

# Responding to the Afroz Thesis: Are the religious roots of Jamaica and the wider Caribbean Islamic rather than Animist and/or Christian?

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**OVERVIEW:** *In this session of the Conference on Islam, the Gospel and the Caribbean, Dr Sultana Afroz's proposed revision of the Caribbean's religious history will be examined from academic historical and spiritual geostrategic perspectives. In light of these considerations, initial suggestions will be made towards a strategic response by the church in the Caribbean, and appropriate conclusions and recommendations will be made.*

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**INTRODUCTION:** A half a millennium ago, the Christian Faith came to the Caribbean with the first European Discoverers, Conquistadores and settlers; at best an ambivalent situation.

Two hundred and fifty years later, the first serious attempts were made to evangelise slaves in the Anglophone territories; many of whom enthusiastically converted to the Christian Faith. Even more of the slaves adapted to that faith through syncretism with their own Animist beliefs – reflecting the common theme of a High God, but retaining the typical Animist scheme of intermediary sky- and earth- bound spirit beings.<sup>1</sup>

For instance, in the mission and native Baptist churches that emerged through a major facet of this process, there was a spectrum of beliefs from orthodox Christian faith to a syncretistic, Christianized Myal.<sup>2</sup> Remnants of this blend remain

<sup>1</sup> This manifests a typical pattern of conversion, adaptation and syncretism that is instantly recognizable to any culturally informed Missiologist. Chevannes [1998] and Newman & Wade I & II [2002] are the major sources for the survey that follows.

<sup>2</sup> In turn, Myal and Obeah had emerged by the time of the 1760 Tacky pan-tribal slave rebellion; out of a synthesis of the African animistic faiths brought to Jamaica by the survivors of the *Middle Passage*. As the Baptist Faith would later serve, these belief systems formed a focus for cultural survival and resistance to the cruel bondage of plantation slavery in the Caribbean.

to this day – more than one church has had a chicken or a goat sacrificed at the laying of its foundation!

Over the period to the 1830s, increasingly, the Christian Faith and its native and missionary leaders would become the protagonists of a long liberation struggle with the plantocracy and its allies in the West India Interest in Britain. Gradually the Abolitionists won over a reluctant Parliament to their cause, especially as the economic power of sugar began to wane. So at the turn of the 1830's, Emancipation was in the air.

However, the struggle would come to a violent head through the Christmas 1831 slave strike demanding pay for work. The strike was led by Baptist Deacon Sam Sharpe; it turned into the “Baptist War” uprising because of the usual overly harsh repression by the local militia<sup>3</sup>, issuing in the hanging of over three hundred slaves and the further terrorization of the over three hundred thousand slaves across the island. Among the executed was Sharpe, Jamaica's first political martyr and national hero.

But, their sacrifice accelerated the British decision to abolish slavery in the Empire, and in the 1840s, within a few years of their emancipation in 1834 - 38,

<sup>3</sup> Sharpe acquired arms in advance of the strike, showing that he anticipated a military struggle as a likely outcome.

the ex-slaves began going as Missionaries to West Africa.<sup>4</sup> As a result, perhaps a hundred Caribbean missionaries played a critical catalytic role in the founding of the Evangelical Christian Faith in this part of Africa. So much is this the case, that in a recent issue of the *Journal of African Christian Thought*, George Liele -- the American Baptist missionary pioneer and former slave who came to Jamaica from Georgia to preach the gospel in the 1780's -- is described as a black prophet and father of the church in the Americas and Africa.

However, Islamic Scholar and Historian Dr Sultana Afroz, of the University of the West Indies History Department, Mona Campus, paints a very different picture of the spiritual roots of Jamaican (and thus Caribbean) culture: "Islam was the faith of the Black African slaves brought to Jamaica and to the other West Indian Islands from West and Central Africa." [1995]

For instance, in writing of the 1831 slave strike-cum-"Baptist War" uprising, she observes:

Contemporaneous to the autonomous Muslim Maroon *ummah*, hundreds of thousands of *Mu'minun* (the Believers of the Islamic faith) of African descent worked as slaves on the plantations in Jamaica. Remarkable intelligence, eloquence in speech, cultural self-confidence, calm and discipline characterized these subdued and obedient African Muslim slaves as they toiled in various capacities on the estates. Yet, beneath this calmness and obedience was their determination to establish the Truth, which is *Tawhid* (the Oneness of God), and thus attain the freedom of the soul. There is also the Qur'anic command to wage *jihad* (struggle against oppression), which is reinforced by the traditions of the Prophet of Islam. *Jihad* became the religious and political ideology of these crypto-Muslims, who became members of the various denominational nonconformist churches since being sprinkled with the water by the rectors of the parishes.

Despite the experience of the most cruel servitude and the likelihood of a swift and ruthless suppression of the rebellion, the spiritually inspired *Mu'minun* collectively responded to the call for an island-wide *jihad* in 1832. Commonly known as the Baptist Rebellion, the *Jihad* of 1832 wrought havoc of irreparable dimension to the plantation system

and hastened the Emancipation Act of 1833. With the death of the first generation of *Mu'minun*, the doctrines of the Holy Qur'an could hardly be heard. Irreligious and ungodly actions of adultery and unchastity by the plantation masters, together with the indoctrination of Christianity and forceful baptism, made the descendants of the *Mu'minun* from Africa oblivious to Islam. However, the eye of a careful observer may trace many of the Islamic practices still prevalent in the society.

Thus, the stage is set for our deliberations: which version of the Spiritual History of Jamaica is more correct? Does it matter? And, not least, what should we do about it?

### 1. Background: The Afroz Thesis

The key claim made by Dr Afroz is that "Of the three Abrahamic religions, Islam was the faith of the Black African slaves brought to Jamaica and to the other West Indian Islands from West and Central Africa." [1995, p. 30.]

This claim implies that the majority of Jamaica's slaves were therefore Muslim (and/or crypto-Muslim), backed up by two supporting claims:

(1) The Moorish slaves brought to the West Indies from Spain were Islamic, and became the basis for Jamaica's Maroon communities.

(2) The slaves later brought to Jamaica from Africa were from tribes that were heavily Islamised<sup>5</sup>, and so in the days leading up to emancipation, there were "hundreds of thousands" of such Muslim and/or crypto-Muslim slaves on Jamaica's plantations.

Consequently, Jamaica's folk religious tradition is also viewed as being fundamentally Islamic rather than Animist as has been hitherto thought. In particular, Maroon and National Heroine Nanny is reinterpreted as a Sufi saint, working miracles by Allah. Similarly, Sam Sharpe, the Baptist Deacon and leader of the 1831 strike-cum-uprising, is viewed as a Muslim rather than a Christian religious leader. Indeed, it is further argued that even George Liele, founder of the native Baptist church of Jamaica, was a Muslim rather than a Christian leader.

Thus also, the passive and active resistance to oppression by the slaves is to be reinterpreted in

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hall, 2003.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Warner-Lewis, 2002.

Islam terms as a jihad, a religiously motivated struggle against “oppression” of Islamic people.

The result of these claims, were they to be established, would be to reformulate Jamaica’s history, on an Islamic foundation; thus the question of “reversion” to the Islamic roots of Jamaican culture would be the natural further action -- if necessary backed up by jihad to throw off the “crusader yoke” imposed on Jamaicans by the colonialists, the churchmen and their successors.<sup>6</sup>

These are indeed momentous claims and implications, so it is natural to ask: what is the evidence that warrants discarding the consensus of generations of historical scholarship in Jamaica?

## 2. Key Evidence and Arguments

The key evidence proposed by Dr Afroz is excerpted below. The excerpts also give the flavour of the argumentation used:

**(1) Moorish roots:** 'Moor' is applied to the community or nationality formed by the mixed blood of Arabs residing in Northern Africa, Spanish, Berbers (the North African natives) and blacks who were followers of Islam . . . The origin of Moors, no matter where they come from . . . never extends beyond the boundaries of Africa. Hence, a Moor being an African is a Negro or a black person. Furthermore, Moors and Islam are two inseparable terms; hence Moorish civilization, whether commendatory or derogatory, also designates Islamic or *Muslim* civilization. [1999]

**(2) Maroons as Muslims:** Oral testimonies seem to suggest that the Spanish Maroon leaders and the subsequent African Maroon leaders had founded their communities to establish the *deen* of Allah or Islam to guide them in this life or *dunya* for the hereafter (*aakhirah*). The terms *deen* and *dunya* are Qur'anic words, which form an integral part of the vocabulary of some of the living elderly Maroons in Mooretown, Portland. However, the Maroons are not aware of the significance of these terms in Islam nor of their origins but consider them as just a part of their vocabulary referring to the religion that one should follow in this world for guidance for the hereafter. Interestingly, many Qur'anic terms such as *deen* and *dunya* have become part of the

vernacular in non-Arab *Muslim* countries, and in most cases the populace is often not aware that they are Arabic words having Islamic significance<sup>7</sup>. [1999]

**(3) Islamic Greetings:** Oral tradition suggests that the historical Maroons of Moore Town adopted Islamic *aadaab* (etiquette) of greeting and meeting. Moore Town is built on land granted by the British to Granny Nanny in 1740. The Islamic greeting *assalaamu alaikum*, meaning 'peace be upon you', still continues as the official Council greeting among the 26 Council members in Moore Town. The present Maroon Councillors are unaware of the significance of the greeting in Islam and consider it as a traditional greeting adopted by the historical Maroons such as Granny Nanny herself and therefore to be adhered to with respect. The existence of such a tradition leaves no room for further argument on the authenticity of the Islamic heritage of the Maroons of Moore Town. [1999.]

**(4) Nanny:** Although popularly called Granny Nanny, her real name according to oral tradition as reported by Colonel C. S. Harris was Sarah. Sarah is a Qur'anic term<sup>8</sup> meaning 'happiness'. Like many *Muslim* women . . . Granny Nanny or Sarah was a courageous and skilful warrior . . . Out of . . . disastrous British defeats arose myths that Nanny was a witch practising witchcraft. Lack of interest and adequate knowledge in Islam has only perpetuated the continuation of such abominable myths . . . one who strives union with the Divine, whether male or female and renounces this world and its attractions and becomes purged of self and its desires is blessed with *karamat* or favours from Allah. Such favours in ordinary terms are described as miraculous powers . . . the devotion and dependence of Granny Nanny on Allah in the struggle against plantocracy, and the establishment of Divine Guidance, were answered by favours or miracles. Historians regard the miracles attributed to Nanny as Ashanti-inspired system of belief obeah or obi. . . Contemporaries have failed to understand that miracles and not obeah were wrought on her behalf. [1999]

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Afroz in excerpt 11 below, on jihad as the *sixth pillar* of Islamic faith.

<sup>7</sup> Does this not un dermine the force of the linguistic survivals argument? Similarly, why should an Islamic community be associated in Jamaican culture with jerk pork, from Spanish times – as Bev Carey notes.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah is a Bible name, and would not be unexpected in a British colonial context. Cf. Warner-Lewis, 2002.

(5) **Preface to Maroon Treaties:** Repeated attacks by the British troops on [Maroon] communities led to defensive responses or jihad . . . compelling the colonial authorities in Jamaica to sue for peace and conclude treaties first with the Leeward Maroons led by Cudjoe and subsequently with the Windward Maroons headed by Quao. The Leeward treaty formally concluded on 1 March 1738/1739 . . . begins 'In the name of God, Amen' which in Qur'anic term is Bismillah, i.e. 'In the Name of Allah'. Historians have failed to study such a beginning from an Islamic perspective . . . All actions of a *Muslim* should begin with Bismillah to ensure good and meritorious conduct. This pious beginning undoubtedly speaks of the Islamic faith of Cudjoe and the other leeward Maroon leaders who must have insisted upon its inclusion before signing the agreement.<sup>9</sup> Such an introduction to a treaty or contract was never the precedent in Christendom Europe. [1999]

(6) **Source populations for slaves:** As early as the tenth and eleventh centuries, i.e. long before the commencement of the Atlantic trade, Islam had made a significant impact in West and Central Africa . . . Among the British West Indies islands, Jamaica had 56.8% of her arrivals from Muslim areas. A large proportion of the deported Muslims came from the intellectual elite. [2001]

(7) **Autobiographical accounts and other reports:** The presence of Islam among the African slaves in Jamaica is revealed through the autobiographical pieces written in Arabic by the Muslim slaves and accounts left by His Majesty's officials, plantation historians and British travellers. These slaves were generally literate in Arabic and many of them could write the Arabic alphabet and passages from the Holy Qur'an with great beauty and exactness . . . In Africa, which is a continent of oral tradition where no writing system was available [sic<sup>10</sup>], only the Muslims were literate.<sup>11</sup> [2001.]

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Warner-Lewis, 2002. Not only did Cudjoe sign the treaty with an X, but also there are in fact British legal documents that sometimes begin with such a salutation, e.g. wills; a relevant precedent given the likely background of Mr Guthrie et al.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, sub-Saharan Africa is intended. For, Egypt for instance is in Africa; and is looked to by many Africans as the mother country from which other African nations derive. Other native African Civilisations, also had their own ancient writing systems.

<sup>11</sup> NB: Several cases are cited, from the early nineteenth Century; all male, and comprise Mandinkas, persons from the neighbourhood of Timbuktu, domestic slaves and at least one "free Negro" person. Through correspondence facilitated by Robert

(8) **George Liele et al:** The *Mu'minun* in Jamaica got a further boost to practise Islam in groups with the coming of American black Baptists after American independence . . . These African American religious leaders, it would appear, emphasized rituals and devotional practices which are common in Islam such as the recitation of the Qur'an, incantation (*dhikr*), music to attain spiritual fulfillment (*sama*), meditation, and retreats (*khalwa*). Evidently, some of the political and religious authorities of the island ignored the dominance of the Islamic faith in West and Central Africa . . . and considered the practices to be part of the African traditional religion such as *myalism*. Scholars relying on such contemporary documents have failed to study the Islamic faith of the African Americans. Sylviane A. Diouf, writing on the Muslim slaves in the Americas, asserts: 'If counted as a whole, on a religious basis rather than on an ethnic one the Muslims were probably more numerous in the Americas than any other group among the arriving Africans.' Hence, Islam dominated the religious beliefs of these black missionaries.<sup>12</sup> As unofficial missionaries for the slaves in non-established or nonconformist churches and in isolation of the estates, the African *Mu'minun* from America freely taught Islam. [2001]

(9) **The Baptist War:** The Righteous, working on the various estates, formed one Brotherhood to repel evil by goodness and faith in God . . . This found its expression in an island-wide rebellion in late December 1831 and January 1832. The rebellion, misunderstood as the Baptist War, is reported to be in response to the call for *jihad* made through a *wathiqah*, a 'pastoral letter', which 'exhorted all of the followers of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to be true and faithful if they wished to enter Paradise.' Apparently, this document written in Africa in 1789 was circulated in Jamaica and reached the hands of Muhammad Kaba, a Muslim slave of Spice Grove Estate who had been baptized and known by his Christian name Robert Tuffit or Robert Peart.<sup>13</sup> Of Mandingo parentage, Kaba came

Madden, evidence is indicated of a loose network in the Apprenticeship period.

<sup>12</sup> In the 1810's George Liele requested assistance from the British **Baptists**; in particular citing a need to challenge the syncretistic impact of Myal, whereby John the Baptist was often seen as superior to Jesus by those who heard the gospel in light of African water rituals. Cf. Chevannes, 1998, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Warner-Lewis. Afroz does not cite a specific call to jihad in the letter, but rather a general call to faithfulness; her interpretation

from Bouka, a short distance east of Timbuktu, and belonged to a well-to-do family learned in law and Islamic teachings. [2001]

**(10) Abolitionist sentiment:** The exoneration of the white Baptist Missionaries from all criminal charges of inciting their slave members to rebel for the purpose of effecting a change in their state and condition in open court by a jury is also indicative of the misnomer attached to this rebellion as a Baptist War . . . Guided by the Holy Qur'an, the religious belief of the *mujahids* (fighters) stood in sharp contrast to Christianity, the faith of the white missionaries and the oppressive slave masters. The *Torah* enjoins slavery, and Christianity is silent about it. Hence, neither Christianity nor the white Christian brethren had anything to offer to the slaves. However, Islam, according to the words of the first *muezzin* in Islam, Bilal Ibn Rabah, 'has left no chance except that it urged the emancipation of slaves, as a mandatory obligation or as a recommended action'. Slavery is reprobated by the Islamic principles of liberty, equality and universal brotherhood and discountenanced by the Islamic code. To the Muslim slaves who had been sprinkled with baptismal water, Christianity, the religion of the spiritually fossilized *bukra massa*, represented oppression. [2001 sic<sup>14</sup>]

**(11) Sam Sharpe (and others):** Slave leaders, like Mohammad Kaba, Sam Sharpe and George Lewis to name a few, were apparently all literate and well respected by their fellow slave brethren. Evidently, their literacy had its origin in Africa

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may therefore be quite suggestive, given her further remarks that jihad is the "sixth pillar" of Islam. [Cf. Excerpt 11 below.]

<sup>14</sup> But note the NT teachings, e.g. 1 Tim 1:8–10 that identifies kidnapping/ slave trading as contrary to the gospel [cf. OT refs. below], Philemon and the subtle balance and hints in passages such as Gal 3:26–29, 1 Cor 7:17–24, Col. 3:22–4:1 [cf. Eph 6:5–9] & 1 Tim 6:1–5. (Even the OT regulates rather than institutes; e.g. Exodus 21:2–11, 16, cf. Deut 24:7 [nb. Lev. 24:22] for a *death sentence for slave trading*.) Similarly, silence on the Trans-Saharan Islamic slave trade which predated the Atlantic one and yet lingers in some quarters, is astonishing. Not to mention, the need for addressing the complicity of Arab traders and Islamic chieftains in the Atlantic slave trade. [cf. Miller, 1993; Bailey, acc: 2003.] Indeed, at a church meeting in August 2002 on the theme of this paper, I was orally informed by a claimed descendant; of at least one reputed Islamic Arab plantation- and slave- owner in Jamaica. The papers' silence on the role of non-conformists in the Abolitionist movement in Britain and in the Caribbean, the context for much of the suspicion that targetted the Baptist Missionaries and the Moravian leaders [the specific context for suspicion of Kaba/Peart, who had become a Moravian] is equally telling. For, slavery – like war -- was and is a human tragedy, not a specifically Christian one.

and those who were literate were usually Muslims. The accounts and narratives left by many of these slaves, although few in number, reveal that they were also all well versed in Islam to lead prayers and to deliver *khutba* (sermon). Hence, they acted as spiritual guides. Since a *khutba* (sermon) in Islam deals with socio-political and economic injustices prevalent in the society, besides religious issues, these slave leaders most frequently spoke against the oppressive plantocracy . . . *jihad, or exertion in the way of Allah whether in the form of selfpurification or defensive war, regarded to be the sixth pillar of Islam, became the religious legitimacy of a revolt to attain freedom* . . . The slave system of plantation Jamaica in all its entirety was a symbol of evil and an instrument for safeguarding the privileges, ambitions, and greed of the planters and a priestly class at the expense of the human dignity of the slaves . . . the *wathiqah* of 1789 calling upon the *ummah* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to rise against slavery, authenticates such an influence. The rebels who were executed believed that freedom was rightly theirs. These slave leaders were known by their Christian names but their teachings were *The Jihad of 1831–1832* not the words of the Gospel. [2001, emphasis added]

**(12) The Decline of Pre-emancipation Islam:** With the death of the original African Muslim slaves, Islam was no longer practiced in Jamaica until the advent of the Indian indentured labourers . . . . Something very profound . . . produce[d] a society of helpless dependents subserviently accepting the Christian faith to appease the European Masters . . . The old values, the sanctions, the standards, the Islamic principles could no longer provide him adequate guides for conduct . . . He could look to none but his master, upon whom the system had committed his entire being . . . the observance of the five pillars of Islam was not possible . . . In the absence of group prayers, under the brutal slavery system there was no opportunity to enliven Islam. Islam ceased to be a community religion<sup>15</sup> . . . . Even Islamic dietary principles

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<sup>15</sup> This directly contradicts the points made regarding Liele, Sharpe et al. For, the native Baptist church and its leaders were presented in excerpts 8 and 11 as precisely an Islamic/crypto-Muslim community and leadership that would have been able to emerge as an institutional framework for the claimed hundreds of thousands of open or hidden Muslims among the slave population of approximately three hundred thousands. Similarly, why did Myal emerge as a force to be reckoned with even during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century when the system was at its worst; and why did the Baptists – openly accused of fomenting sedition -- grow explosively in the

could not be observed. Pork, which is restricted in Islam, seemed to have been a common protein for the slaves. The virtues of family life and marriage were substituted with adultery . . . neither the European Christian plantation masters nor the Christian churches abstained from committing such a grave sin. The Islamic principles governing family life disappeared with the disintegration of the families. Under such circumstances, there was no succeeding Black Muslims generation to accept the practice of the Islamic faith. What remains of the Muslim African slaves until today, are some of their graves in St. James, typifying the characteristics of Muslims burials.

### 3. Assessing the Historical Evidence & Arguments

It is evident that Dr Afroz has correctly highlighted definite evidence of Islamic presence among the slave populations in Pre-Emancipation Jamaica. However, it is also necessary to assess whether the evidence warrants the further claims that the Maroons constituted an *ummah*, and that the slave population contained hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Crypto-Muslims.

Of these wider claims, it is at once evident that there are substantial problems with the links between the evidence presented and the conclusions inferred, as well as some problems with some aspects of the evidence cited (and even more with what has NOT been cited but would be easily accessible to a Historian working in the History Department of UWI Mona Campus).

These concerns may be highlighted as a set of key unanswered questions:

- The Oxford English Dictionary describes Moors as being of a mixed Arab and Berber stock, the latter being a *Caucasian* people native to North Africa. Further to this, the infusion of Negro stock reflects the trans-Sahara slave trade. Why then is there an equation: “a Moor being an African is a Negro or a black person.”?
- Dr Afroz notes that: “Pork, which is restricted in Islam, seemed to have been a common protein for the slaves.” But, if the Spanish slaves brought to Jamaica were predominantly Muslim, so that the core of the original Maroon communities – identified as an autonomous *ummah* -- was

Islamic, why then has the Windward Maroon culture been traditionally and closely identified with Jerked Pork, from Spanish and early English settlement times?

- If “many Qur'anic terms . . . have become part of the vernacular in non-Arab *Muslim* countries, and in most cases the populace is often not aware that they are Arabic words having Islamic significance” then what is the evidentiary value of such linguistic survivals, beyond showing some contact with Arab culture?
- Similarly, if West and Central African peoples becoming Islamised and thus part of *dar al Islam* includes that “in some cases the chiefs remained pagans but employed Muslims as officials, traders and advisors” or keeping a “cultural orientation which synthesised Islamic rituals and festivals with pagan customs and ceremonies” [1995] then in which sense could the Maroon communities and plantation slaves in Jamaica be meaningfully distinguished as Muslim rather than Animist?
- If the black Baptist missionaries were actually Muslim teachers and were able to teach and practice Islam in their non-conformist chapels in the years leading up to Emancipation, why is it that a Muslim presence on the order of 3/5 or more of the slave population would vanish by the time of Emancipation? Especially, as both non-conformist Christian Faith and traditional religions thrived under the same circumstances, despite suspicion and persecution?
- The set of identified Muslim slaves cited from their own writings or in the accounts of others follows a clear pattern: male, educated Mandinkas; often serving as domestic slaves. What basis is there for projecting such a pattern across the range of tribes and regions<sup>16</sup>, and to the far more common field hands? What of the consistent reports that the vast majority of the slaves were adherents of Myal and/or Obeah?
- Similarly, why is it more credible that Nanny/Sarah was a Sufi saint rather than (as the contemporaries & subsequent traditions describe) an Obeah adept, i.e. a practitioner of traditional African religion?
- Further, from the 1810's, the British Baptists sent out men such as Burchell, Knibb and Phillip to further the Baptist work in Jamaica. If

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generation leading up to Emancipation, and in the post-Emancipation era?

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Warner-Lewis, 2002.

George Liele was in fact more Islamic than Christian in his beliefs and teachings, why did he appeal to the British Baptists for assistance with the Jamaica work?

- Why did these men speak of facing a major theological challenge of syncretism with Myal and Obeah rather than Islam?
- If baptisms were largely by force and under the control of the Anglican Colonial Church Union, why did the Baptists and other dissenters become the dominant Christian churches of the black population?
- As Professor Warner-Lewis has pointed out, if Sharpe et al were Islamic leaders, why did they not use the occasion of their trials and executions to bear testimony to their true faith?

Thus, it is fair comment to conclude that although Islamic influence and presence are highlighted in the papers surveyed, the overall thesis that “Islam was the faith of the Black African slaves brought to Jamaica and to the other West Indian Islands from West and Central Africa” [1995] has not been demonstrated. Further to this, the force of several of the above questions is such as to make the thesis at least improbable.

#### 4. Spiritual Geostrategic Implications

While the academic case for the Afroz thesis has yet to be made, and may well never be made, that does not prevent this claim from becoming a force to be reckoned with in the Caribbean and beyond. For, often it is not the truth or probability of an idea that gives it great force in the hearts and minds of people, but whether it appeals to their felt needs in a way that alternatives do not.

In particular, the thesis is an extension of a similar claim that Africa once constituted an historic *ummah*,<sup>17</sup> which it is the duty of Muslims to restore. Thus, given the “sixth pillar” of Islam, we must reckon with the potential for religious confrontation and even violent conflict that may well flow from such a claim in the hands of men of the ilk of a bin Laden, or even our home-grown Abu Bakr of Trinidad, who attempted an Islamic coup in 1990.

Accordingly, we are not just facing an academic issue or an Apologetics question, but potentially a major challenge to the church’s mandate in the Caribbean.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Nehls et al. 1996: <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Nehls/tt1/tt1.html#p21>

Furthermore, the significance of the thesis reflects the Caribbean’s significance as one of the earliest success stories of modern Missionary movement. Here, it is especially relevant that by the early 1840’s Jamaicans and other Caribbean Christians were undertaking highly successful church-planting missions in West and Central Africa. This is underscored by our status as Christians untainted by the West’s lingering stench of colonial ambition and exploitation.

For, first, that successful missionary initiative helped to blunt the advance of Islam in West and Central Africa and established several of the most vibrant churches in the world; churches that now stand foursquare in the path of the declared Islamic goal of making Africa the world’s first Islamic continent. Indeed, these churches are a leading part of a growing global reformation that in many Islamic eyes threatens to swamp Islam in a Christian sea.

Secondly, since Caribbean blacks have a history of global leadership, and in particular of rising to leadership in North America and Britain, we are also a potential source of *Dawah* leadership to carry the Islamic message to North America and Europe; as well as into resistant pockets of Africa.

Thus, there is a further incentive to plant Islam in the Caribbean. And, in that pursuit, the Afroz thesis offers a ready way to appeal to the cultural roots of the region, lending the Islamic message and its spokesmen great credibility in the eyes of many in our region who resent the history of colonialism and the religion of the oppressors: Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

#### 5. Towards a Strategic Response by the Church

It has been observed that one of the key differences between Islam and Christianity in many contexts is that Muslim leaders think culturally, structurally and strategically, whilst, by and large, Christian leaders do not.

If the Church in the Caribbean is to respond appropriately to the implications of the Afroz thesis, this will have to change.

A first step to such a response is to review our perspective on the mandate and mission of the church. For instance, Matt 28:18 – 20 speaks of a

<sup>18</sup> Thus is answered the question on the cover of the June 30, 2003 *Time* Magazine: “Should Christians Convert Muslims? A new flock of missionaries has launched a campaign to take the Gospel to Islamic countries. But will they inspire more backlash than belief?” For, Islam has already undertaken the project to convert Christians, here in the Caribbean and elsewhere across the globe.

mandate to disciple the nations under the Lordship of Christ, baptising and teaching them to obey him. From the perspective of the nations, this is a call to global reformation under the crucified, risen and glorified Christ. Such a reformation would help to fulfill the fullness theme highlighted in Ephesians<sup>19</sup>:

( . . . [Jesus] who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe [*panta* – all things].) It was he who gave some to be apostles . . . prophets . . . evangelists . . . pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ [“the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” 1:22 – 23] may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. [Eph. 4:9 – 13.]

For, in love, God sent his Son into the world, descending, serving, healing, dying for sins and rising triumphant over death and sin, so that he might fill all things. He therefore sent out his messengers, to call out and equip the people of God, so that we would be able to work out that fullness of Christ in all areas of life and community.

So, secondly, when a community hears and receives the gospel it then undergoes renewal and reformation of its ways of thought and life through discipleship. As a result, its individuals, families, institutions and communities are transformed and filled with the grace, glory, blessing and order of Christ: *shalom* – true peace.

More concretely, let us thirdly consider the strategy behind Paul’s approach to the Athenians.

The Apostle had come to Athens five hundred years after its glory days — the days of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Pericles, to take a brief respite from his stressful Macedonian adventures. However, he found the all-pervasive idolatry too disturbing to keep silent. [Acts 17:16.]

So as a lion, with terrible resolve, turns and vexes those who have unwisely persisted in harrying him, Paul — as Socrates had been wont to do — went to the Agora (the marketplace), and started to dialogue with passersby. Soon, a group of pagan Philosophers paused, argued with him, conferred among themselves, and, parodying the fate of Socrates, took

the Apostle to a meeting of the Areopagus [Mars Hill] Council.

There, the Athenian leaders got more than they bargained for. For, Paul made straight for the rotten intellectual foundation of Pagan thought and culture. Pointing to its beautiful temples and monuments, he picked the altar that exposed the critical instability: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.

That is, on the most important possible point of knowledge, the Athenians — the fountainhead and proud guardians of the Western intellectual, artistic and democratic traditions — were forced to admit their ignorance, in a public monument!

Paul then pointedly stated the decisive prophetic issue: “Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”

The substance of Paul’s prophetic proclamation to the Athenians (and thus to Western Culture and the wider world) is therefore pregnant with beneficial implications for community order, national life, cultural transformation, and blessing leading to truly sustainable development: in the Caribbean, in the 10/40 Window dominated by Islam, and globally.

For, the Creator-Redeemer God who made all nations from one man does not live in temples we can make with our hands, nor does he depend on us to fulfill his needs. And so, “In the past, God overlooked [our] ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day in which he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

So, the time for ignorant pursuit of false spiritual loyalties and ill-informed community agendas is over; God has intervened globally, decisively and publicly by Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection: “he has made this same Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ.” [Acts 2:36, cf. 26:24 - 26.]

Thus, God commands that we repent, undergoing a comprehensive change of mind and heart driven by recognition of the truth and godly sorrow over sin; leading to a transformed way of life [1 Cor. 6:9 – 11]. In particular, we are to receive as Lord and Saviour him who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” and walk in those good works that God has laid out in advance for us to do. [John 14:6, Acts 4:12 & Eph. 2:8 - 10.]

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mullings, 2003a and b.



This command to repent is universal – i.e. it does not exempt those who claim to belong to any of the three Abrahamic Faiths [cf. James 2:14 – 26 on “dead” or “devilish” empty faith] --but it also does not demand blind obedience. For, God offers public proof to us by raising Jesus from the dead. In evidence of this, we have over five hundred eyewitnesses, most of whom were still alive when the record was made, and the continued manifestation of resurrection power — in manifold ways — in the church to this day. [1 Cor. 15:1- 8, Eph. 1:17 – 23.]

Thus, we fourthly see that:

- Communities and their citizens are servants of God, accountable before their Creator for truth, right, justice and the proper stewardship of resources in their care, starting with their land. This opens the door for prophetic commentary on public morality, policy and issues linked to development and sustainability. [Cf. Rom. 1:18 – 32 & 13:1 – 10; Lev. 19:15 – 18..]
- Moreover, since we are created from one ancestor, there can be no justification for religiously-, or nationally-, or racially-, or class-, or otherwise- motivated oppression, aggression, exploitation or prejudice.<sup>20</sup>
- Community therefore extends to the fraternity of all peoples, and so God refuses to answer the foolish question: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”
- In particular, this opens the door to reconciliation and restoration of right relationships between the descendants of the slaves and those of the slave masters and traders; and especially among Christians, Jews and Muslims, all of whom have been implicated in and/or victimised by that horror. [Cf. Note on reference to Bailey.]
- The Gospel therefore challenges all men and communities to reckon with the crucified, dead and risen Lamb of God, Jesus the Christ, the Prince of Peace; to whom God has committed the power to judge the living and the dead at the Last Day.

<sup>20</sup> Including military jihads, reduction of the conquered to dhimmitude or similar subject status, military crusades and the kidnapping and calculated enslavement or oppression of other peoples. [Cf. <http://www.dhimmi.org/> (on jihad and dhimmitude) and 1 Tim. 1:8– 10 (on **slave traders** -- “menstealers” in the KJV: an all too apt description of “Old Pirates, yes they rob I . . . sold I to the merchant ships” – being specifically contrary to the gospel. This is a biblical text that should be prominently posted in Jamaica’s new Emancipation Park!). ]

Thus, finally, we know that God is sending the church, as his spokesmen into the Caribbean and beyond; with the call to repentance, renewal and reformation, through Christ. So, like Paul, we should:

- (1) Renew our understanding of the gospel and its cultural transformation implications, so we can go to the nations in the Caribbean and beyond with the liberating Good News of the Incarnated, crucified, risen and glorified Christ, our Lord, Saviour and Judge.
- (2) Prophetically confront the intellectual, religious, political and cultural strongholds that create deceptive arguments and systems of thought and life that block people from coming to know and be liberated from sin and associated bondages by God the Saviour. [Cf. 2 Cor 10:4 – 5, Jn 3:14 – 21.] Thus, on the one hand, we will especially have to confront the West’s rising tide of secularism, apostasy and neo-paganism. On the other – especially given the challenge of the Afroz thesis -- we must also correct that aspect of Islam that stands in opposition to the full truth about the Father who loves us and has sent his Son to rescue all peoples from sin and its bondages to fear, oppression and destruction.
- (3) Call forth, nurture, send out and support the church as the community-transforming people of God, who across time will bring liberation, reformation, reconciliation, blessing and transformation to the nations across the whole earth.

This renewed missionary focus opens the door “so that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles [*ethne*] through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit.” [Gal 3:14] For, since we are utterly unable to consistently obey in our own strength the righteous standards that we may well admire, it is by that Spirit who those who trust in Christ receive, that we are empowered to gush forth in streams of living water: love, truth, purity and power. [Jn 7:37 – 39, cf. Rom 7:14 – 8:17.]

So also, God is now clearly sending us as the Caribbean Church with the gospel of reconciliation and blessing to the nations of the Abrahamic Faiths across the world. Thus, God continues to call out, create, build and equip his body, the church “the fulness of him who fills everything in every way,” as his means of blessing for our world.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The challenge posed by the Afroz thesis opens the door to renewing our vision of the Caribbean peoples as a strategic global Mission Force of God, one unencumbered by the lingering stench of colonial overlordship. So, let us now seize this major opportunity, and use it to take the gospel of hope and blessing through the Seed of Abraham to the peoples of the Abrahamic Faiths, not only across the 10/40 Window, but also across the whole world.

Specific steps should include:

- ✓ Reflection on, and renewal of, our calling to global Mission as the Caribbean Church and peoples; including the call to global prophetic intellectual and cultural leadership under the fulness of Christ..
- ✓ Refocussing the life, activities and ministries of the church in the region under that mandate to be and bear witness to Christ across the world, so that we will win, nurture, equip, send and support disciples who are able to carry the Gospel of blessing into all aspects of the community, in and beyond the Caribbean.
- ✓ Reflecting on, and lovingly but firmly responding to the intellectual and cultural challenges posed by our history of enslavement by “Christisms” [cf. 1 Tim 1:8 – 10, 1 Cor 7:17 – 24, Philemon vv. 8 – 21, etc.], secularism, apostasy, neo-paganism and Islam. (This specifically includes the claims made under the Afroz thesis.)
- ✓ Training members of our churches about such challenges, so that they will be prepared to answer effectively but respectfully, concerning the reason for the hope we have in Christ. [Cf. 1 Peter 3:15.]
- ✓ As appropriate, exposing and refuting such false arguments and theses in public fora, using: Conferences, Journals, the press, the electronic media, books, web sites and other appropriate media.
- ✓ Preparing disciples to go out as missionaries from the Caribbean, to the nations in the 10/40 window as well as those of the wider world; especially as we do not carry with us the lingering stench of the West’s (as yet unfinished) history of colonial oppression.
- ✓ Sending out and supporting such disciples in the work of cross-cultural church planting, as we work to bear witness to the Gospel of the kingdom of God in all nations in our generation.

- ✓ Thus, further developing and supporting regional missions training institutions and missions agencies towards facilitation the work of the global proclamation of the gospel; with a priority on those areas of the world that are closed to the West due to its colonial history<sup>21</sup>.

It is therefore appropriate to prayerfully issue a challenge:

WHY NOT *NOW*? WHY NOT *HERE*? WHY NOT *US*?

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<sup>22</sup> Discusses the evolution of slavery in the context of the alien male as a threat to the power centres of a culture. P. 132 discusses interactions between the Trans-Atlantic and the Trans-Saharan slave trades: females largely went North, males largely went West, in accord with the different foci of lineage and chattel slavery. On the cessation of the Atlantic Slave Trade, there was reportedly a reversion to the practice of killing male captives, as they were no longer marketable. Cf. Bailey [http://answering-islam.org/Bailey/real\\_slave\\_master.html](http://answering-islam.org/Bailey/real_slave_master.html).

*neopagan and Islamic challenges to the Caribbean. He is a member of the Team that has helped to initiate the Conference. His reference web site is: <http://www.angelfire.com/pro/kairosfocus/>*

#### ATTACHED/AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS:

The Afroz articles and/or the Warner-Lewis Article may be obtained through EBSCO Host, the UWI Mona Campus Main Library, the Gleaner Company or at the referenced web sites. The JACT Articles may be accessed through their authors.

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#### LECTURE ATTACHMENT:

The Warner-Lewis Response to the Afroz Thesis  
S. Gleaner, Oct 20, 2002 (for academic purposes, under *fair use*)

#### Jamaica's Muslim past: disconcerting theories

##### Maureen Warner-Lewis, Contributor

Some weeks ago, Gordon Mullings issued a challenge to historians to comment publicly on the claims put forward by Dr. Sultana Afroz, a member of the Department of History at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies, regarding the high number of Muslim slaves who came to Jamaica and the Muslim foundations of the island's Maroon communities. Although not a historian by training, I have researched both African and Caribbean history enough to put forward my views with some degree of confidence.

There is no doubt that there were Muslims among the enslaved brought to the Caribbean. My oral interviews in the 1960s with Trinidadian descendants of such persons, bore testimony to this, findings which were published in the **African Studies Association of the West Indies** Bulletins 5 and 6 (1972, 1973), later republished in my **Guinea's Other Suns'** (1991). These foreparents had come from the Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, and Mandingo ethnic groups of West Africa. Of these groups, the Mandingo of the Senegambia region were most associated with Islam. The religious ideas of these Muslims as well as the writing skills in Arabic which several of them possessed had in fact caught the attention of European planters, among them Jamaican-based Bryan Edwards (1819).

In fact, their numeracy and writing skills allowed them to secure jobs as storekeepers and tally clerks on estates. But many of the Africans who had come into contact with Islam before migrating were not literate in Arabic, and it is the literacy of those who belonged to families of established Muslim priests and scholars which most readily attracted the attention of European commentators.

#### ATTENDED MUSLIM SCHOOLS

Having attended Muslim schools, they were able to recite short or long sections of the Koran, as well as write Arabic words and letters. Indeed, Jonas Mohammed Bath of Port of Spain, Trinidad, wrote

several petitions in English and Arabic during the 1830s on behalf of other Muslims who wished to be repatriated to their native lands.

In a 1974 article, Carl Campbell set out the life story of Mohammedu Sisei of the Gambia, who had arrived in Trinidad as a demobilised West India Regiment soldier in 1816 and who, through the agency of the Royal Geographical Society of England did return to the Gambia.

In an almost similar vein, Magistrate R. R. Madden of Jamaica alerted anti-slavery and Africa colonisation interests in London to the Arabic autobiography (1830s) of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, otherwise called Edward Donlan in Jamaica.

Moravian and Baptist missionaries collected other autobiographies; and European and American missionaries commented on the arguments they conducted with Muslims regarding the relative positions of Jesus, Abraham and other sacred figures shared by the Christian and Islamic orders of divinity. There is therefore, in the travelogues and histories of the 18th 19th centuries, mention of Muslim Africans, but the comment is consistently made that the presence of such persons was small.

Of course, Europeans did not understand much about the lives of the slaves. So other evidence must be adduced to bring to light fuller understandings of the Caribbean past. An important strand of evidence lies in the data on sources and destinations of the Caribbean's enslaved populations.

Orlando Patterson's ethnic ratios of slave imports into Jamaica given in **The Sociology of Slavery** (1967) have been consistent with the findings of later analysts such as Curtin, Higman, Eltis and others. Between 1655 and 1700 after the British seized the island, the main slave sources were the Gold Coast and the Senegambian Windward Coast comprised of today's Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast.

In the first half of the 18th century (1700-1750), the Windward Coast and Angola at the south-eastern extreme of the slaving zone parted with 27 per cent, and 33 per cent came from the Slave Coast (today's Togo and the Republic of Benin, previously called Dahomey), while the neighbouring Gold Coast yielded 25 per cent. By the second half of the 18th century, there was a noticeable shift toward the Niger and Cross deltas of today's Nigeria and Cameroon, but between 1790 and 1807 when the traffic was outlawed there was a rapid increase in slaves exported by the British from the Congo and Angola.

By contrast, Afroz in her 1995 article on "The **Unsung Slaves: Islam in Plantation Jamaica**" identifies Jamaican slaves as being Mandinka, Fula, Susu, Ashanti and Hausa, without indicating their relative strengths vis-a-vis other significant ethnicities such as Igbo-Ibibio from the Niger and Cross River deltas, Ewe-Fon from Togo and

Dahomey, and people from Congo and Angola. Four of her five named categories came from cultures which had been either minimally, partially, or heavily converted to Islam between the 8th to the 19th centuries.

In a similar non-rigorous manner, by her 1999 article "From Moors to Marronage: the Islamic Heritage of the Maroons", Afroz moves from indicating that Muslims (called Moors) in Spain were among the earliest Spanish settlers in the Americas to speaking of Jamaica's Maroon settlements as being 'Muslim'.

Thereafter, her article continues to make extravagant claims for Muslim influence among them: the fact that windward and leeward Maroon links are couched in "brother" and "sister" terms; that Maroon communities are governed by councils; that Nanny's other name, reputedly Sarah, is Muslim; that since Salaam aleikum (peace be with you) has been used by the Moore Town Maroons, and since this term is confined to greetings among Muslims rather than by Muslims to non-Muslims, then this serves as proof that Muslim culture dominated Moore Town and that Islam was its "unifying force".

Regarding the salutation, studies on residual and dying languages show that grammatical forms in their original languages become abridged when languages are used by isolated minority groups who are under pressure to acquire the dominant languages of an exile environment; and the infrequency of usage also leads to a non-observance of the social conventions which govern the use of particular phrases or words, such as the appropriate differentiation between pronouns which are emphatic versus non-emphatic, familiar versus respectful.

Since speakers of a language most often speak it among themselves, Arabic speakers would most commonly use Salaam aleikum, rather than 'Assalamo-Ala-Manittaba'al Huda' which Afroz indicates is the proper greeting from a Muslim to a non-Muslim.

Furthermore, the shorter, less complicated phrase would be the one most likely to be remembered in a situation of exile, where an immigrant language is in disadvantageous competition with other languages.

As for the other claims, these are similarly untenable as proof of intense Muslim influence. African cultures in general use certain basic kinship terms, such as "father", "mother", "brother", "sister", "uncle", "aunt", "husband", "wife", to signal relationships among individuals for which European languages add "in-law", "adopted", "half-", or use words such as "cousin" or "friend"

In like fashion, all over Africa alliances between communities, villages, and ethnic groupings are rationalised in terms of descent from common ancestors, thus making the groups "brothers" and "sisters".

Another distortion is Afroz's, assertion that Akan day-names such as Kojo, Kwao and Kofi are Arabic. These names are so embedded in the Akan tradition of the Fanti (Coromanti) and Ashanti that in their ancient and cryptic drum poetry and religious verse, one of the aspects of God, Nyankopong or the Great Ananse, also bears Kwaku, the birthday-name for those born on Wednesday. And Mother Earth is named Asase Yaa, the final name being given to females born on Friday.

Given the fact that Islam did not become a serious political force in the royal court of Ashanti until the second half of the 1700s, it is surprising that names so deeply embedded in the Akan and Ga cultures to the east and west of the Volta River and extending from the savannah lands bordering the Sahel in the north and southward to the Gulf of Guinea coast could be Arabic in their source.

### **MUSLIM INFLUENCE**

This is because Ashanti was one of several West African kingdoms where Muslim influence was confined to the royal court, rather than an aspect of mass popular culture and worldview.

Islam had penetrated sub-Saharan Africa from North Africa in the eighth century. Its first host was the ancient kingdom of Ghana in the vicinity of present-day Mali. It was introduced by Berber traders who opened up the trans-Saharan gold trade from Ghana to the Mediterranean.

Over the next 11 centuries, the international contacts stimulated by the trade in gold, slaves, salt, and kola, and the need of sub-Saharan rulers to communicate with the Arab world of traders, lawyers, and scholars led African kings to recruit Arabic speaking scribes-cum-merchants as diplomats and interpreters at their courts.

This process took place at different times at varying locations from west to east across the savannah belt of West Africa, and in some cases this collaboration led to the conversion to Islam of court elites.

By cultural osmosis, and sometimes by upsurges of Islamic religious militancy, the village-level leadership, and later commoners, eventually became converted from various forms of African animistic religion and ancestor veneration to the monotheism and international religious culture of Islam. In contrast to Ashanti and Yoruba, by the 14th century Islam had already extensively penetrated into the urban culture of the Senegambian peoples.

The contention that the final segment of Juan de Bolas' name was a Yoruba name originating from Arabic is another glib assertion. In the first place, the Yoruba did not figure in the slave trade till the late 17th century whereas de Bolas or Lubolo or Libolo lived in Jamaica in the mid-17th.

Furthermore, "Bola is easily decoded as comprising two Yoruba segments of meaning. Then the

assignation of Sarah as Arabic might be more helpfully denoted as Semitic, that is, common to the languages of the Red Sea, such as Hebrew and Arabic. This applies to names like Abraham/Ibrahim, Solomon/Suleiman, Miriam/Miramu, and so on. "Sarah" having entered into English language and culture through Biblical influence, it would be preposterous to claim that every British girl who bore the name Sarah or Sally was Jewish, just as the slaves who carried such names cannot be identified as either Muslim or Jewish on that ground.

Another custom deeply embedded in African culture was prostration on the ground by the subordinate in deference to a superior. It was already the practice in Central Africa when the Portuguese arrived in the Congo at the end of the 15th century, and the northeastern segment of the vast Congo Basin only felt the effects of Islam approaching from East Africa in the 19th century.

Prostration in its full form, in which the subject lies full-length on the ground face downward in the presence of the superior in social status or age, or in truncated forms which involve touching the hands to the earth, is widely practised among several peoples of West Africa and predates Islamic intervention. Maroon Kojo's act of prostration during the signing of the Treaty with the British in 1739 cannot therefore be ascribed to Islamic influence in the light of the acts of respect and social distance which are indigenous to so many African cultures.

Another instance advanced by Afroz to assert the Islamic affiliation of Jamaican Maroons is the initial phrase of the Treaty drawn up between the British authorities and the Leeward Maroons led by Kojo (Cudjoe). The Treaty begins with the words "In the name of God, Amen," the equivalent to Arabic Bismillah "In the Name of Allah". Afroz asserts that "such an introduction to a treaty or contract was never the precedent in Christendom Europe."

On the other hand, the phrase in the Treaty occurs at the beginning of some British wills, and possibly was a reflection of the testator's religious faith. To cite two instances I know of, it occurs at the start of a will made by Sarah Hart in St. Elizabeth in 1822 and registered in 1834, and in a Scottish will registered in 1818, which begins: "Follows the Probate of the Defuncts last will and testament: In the name of God Amen. I Robert Douglass of Mains..." Indeed, it is clear that Kojo did not himself draw up the wording of the Treaty; the British would hardly have allowed him that privilege. He was a formidable military tactician, but his signing the Treaty with an x indicates that the writing styles of legal documents was outside of his specialisation and that he wrote neither in Roman nor Arabic letters.

### **QUESTIONABLE DEVICE**

Yet another questionable device in Afroz's two articles is the application of the term jihad to label acts of war and rebellion on the part of slaves and Maroons in Jamaica, Suriname and, by association in

the same sentence, Haiti. Because two Suriname Maroon leaders bear names which she identifies as Arabic, her deduction is that their military actions constituted jihad.

Such an attribution cannot be made unless proof is adduced as to the motives for their actions. Similar over-reading affects her designation of the 1831-32 Jamaican slave rebellion as inspired by motives to effect an Islamic jihad.

No such evidence emerged in the several inquiries into the prolonged event and no Muslims were specifically singled out as pivotal to the action. Were Sam Sharpe and his principal lieutenants Muslim, then it is strange that they did not use the forum of their trials, their interviews with pastors, or their execution gibbets to proclaim their Islamic faith.

All the same, there might well have been either crypto- or active Muslim believers among the hundreds of slaves who participated in the uprising. The sole piece of evidence that suggests a link in the mind of a contemporary slave was recorded by magistrate Madden regarding Muhammad Kaba of Spice Grove estate in Manchester who in Jamaica also carried the names Robert Peart and Robert Tuffit.

Given the repression by government, militia, and anti-missionary civilian elements, that followed the widespread devastation of the uprising, Kaba's wife destroyed a letter in Arabic which had been hand-delivered to Kaba in 1831 from a Muslim friend in Kingston. It was believed to have been written in Africa by a Muslim cleric and it "exhorted all the followers of Mahomet to be true and faithful, if they wished to go to Heaven."

What else it said is not recorded. But Kaba's wife thought it might be incriminating at a time when in several parishes local militia and army personnel were carrying out house-to-house searches and were posted outside churches, while slaves were being put to death on the slightest suspicion of disloyalty.

Indeed, Brother Pfeiffer, a German Moravian pastor, had been arrested in St. Elizabeth on January 7, taken on the 9th to Mandeville in Manchester and tried, and came within an inch of being executed, in addition to which Craton (1982) alludes to some events in Manchester on the night of January 11, 1832 which led to the army shooting six and executing two, so that there was reason for alarm by Kaba's wife, especially as Kaba had become a Moravian and so might have come under special scrutiny at this time.

If the letter to Kaba advanced the cause of jihad, it might have had the effect of triggering rebellion, in the way in which Muslim slaves rose against bondage in the city of Salvador in Bahia, Brazil, in January 1835.

In the Brazilian case, there was evidently a sufficiently large Muslim community of Yoruba and

Hausa slaves united by a supra-ethnic religion to have made this prospect feasible, despite the fact that these two ethnicities had been engaged in a religious-political war in Africa since the end of the 1800s and this was feeding the 19th century slave trade with many war captives.

But there has not so far emerged evidence of concentrations of Yoruba or Nago in Jamaica sizeable enough to have spread their influence and shaken the system, though there are known to have been pockets of Nago in the post-slavery period in Hanover (where *etu* is practised), at Abeokuta in Westmoreland, in St. Mary and St. Thomas, and of course, there may have been a settlement at Naggo Head in St. Catherine. But there does appear to have been loose interconnected groupings of Muslim slaves generally referred to as "Mandingo" who debated the authenticity of Christianity even as they joined various Christian religions.

This network takes vague shape in the writings of magistrate Madden, even though he clearly did not comprehend the complexity of the religious lives of individuals such as Peart/Kaba.

Kaba's religious questionings also gained the attention of the Moravian clerics John Lang and Henry Buchner, while the recent discovery of a notebook with pastoral advice on prayer, fasting, and marriage written by Kaba in Arabic sheds more light on his spiritual conflicts and preoccupations. The contents of that notebook were discussed by Yacine Daddi Addoun and Paul Lovejoy in a paper on 'The Arabic Manuscript of Muhammad Kaba Saghanughu of Jamaica, c. 1823' at the Caribbean Culture conference at Mona in January 2002.

It is very useful that the understanding of Caribbean history should have the benefit of analysts who know the Arabic language, religion, and culture. It allows the researcher so equipped to spot information which another would miss. As for example, when Afroz (1999) informs us that the Koranic terms *Din* and *Dunya* still form "an integral part of the vocabulary of some of the living elderly Maroons in Mooretown, Portland."

Unfortunately, the writer does not divulge precisely in what context or what sentences these terms were used, or whether the words were suggested to the speakers and responses thus elicited.

This lack of proper supporting evidence undermines the validity of her discovery. In general, then, it is to be lamented that Afroz's effort to throw new light on Caribbean history and culture is discredited by constant slippage from probability to bolder and bolder assertions, by misapplication of terminology, and disconcerting manipulation of evidence.

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