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Introduction

Popular music has always drawn part of its attracting powers from referring to religiously connotated sources, obscure movements or charismatic characters in content and symbolism (Till, 2010). One only needs to think about The Beatles' association with Indian gurus, Led Zeppelin's fascination with occultist Aleister Crowley, countless Rock bands' claimed affiliation with the Church of Satan or Rap-millionaire Jay-Z's lucrative play with Illuminati symbolism (Gosa, 2011, p. 8). Providing the listener with seemingly meaningful context beyond the plain musical content seems to help to sell that extra bunch of records.

While in a lot of cases, this displayed affiliation stays mainly on the surface of things and seems to serve simple PR agendas, some artists openly commit themselves – or even fully dedicate their artistic output – to the cause of certain quasi-religious movements. If one of the most influential Rap groups of the 1990s, at the peak of their popularity – and the one of Hip Hop as a genre as well – decides to fill the seven minute-opener (Wu-Tang Clan, 1997a) of their highly anticipated new album with a preacher-style sermon performed by Five Percenter ideologist Popa Wu (Killmann, 2014), it can be considered a fundamental statement, underlining the crucial commitment the Wu-Tang Clan expresses towards its primary ideological influence.

What might be in coherence with the character of the Five Percent Nation as a missionary movement employing newspapers and websites or street academy activities (Knight, 2013, p. 96) comes across a lot more ambivalent in the case of Reggae/Dancehall artists like Sizzla Kalonji, Capleton or Lutan Fyah who openly demonstrate their affiliation with the Bobo Shanti Order, a rather reclusive branch of the Rastafarian faith, organized around strict communal services (Barnett, 2002, p. 58) and quite clear in its rejective stance towards Reggae music (Kamimoto, 2015, p. 47).

However, one of the main questions that has to be asked is concerning the possible reasons for the fact that two highly commercially successful, globally relevant and influential musical styles of the last decades (Savishinsky, 1994a; Mitchell, 2001; Alim, Ibrahim & Pennycook,

2008) are being deeply rooted in rather obscure mythologies of somehow radical religious character that affiliated artists pledge open allegiance to. Are these movements simply being exploited by musicians looking for increased attention to add some outstanding attitude and identity on a competitive market – or are they in turn being used and instrumentalized by these groups for their own promotional purposes? In any case, it is nothing else but astonishing that a considerable audience of listeners would happily vibe to rather harsh and violent musical enforcements of Mosaic law, delivered by preachy, self-styled prophets, or even more obscure, Islam-inspired Black supremacy conceptions, circulating around the idea that the creation of the Caucasian race is resulting from an evil experiment of a mad scientist (Smith, 1998, p. 539).