that . . . Change encounters comes not from the reggae sector, but from the church community. The traditional churches exposed to European music say that reggae has no place in church. But it's been changing a little. We make Christianity relevant to our culture, and since our heritage is African, we try to maintain it in an African context. That's using reggae to its fullest, because reggae is a powerful medium. The message of Christ is a powerful message. Put them together, and you come out with Change. (Kitson 1997)

One of the principal reasons why reggae as a genre remains a controversial style within Jamaica, it should come as no surprise, is its close association with the rise of Rastafari in Jamaica and throughout the world. It goes back to Murrell's observation that 'to hear reggae is to *think* rasta'. In order to combat this perception within the local Protestant community (a community neither as closely knit, nor as homogenous as the word suggests), artists are very careful to present a clear message that remains rigidly separate from Rastafari symbols. Stitchie thus finds it much more comfortable to sing a hymn text like 'Softly and Tenderly' or 'On Christ the Solid Rock I stand' than to explore his dancehall roots. Mark Mohr, in a discussion about the music that Stitchie incorporated onto *Real Power*, explained that. 'he [Stitchie] can't even hint at any Rasta stuff or his career wouldn't even get off the ground. Over there [Jamaica] they won't tolerate it at all' (Mohr 2003a).

Mark Mohr knows quite well of what he speaks. When, in 1993, he was able to get a Christafari single, 'Wisdom' to air on the Jamaican gospel radio station Love FM, it was terminated before the first verse even finished playing because the show's producer had heard the word 'Jah'. 'The offending lyrics were ''Jah wisdom, it is better than silver. Jah wisdom, it is better than gold''' (Mohr 2003a). While things have changed a great deal since 1993, Stitchie still chooses to avoid controversy (and so does his contemporary, Carlene Davis). However, this is not to say that his music avoids all types of engagement with Jamaican popular culture (patwah and dancehall rhythms appear regularly throughout the album), but rather to say that his project strikes a much more delicate balance between North American worship music and reggae/dancehall material than does the music of either Christafari or Sherwin Gardner. In an interesting twist, then, it is Stitchie who appears most North American and Christafari who appears most Jamaican; a phenomenon that I believe grows out of the negotiation of proximity, a concept to which I will turn in the pages that follow.

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IV. *Gravity*:[39] Or the negotiation of proximity

Thinking about these artists and their music highlights two significant patterns and a third that develops quietly, but insistently, in the background. First, it becomes increasingly clear that Western Christian/North American elements tend to exist in a relationship of inverse proportion to Rastafari symbols; this is a relationship that manifests itself in terms of difference, which is itself figured in terms of cultural and geographic space. In other words, the more removed an artist/band is from Jamaican cultural or geopolitical space, the greater is the proportion of Rastafari elements within the music. Thus, while reggae remains a constant point of contact between all of these artists, Christafari is most thoroughly involved in the production of Rastafari symbols and most committed to the construction of a calculated Jamaican authenticity. Sherwin Gardner, is much less likely to press Rastafari symbols into service, choosing instead to *attack* the beliefs and values of Rastafarians. And yet, he *does* work with his own interpretation of Jamaican patwah and with the occasional reference to conscious, Rastafari language-use. Stitchie, however, is in the business of *separating* himself from a sector of Jamaican social and religious life that does not square with his new-found, Pentecostal praxis. In order to accomplish this, he focuses on imagery, language and sounds that are closely tied to North American Pentecostalist identity. The lyrical and symbolic content favoured by these artists, then, runs on a continuum that favours the non-local over the local.

Second, it is interesting to witness a gradual withdrawal from the use of Rastafari symbols over the course of several years by artists like Christafari, who had previously pressed them into service quite regularly. I believe that these two patterns combine to offer an important contribution to the ongoing discussions about globalisation and popular music. Finally, and herein lies the crucial distinction, these patterns do not really involve *reggae*, per se. What I mean here is that the case studies at hand illustrate that reggae (as sound and genre) travels relatively easily between Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States. Put somewhat bluntly, reggae is a local music *wherever* it winds up being performed and used. It has, in effect, surpassed its originating space (Jamaica) and now circulates in a wide variety of musical contexts, ready to be pressed into the service of new locales. The case studies at hand build the same case for reggae that Tony Mitchell *et al*. recently made for rap and hip hop (Mitchell 2001). In other words, the time has come to free reggae studies from the big referent of Jamaica.[40] What matters in the contemporary moment, then, is the *local* context of production, performance and reception, and not the fact that *Jamaican* music has become global.

But this leaves open for discussion the crux of the matter, so provocatively formulated by Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, when he wrote that 'to feel the reggae beat is to *think* Rasta'. I would like to problematise his statement in order to approach at a closer range the dynamic of inverse proportionality so evident in these case studies. It seems likely that Murrell's statement stands up under certain conditions and that one of these conditions is met in the case of gospel reggae artists who choose to incorporate Rastafari symbols into their music. This is the case because gospel reggae pursues the *sacred* and, as such, opens itself to 'Rasta Contemplative' meanings.

Gospel reggae, therefore, serves to highlight one of the problems associated with the globalisation of Rastafari. Whereas reggae artists who approach Rastafari symbols as 'Rasta as style' tend to use the symbols as 'spice', or perhaps as markers of a certain type of authenticity, this road is always already closed to *gospel* reggae artists. This is

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the case not least because 'Rasta contemplative' meanings will always surface in and through the religious context of gospel reggae and because these meanings, not surprisingly, are incompatible with Full Gospel doctrine. What I want to suggest here is that the *message* of Rastafari is much more difficult to re-contextualise and localise than is the sound of reggae; that the globalisation of Rastafari travels along quite different routes and at very different speeds than does reggae's sound.

Moreover, the closer to Jamaican socio-cultural and religious life an artist is, the more clearly this reality is etched across his or her musical and symbolic productions. It is clear that Stitchie is intimately familiar with the consequences of playing at 'Rasta as style' and stays well away from being implicated in or associated with this practice. In this sense, it is perhaps more accurate to characterise his musical creations not as pursuing North American Pentecostal and Full Gospel paradigms (as I did earlier), but rather as a careful negotiation of the proximity of 'Rasta Contemplative' meanings; meanings that can easily encroach upon the reggae music he performs, thereby disrupting (if not destroying) the context of meaning within which he is working.

I call this process the negotiation of proximity. Those artists closest to Rastafari's socio-cultural and religious contexts and histories manage to recognise the danger of utilising 'Rasta as style' within their reggae music while those farthest from these contexts tend to appeal to 'Rasta as style' symbology in order to validate and/or legitimise their projects as authentic. Christafari, then, spent thirteen years trying to figure out how to balance 'Rasta as style' against a Christian world view without allowing 'Rasta contemplative' meanings to seep in and complicate their message. Put otherwise, Christafari attempted to approach Rastafari as though 'to feel the reggae beat is to *feel* Rasta'.

This modification of Murrell's idea may ring true if Christafari were pursuing a project on the order of, say, UB40 or No Doubt, but theirs is an explicitly sacred *and* overtly Christian project. Their most recent album, *Gravity*, is, in my view, the final realisation of and ultimate capitulation to the reality that Stitchie and, to some extent, Sherwin Gardner, have recognised and largely circumvented from the outset. When you are producing *sacred* reggae music, 'to feel reggae is', indeed, 'to *think* Rasta'. The negotiation of proximity, then, is a means by which we can name a process of socio-cultural and, in this case, religious engagement with the immediacy of ideology and symbol. While reggae is localised wherever it is performed, Rastafari meanings are not as easily separated from the contexts within which they were initially articulated. This is especially so, I argue, when the musical project at hand is a specifically sacred one.

V. 'No Water Can Out this Fire':[41] Remarks by way of conclusion

How and to what ends is Rastafari thought and symbolism being mobilised within gospel reggae and what might this contribute to our understanding of the globalisation of religious belief? The case studies I have explored here suggest that the extent of Rastafari mobilisation within a given artist's music depends in large part on the artist's location *vis-à-vis* Jamaican social and religious contexts. I have suggested that one way of approaching the relationship between Rastafari content and place is by thinking about the negotiation of proximity. The relationship between proximity and religious symbolism, however, needs further nuance in order adequately to account for the separate paths that reggae (sound) and Rastafari (ideology) weave through these case studies.

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In what ways, then, are reggae music and Rastafari faith and symbolism linked (and/or uncoupled from one another) in the process of globalisation? The case studies offer evidence of the need separately to analyse the parallel globalising trajectories of reggae music and Rastafari ideology. They do this by illustrating through sound, lyric, and image the very different ways that reggae and Rastafari are localised in the process of going abroad and by highlighting the negotiations of proximity that these disparate routes necessitate. Reggae as sound is adopted and adapted with relative ease by each of the artists I have discussed here. Rastafari symbol, on the other hand, exacts a higher price from these artists – a price that becomes easier to pay the farther the artist is removed from Jamaican religious contexts. And yet, even Christafari struggled clearly to mark their use of Rastafari symbols as Christian. This seems to indicate that attempts at incorporating 'Rasta as style' into an explicitly Christian (sacred) context evoke 'Rasta contemplative' associations simply by virtue of the use to which the symbols are being put in gospel reggae. I am convinced, then, that Rastafari symbols remain more difficult to translate into new *sacred* contexts than is the sound of reggae.

But the two are linked to each other through the history of reggae's globalisation. It is in this limited context, then, that Murrell's statement is, indeed, telling. 'To feel the reggae beat is to think Rasta'. Stitchie and Sherwin Gardner (to a lesser degree) recognised this linkage between sound, symbol, and ideology from the start, and Christafari has come to understand this over the course of their career, confirming this realisation (at least to some degree) with the release of *Gravity*. 'Rasta as style', nevertheless, offers invaluable currency in terms of authenticity, and this, again, in relationship to artists' distance from Jamaican social and musical contexts, a state of affairs that leads me to my final question.

What role do questions of authenticity play in determining the extent of these linkages? Questions related to power and appropriation notwithstanding, it is not unreasonable to suggest that artists like Christafari, removed as they are from specifically Jamaican contexts of religious and musical experience, find it necessary to wrestle with the double-edged sword of 'Rasta as style' within gospel reggae. On the one hand, the range of symbols – both visual and conceptual – offered by Rastafari, present an opportunity to solidify overall authenticity. Christafari's careful deployment of reggae music bears markers of authenticity that Rastafari symbols can reinforce in important ways. On the other hand, however, the difficulties of incorporating these symbols into an explicitly Christian context are quite serious. Christafari thus faces the very real challenge of balancing between the benefits and simultaneous liabilities associated with using Rastafari symbols in pursuit of authenticity. I suggest that Sherwin Gardner and Stichie do not feel the need to generate an authenticity of positionality in the same way as does Christafari, a fact that renders the liability associated with using Rastafari symbols an unnecessary risk. Each of the case studies, then, highlights the important role that artists' positionality plays in relation to Rastafari symbols and authenticity.

With these thoughts in mind, it strikes me that the case studies explored here are sufficient to call into question a reading of reggae, Rastafari, *or* Full Gospel Protestantism that neglects the positioned and radically local interpretive community within which a given artist performs these relationships. It is my hope that this first step toward thinking about the *religious* implications of reggae's globalisation will lead to additional explorations of the nuanced and intricate local interactions between reggae, Rastafari, and Full Gospel Protestantism throughout the world.

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Endnotes

1. Christafari, one of the most successful gospel reggae bands, for example, lists among its most important accomplishments the following items: participation in the 1995 Reggae Sunsplash tour; performance at the 1997 Reggae on the River Festival; over 370,000 units sold since 1989; and the fact that their 1998 release, *Word Sound & Power*, debuted at No. 9 on the Billboard Reggae Charts. While these are certainly worthy accomplishments, it should also be clear that Christafari is not a large-market act. To put this into perspective, compare Christafari's career total of 370,000 units sold with Usher's album, entitled *Confessions*, which sold 7,979,000 units in 2004 alone, topping Billboard's Best-selling Albums of 2004 list in the process.
2. I use the term 'Full Gospel' to indicate what is, at best, a loose affiliation of several denominations and strands of Protestantism within the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. The term takes on slightly different meanings in each place, but offers, as a central unifying thread, the advantage of referring primarily to Pentecostal and evangelical denominations (and, importantly, *not* to Presbyterians, Anglicans, or Episcopals). In spite of the range of meanings that 'Full Gospel' entails, then, it does serve to delimit the Protestants with whom this article is concerned in a useful way.
3. This is the title of Stichie's debut album for Lion of Zion Sounds. Stichie, *Real Power* (2000).
4. I am thinking here of cultural criticism by scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall, and of historical research conducted by scholars including Armando Lampe, Barry Chevannes, Eric Williams and Rex Nettleford, to name just a few.
5. The great commission as recorded in Matthew 28:19–20 (New International Version). The great commission is also recorded in Mark 16:15–16. 'He said to them, ''Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned''.' The great commission provides some insight into the logic of colonial religious instruction and also figures as one of the primary reasons why Christian artists are searching for popular genres such as reggae through which they can reach a large audience with the gospel.
6. A case in point is offered by Keith Hunte: 'In Jamaica, in spite of the pious injunction inserted in the slave code of 1696 requesting ''All masters, mistresses, owners, and employers'' to make provision for the religious instruction and conversion of their slaves, little action was taken to give effect to it. The real intention of the Jamaican legislators in this regard seemed to have been more accurately expressed in the text of the law in which that legislature fixed the fee for administering the sacrament of Holy Baptism to a slave at £1 3s. 9d. ''a sum large enough to be prohibitory'' ' (Hunte 2001, p. 92). However, there was also a flip-side to this debate having to do with the tricky doctrinal question of what exactly happens to slave status subsequent to baptism. Would it be 'Christian' to remain the master of one's own 'brother or sister in Christ?' Resistance to these pious injunctions, then, ran deeper than mere rebelliousness and/or disregard for imperial authority, for it was also motivated out of financial considerations, that is out of a concern for the continued 'doctrinal' viability of slave labour. This issue is explored in detail in Lampe (2001).
7. For a detailed exploration of the Free Village system, see Sidney Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (1974). For a more sweeping exploration of the role of Christianity in Jamaica during the first half of the nineteenth century, see Winston Arthur Lawson's *Religion and Race: African and European Roots in Conflict – A Jamaican Testament* (1996).
8. This approach to religious belief occurred in various forms throughout the New World, leading to interesting syncretic practices in both Catholic- and Protestant-dominated contexts. It is, in fact, one of the most characteristic features of religious belief in the region. For an interesting overview of these types of negotiations of belief, see Margarite Fernandez Olmos's *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santeria to Obeah and Espiritismo* (2003).
9. For an excellent exploration of the spirit of resistance evidenced by Jamaican interactions with Christianity, see Barry Chevannes'

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Rastafari: Roots and Ideology (1994). Richard D.E. Burton's work, entitled *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (1997), offers another important discussion of the idea of opposition as it relates to the development of religious practices in Jamaica.

10. This is the title of Christafari's fourth studio album. Christafari, *Word Sound & Power* (1999).
11. I am thinking here of Roland Barthes' work in *Mythologies* (1998).
12. For an excellent historical treatment of Rastafari's doctrinal development and its impact on Jamaican culture and society, see Ennis Barrington Edmonds's *Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers* (2003).
13. For more detailed discussions of the terms of Rastafari opposition to Christianity and to the politics of Babylon, please see Barry Chevannes' *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (1994) and his edited collection entitled, *Rastafari and Other Afro-Caribbean Worldviews* (1998); *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, edited by Nathaniel Samuel Murrell *et. al* (1998) is another excellent source of information. It is also helpful to refer to a copy of the *Kebra Negast*, a very influential Ethiopian treasury of mystic spirituality that has been used extensively in Rastafari thought.
14. Both Sherwin Gardner and *Melchizedek Order* are Trinidadian gospel artists who use Rastafari symbols to convey their message.
15. There are, of course, some parallels between gospel reggae and, say, Christian rock. An excellent example of this is the band called Stryper, whose album entitled *To Hell with the Devil* traded on a clever semantic ambiguity. They invoked the word 'hell' in a biblical sense, but embedded it within a figure of speech that is generally frowned upon within the evangelical community. Dressed in spandex and wearing the long hair and make-up of the late 1980s glam rock bands, Stryper garnered a good deal of negative attention from the Christian community. Reaching farther into the past, one could also think about the early attempts of Thomas A. Dorsey to introduce the gospel blues into church services – attempts that were met with stiff resistance for some time. And yet, while parallels exist between these projects and gospel reggae artists, the crucial difference is that bands like Christafari are attempting to translate sacred symbols into their own sacred context. Christian rock and gospel blues are working with popular musical styles, but not with symbols held sacred in non-Christian religious contexts. This, then, is the aspect that separates gospel reggae from the gospel blues or from late 1980s Christian rock bands.
16. This is the title of Sherwin Gardner's debut album, *100% Sold Out* (1999).
17. The information I condense in these case studies has been gathered variously through fieldwork, interviews, personal correspondence, and through information published on the artists' websites.
18. And while Mohr appreciates the lack of oversight he lives with, he does acknowledge that there are some practical disadvantages to his position as well, noting that 'I can't just set up a tour of all the churches [of a given denomination], because they are like ''who are you?'' ' (Mohr 2003A).
19. Mark Mohr, however, conveniently overlooks the fact that concepts like Zion and the Star of David were, in fact, appropriated from Jewish religious life, a religious context that predates Christianity.
20. This slogan is itself freighted with a distinct irony, given the fact that World Music as a genre was created not for the world but for consumers in Europe and North America. The use of World Music to reach the World, thus, participates in the same logic used to justify appropriating Rastafari symbols to reach Rastafarians with the gospel.
21. While this is an achievement in its own right, I should point out the relatively marginal space that Christafari occupies within the Contemporary Christian market by offering a few other projects as comparisons. DC Talk's *Free At Last*, for example, reached No.1 and remained on the charts for 197 weeks. Amy Grant's *The Collection* also reached No. 1 and stayed on the charts for 381 weeks.
22. Lyrics excerpted from 'Jah is I Light' as recorded and re-released on *Reggae Worship: The First Fruits of Christafari* by Christafari (2000). See http://www.christafari.com for entire text.
23. Liner Notes to *Reggae Worship: The First Fruits of Christafari* by Christafari (2000).
24. Lyrics excerpted from 'Spirit Cry' as recorded on *Soul Fire* by Christafari (1994). See http://www.christafari.com for entire text.
25. *Valley of Decision* marks the height of Christafari's career on the billboard charts. And while it is significant in its own right, a comparison with some other reggae artists might help situate the relative success of the album. Buju Banton's *'Til Shiloh*, for example, peaked at No. 2 and remained on the charts for 104 weeks. Inner Circle achieved No.1 with their *Bad Boys* album and remained on the charts for 151 weeks.
26. Lyrics excerpted from 'Surrender' as recorded and released on *Valley of Decision* by Christafari (1996). See http://www.christafari.com for entire text.
27. For more information regarding the word 'trod', see Velma Pollard, 'Sound and power: the language of the Rastafari' (2003, pp. 60–82).
28. Lyrics excerpted from 'Can't Stop' as recorded and released on *Valley of Decision* by Christafari (1996); emphasis mine. See http://www.christafari.com for entire text.
29. Lyrics excerpted from 'My Stereo', 'Blood and Fire' and 'Word Sound & Power' as recorded and released on *Word Sound & Power* by Christafari (1999); emphasis mine.
30. In thinking about pragmatist philosophy, I am primarily interested in Richard Rorty's

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approach to contingency as articulated in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989).

31. Lyrics excerpted from 'Food for the Hungry' as recorded and released on *Word Sound & Power* by Christafari (1999). See http://www.christafari.com for entire text.
32. Lyrics excerpted from 'Cry No More' as recorded and released on *Word Sound & Power* by Christafari (1999). See http://www.christafari.com for entire text.
33. Lyrics excerpted from 'Babylon Has Fallen – Burn Babylon' as recorded and released on *Dub Sound & Power* by Christafari (2000). See http://www.christafari.com for entire text.
34. By way of example, think of the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), the fall of Jericho (Joshua 6), or the account of the flood (Genesis 7). The death of the unrighteous is, thus, an integral part of Judeo-Christian belief. Whether that occurs by the hand of other human beings or in the final judgement is less important than the fact of human accountability to God.
35. Christian artists have also worked with heavy metal, hip hop, and alternative music (including bands like White Cross, D.C. Talk, and the Newsboys, respectively). While these bands also explore lyrics involving violence (as in Stryper's 'To Hell With the Devil') these genres are not as widely popular in the Caribbean as is dancehall. It is for this reason that an artist like Sherwin Gardner tends to channel his lyrics through dancehall and, only to a lesser degree, through r'n'b and hip hop.
36. Lyrics excerpted from 'War' as recorded and released on *100% Sold Out* by Sherwin Gardner (1999).
37. Not insignificantly, the song also begins with the line, 'this is a real murder tune'.
38. Lyrics excerpted from 'Hotta Redda Fire' as recorded and released by Sherwin Gardner on *Leaning* (2002).
39. This is the title of Christafari's most recent release, *Gravity* (2003).
40. Recent scholarship seems to substantiate this claim, and yet, analysis of reggae outside Jamaica still tends to remain tied to Jamaican models. So, as one example among many, we could think about the article by Jorge L. Giovannetti entitled 'Popular music and culture in Puerto Rico: Jamaican and rap music as cross-cultural symbols' (2003). The question about why white Puerto Ricans are using reggae as a symbol of elite culture is framed against the fact that it was originally articulated in direct opposition to these cultural spheres. But what fascinates me is the fact that reggae has been freed from that history to tell other stories, and I am advocating for an embrace of the unique and important local narratives within which reggae has begun to play a role.
41. Title of a song included on the album *Word Sound & Power* and released by Christafari (1999).

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