



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



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Bio and Research Statement

K. Gandhar Chakravarty successfully defended his thesis on April 3rd, 2014. His dissertation, “African Nazarites: A Comparative Religious Ethnography of Rastafari and *Ibandla lamaNazaretha*,” focuses on two rapidly growing theological and cultural movements currently sparking global interest. From a theoretical framework grounded in the notions of religious liminality and hybridity, Chakravarty’s dissertation argues that both *Ibandla lamaNazaretha* and Rastafari perpetuate a conflation between the “Nazirite” from the Old Testament (Numbers 6:1-8) and the “Nazorean” of Matthew 2:23 through the hailing of a contemporaneous saviour: Haile Selassie I for Rastafari and Isaiah Shembe for *Ibandla lamaNazaretha*. Until today, no existing study documented how these contemporary religious movements interpreted the ancient biblical practices associated with the office of the Nazirite in original and sig-

nificant ways. These practices include consecration to a Lord, hair growth, abstinence from alcohol, and avoidance of the dead. In this regard, the thesis is a breakthrough in scholarship. Through the implementation of a methodology defined as “living hermeneutics and exegesis,” Chakravarty argues that based on the traits of modernity and indigeneity that co-exist in some modern religious movements, postcolonial studies could profit from a dialogue that includes the idea of *persistence* alongside the more conventional concept of a “resistance movement.” That is, the indigenous practices that have been

retained, in albeit enculturated forms, existed long before colonialism and have sometimes unfairly been labelled forms of “resistance” in postcolonial dialogues.

His research was made possible by a number of sources: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) who awarded Chakravarty with a Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Doctoral Scholarship, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS), and Université de Montréal (Chaire Religion, culture et société; Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales; Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions).

K. Gandhar Chakravarty is a published scholar and poet. Most recently, his article “Rastafari Revisited: A Four-Point Orthodox/Secular Typology of Moderate Expression” has been accepted for publication by the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. He has also co-authored, with his supervisor Solange Lefebvre, a chapter entitled “Youth, Spirituality, and Religion in Canada and Quebec” that was published in the *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion* (2010) and co-edited a volume of *Concilium* (2014:1) with Lefebvre and Denise

Couture. His poetry books are *Kolkata Dreams* (2009) and *Maple Vedas* (2010). In many ways, Chakravarty's creative works explore the idea of what it means to be an Indo-Canadian, or any kind of hyphenated identity, and are a poetic extension of his critical thinking. Chakravarty has also lectured and given talks on various topics at The University of Texas at Austin, Université de Montréal, the American Academy of Religion-Eastern International Region (AAR-EIR) 2010 Annual Meeting in Ottawa, McGill University, the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) 2010 Annual Meeting in New Orleans, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.