

Invisible Yet Invincible: The Muslim *Ummah* in Jamaica

SULTANA AFROZ

The Island so green and smiling, abounding in food and heavily wooded and the Blue Mountains rising to over 7,000 feet in shrouded peaks dominating the landscape was in supreme display of its majestic beauty.

Introduction

It was the romantic island of wood and water, Jamaica in the Caribbean, which was sighted by the Morisco pilot who steered the lead boat of Columbus from Spain to the West Indies in 1494.¹ The current invisibility of the Muslim *umma* (community) in Jamaica is overshadowed by the historic role played by the al-Andalus Muslim mariners in the discovery voyages of Columbus and the illustrious military feats of the historical Muslim Maroons who had brought the world's 'mightiest' Red Coats to sue for peace.² The splendid past of the Muslim *umma* serves as a source of spiritual inspiration to maintain its Islamic identity in the multicultural and religiously diverse society of Jamaica. The country's coat of arms, 'Out of Many, One People', embraces the *umma* under the broad spectrum of its historical diversity. Nonetheless, Christianity is acknowledged as the most important part of the national heritage within which various religious faiths exist. Although the Muslim community remains constitutionally unrecognized, the guarantee for freedom of religion and the democratic nature of the parliamentary form of government have allowed the continuity and growth in the number of adherents to Islam in Jamaica. The acceptance of Muslim membership in the Jamaica Interfaith Organization, which is patronized by the Governor General, has provided the Muslims with a sense of recognition and a wholesome basis for living together despite some popular prejudices.

Currently, numbering about 4000, the Muslims in Jamaica form 0.15% of the estimated total population of 2,590,400 persons. Jamaica has an annual population growth rate of 0.7% and the total fertility rate of 2.8 children per woman.³ The Muslims are predominantly of African descent. Approximately 50% of the Muslim population of Jamaica resides in the Kingston Metropolitan Region, where some 43.3% of Jamaica's population lives. Kingston is the capital and the biggest seaport of the island. It is also the financial and commercial centre of the country. The other important cities of Muslim concentration are Spanish Town in Saint Catherine Parish, the island's second oldest capital, and Montego Bay in Saint James, popularly known as the 'Tourist City' on the northern coast of the island.⁴ The parishes of St. Elizabeth, St. Mary and Westmoreland also have a good concentration of this tiny Muslim community. A few others are scattered throughout the country. Although invisible as a community, their presence in society is easily recognized by their mode of dressing and behavioural patterns. The Muslim community emphasizes the Islamic principles of

equality and brotherhood and conforms with values such as those of honesty, collective sharing of knowledge and observance of religious festivities, respect for elders, close family relations, maintenance of legitimacy and mutual assistance. The Islamic greeting *as-salaamu-alaikum* and the essential Qur'anic precepts have influenced the vernacular of the *ummah*, which is English, and the Arabic terms have become an integral part of their vocabulary.

The Advent of Islam in Jamaica

Islam made its first appearance in the home of the *Tainos*, Jamaica, with the undaunted Andalusian mariners who played the dominant role in navigating Columbus' discovery voyage through the rough waters of the Atlantic Ocean into the Caribbean Sea in 1494.⁵ These Moorish sailors, schooled in Atlantic navigation to discover and dominate the sea routes, received Royal Pardon from the Spanish Crown and continued to be an integral part of the discovery and conquest entourage long after Columbus. Indeed the Muslims, as discoverers and conquerors, arrived for settlement in Jamaica since the coming of Columbus.

Subsequent to the importation of the Moorish slaves to Jamaica in 1503, the practice of Islam became more dominant as the number of Muslims increased with rapidity. *Jihad* (struggle) against the indignity of slavery took the form of *hijra*, the flight from servitude, in order to establish a community based on Islam. From among these Moorish or free Negro communities, referred to as Spanish Maroon communities, came leaders such as Don Christoval Arnaldo de Ysassi, who was appointed the governor of Jamaica by the Spanish King in 1655, and Don Francisco de Leyba, the Spanish lieutenant general of Jamaica.⁶ Ysassi is a corruption of the Arabic word *ysassa*, meaning ruler, while Leyba in Arabic denotes lioness or intelligent. With the Spanish Maroons came the aqueducts, water wheels, windmills, and the introduction of sugar-cane in Jamaica and the West Indies.⁷

The Maroon societies of the Moors subsequent to the British occupation of Jamaica in 1655 became a source of refuge for the rebellious slaves from the plantations.⁸ Many of them came from Muslim nations of western and sub-Saharan regions of Africa.⁹ The 80-year *jihad* initiated by Spanish Maroon leaders such as Yuan de Bola and Yuan de Serras, in response to repeated attacks by the British 'Red Coats' on the Muslim community, ultimately compelled the authorities to conclude a peace treaty in 1739 with the Maroons recognizing their territories as separate entities beyond the jurisdiction of the British colonial government.¹⁰ The island-wide alliance of the Maroon communities of the Leeward and the Windward was united under the indisputable leadership of Cudjoe.¹¹ Cudjoe's power of endurance and his conspicuous worship of Allah are illustrated by his act of prostration on the occasion of the peace offer.¹² This behaviour, of utmost humility, in appreciation of the reward of victory from Allah speaks of the inherent Arabic meaning of Cudjoe or Kwadjoe, 'humbleness'. Cudjoe's sister, Grandy Nanny or Sarah, is regarded by the Maroons to be the most illustrious woman, who never lost a battle with the British. Sarah's deep devotion and dependence on Allah to establish human dignity were apparently answered by favours or *karamat*, which were misunderstood and regarded as *obeah* (witchcraft or sorcery).

The piety of the historical Maroon leaders is illustrated by their Arabic derived names, such as Ghani, Quao and Cuffee, which refer to the attributes of Allah. The deep profession of the faith also found expression through varied Islamic practices. Governance of the Maroons was based on consensual authority or *shura*. The pious

beginning of the treaty—‘In the Name of God, Amen’, which in Qur’anic term is *Bismillah*—was never the precedent in Christendom Europe. The adoption of the Islamic greeting, *as-salaamu-alaikum*, which still continues to be the official Council greeting at Moore Town, and the presence of Qur’anic Arabic terms in present day Maroon vocabulary such as *deen* and *dunya* indicate the pervasiveness of Islam among the historical Maroons.¹³ Nonetheless, Islam has been in oblivion for long in the Maroon societies, despite their freedom from the British colonial government. The death of the historical Maroons, the absence of Islamic teachings, and the complacency of the succeeding generations to preserve the faith of their forefathers in the face of consistent and persistent efforts of the state machinery and the Anglican church to penetrate into the Maroon communities are the attributable causes for the Maroons in Jamaica to have become oblivious to Islam.

The *mu’minun* from Africa

Parallel to the Maroon *ummah*, thousands of *mu’minun* of African descent belonging to the Islamic nations of Mandinka, Fula, Susu, Ashanti and Hausa worked as slaves on the plantations in Jamaica. Approximately 57% of the enslaved African arrivants came from Muslim areas. The presence of Islam among the slaves is revealed through 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 with great beauty and exactness the Arabic alphabet and passages from the Holy Qur’an. They also displayed a gentleness of disposition and demeanour, which is believed to have been ‘the result of early education and discipline’.¹⁴

Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, a Mandinka slave assigned to Magistrate Robert Madden, reveals himself through two autobiographical pieces written in Arabic, as the son of a learned family in Islamic Jurisprudence from the city of Timbuktu. He acquired advance Qur’anic learning initially in the city of Jenne and subsequently in Bouna, ‘a place of great celebrity for its learning and schools, in the countries of the Mohammedan Mandingoes’.¹⁵ So strong was Abu Bakr’s Islamic teaching that even after thirty years of bondage in Jamaica he still knew the Qur’an ‘almost by heart’. Like hundreds of other African Muslim slaves, Abu Bakr had different masters and had been baptized as Edward Donellan but remained faithful to Islam. He is perhaps one of the very few who returned to Africa upon his manumission in 1834.

The accounts left by Bryan Edwards, a planter historian, and Magistrate Robert Madden are clear testimonies that Islam was the religion of hundreds of African slaves who were brought to Jamaica from the Muslim nations of Africa. Bryan Edwards, writing on the national customs and manners of Muslim slaves, states as follows:

An old and faithful Mandinka servant, who stands at my elbow while I write this, relates that the natives practice circumcision, and that he himself has undergone that operation; and he has not forgotten the morning and evening prayer which his father taught him. In proof of this assertion, he chants in an audible and shrill tone, a sentence that I conceive to be part of the *Al-Koran*, ‘La Illa ill illa!’ (i.e. *La Ilaha Illallah*, there is no god but Allah) which he says they sing aloud at first appearance of the new moon. He relates, moreover, that in his own country Friday was constantly made a strict fasting. It was

almost a sin, he observes, on that day to swallow his spittle; such is his expression.¹⁶

The narrative left by Magistrate Robert Madden further reveals the faithfulness of the Muslim slaves to Islam and their exertion in the Way of Allah, despite forceful baptism. He records the presence of a considerable number of Muslims in Jamaica in a letter written to J. F. Savory, Esq., Jamaica, on 30 March 1835:

I had a visit one Sunday morning very lately, from three Mandingo negroes, natives of Africa. They could all read and write Arabic; and one of them showed me a Koran written, from memory by himself—but written, he assured me, before he became a Christian. I had my doubts on this point. One of them, Benjamin Cockrane, a free negro was in the habit of coming to me on Sundays ... His history is that of *hundreds of others in Jamaica* ... [emphasis added by author] Cockrane says his father was a chief in the Mandingo country ... I (Madden) have not the time to give you an account of his religious opinions; but though very singular, they were expressed with infinitely more energy and eloquence than his sentiments on other subjects. He professed to be an occasional follower of one of the sectarian ministers here, and so did each of his two friends. I had my doubts thereupon. I expressed them to my wife ... and told her to prepare for a demonstration of Mohometanism. I took up a book, as if by accident, and commenced repeating the well-known Mussalman Salaam to Prophet Allah (*sic.*) Illah Mohammed Rasul Allah! In an instant, I had a Mussalman trio, long and loud: my Neophytes were chanting their names with irrepressible fervour, and Mr. Benjamin Cockrane I thought, would have inflicted the whole of ‘the perspicuous book’ of Islam on me, if I had not taken advantage of the opportunity for giving him and his companions reproof for pretending to be that which they were not.¹⁷

Despite the systematic and brutal suppression of the West African Islamic heritage by the plantocracy, the metropolitan powers and the various established Christian churches, the community of the mu'minun nonetheless responded to the call for an island-wide *jihad* made through a *wathiqah*, a pastoral letter, in 1832.¹⁸ Slave leaders like Mohammad Kaba, Sam Sharpe and George Lewis were all crypto-Muslims working as local leaders, *marabouts* or *imams*. These *marabouts* were apparently the so-called ‘deacons’ in the less established or nonconformist churches such as the Baptist, Moravians and Wesleyen, 17 of which were destroyed following the outbreak of the rebellion in 1832 by the Colonial Church Union run by the Anglican Reverend George Bridges. Although ruthlessly suppressed, the *fihad* of 1832, commonly known as the Baptist Rebellion, hastened the Emancipation Act of 1833.

The complete metamorphosis experienced by the once proud African Muslim slaves through the shock in the process of enslavement, the subsequent physical torture and the cultural and spiritual genocide led to the dormancy of Islam until it re-emerged with the arrival of the Muslims from Moghul India in the 1850s. Vestiges of Islamic practices, however, still persist in the cultural heritage of the African Jamaicans. It is customary to take off one's shoes upon entering the house, indicating the importance attached to cleanliness of the abode, which was considered as the *masjid* for the performance of prayer by the Muslim forefathers. The observance of *wudhu* and night prayer, *isha'a*, by the pioneer Muslims from Africa are illustrated by the traditional practice of washing hands, rinsing mouth, washing face and feet, and offering prayer

before going to bed. Women, mostly in the countryside, also continue to wear the head covering.

The Mogul Islamic Diaspora

Following the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies, the peaceful revival of Islam in Jamaica began with the Muslims from Moghul India who formed a minority, constituting only 16% of a larger group of indentured Indian labourers. The drudgery of plantation life began with their allocations to serve on the various estates and horror stories of starvation and nakedness were rife. However, the spiritual struggle or the inner exertion in the Way of Allah enabled them to lead their lives in accordance with the *shari'ah* and the *sunnah* and to publicly observe and celebrate the Islamic practices and festivities. The solidarity of the community was illustrated through the performances of *jumm'ah* (Friday congregational prayer), and the observances of *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adhaa*, and *Aashura*. The resilience, vibrancy and solidarity of the Muslims from India found expression in the establishment of two *masjids*, thus institutionalizing Islam in a Christian dominated country. Masjid Ar-Rahman was built in Spanish Town in 1957, while Masjid Hussain was constructed the following year in Westmoreland. Mohammad Khan, a Muslim immigrant worker who came to Jamaica from Uttar Pradesh in 1915 at the age of fifteen, founded Masjid Ar-Rahman. Masjid Hussain in Three Miles River, Westmoreland, was built upon the land contributed by Aja Golaub, who came from India with his father at the age of seven. These *masjids* at once became the centres of religious, social and educational activities for the Muslim community.¹⁹ Classes were offered in Arabic and Urdu and the *khutba*, or Friday sermons, were delivered in Urdu, the official language of Moghul India. These Muslims for the most part kept their children away from schools, which were run by the established churches and often funded by the state.

This invisible yet invincible Moghul Islamic Diaspora maintained the continuity of Islam and formed the link between the Moors and African Muslim slaves and the emergence of the black Muslim community in Jamaica since the 1960s. Race and religious prejudices in a predominantly black Christian society, however, have almost eclipsed the story of the Indian Muslims. Nonetheless, with them came the Moghul culture exhibiting its richness in culinary arts, fashion and lifestyle.²⁰ Through their cultural contributions the Moghul Islamic Diaspora has now become part of the multicultural and multi-heritage society of Jamaica.

The Resurgence of the Islamic Faith among the African Jamaicans

The political independence of Jamaica in 1962 had a profound impact on the redefinition of cultural identity that often found expression through religious affinity. Although many Jamaicans migrated for better opportunities to North America and Britain, the majority of the underclass found themselves still trapped in a state of social and economic deprivation where race, colour and class continued to be the influential indicators of social status. Several African Jamaican immigrants in the United States became adherents of the Nation of Islam, an organization of African American Muslims, which had a tradition of black self-assertiveness and racial redemption representing Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalism. The influence of the Nation of Islam in Jamaica was indicative of the steady growth of its followers, particularly from amongst the underprivileged class. The parish of Saint Mary saw the first resurgence of Islam

among the Jamaican Africans, partly influenced by the followers of the Nation of Islam who returned to their homes and partly by the Muslims of Indian descent.²¹ However, the established Indian Muslim community, operating as ‘the Islamic Association of Jamaica’, viewed it as a cult group professing a distorted form of Islam. The concerted and persistent efforts of the congregates of Masjid Ar-Rahman and Masjid Hussain charting out the actions of *da’wah*, to invite both Muslims and non-Muslims to adhere to the principles of Islam, eventually led to the unity of the black and the Indian Muslims as one community under the Islamic Council of Jamaica in 1981.²²

As mentioned earlier, during the mass exodus in the 1970s and early 1980s many Muslims of Indian origin also emigrated to North America and England because of serious political problems and almost complete economic breakdown in Jamaica. Racial and religious prejudices have also led some of the descendants of the Muslims from India to leave the *ummah*. The void created by the departure of Muslims of Indian origin was however filled by Jamaicans of African descent who now constitute approximately 70% of the Muslim population. Muslims of Indian descent at present form about 20% of the *ummah* while diplomats and expatriates from Muslim countries and recent immigrants from the subcontinent compose the remaining 10%.²³ The institutionalization of Islam by the Moghul Islamic community nonetheless laid the foundation for the subsequent eight *masjids* established in Jamaica since the 1960s. The *masjids* are indicative of the steady growth of the *ummah*, and the appeal of the Islamic faith throughout the country, a reminiscence of the plantation days when African Muslims worked in bondage in the various estates of the island. *Khutba* or Friday sermons, which are delivered mostly in the national language, English, with occasional Qur’anic verses in Arabic, also reflect the dominance of the African Jamaicans and the presence of non-Jamaicans.

The Islamic Council and the *Masjids*

The Islamic Council of Jamaica, which functions from the Central Masjid located in Kingston, coordinates the activities of the *masjids* and represents Muslims both locally and internationally. The Caribbean Islamic Secretariat with its headquarters in Trinidad and the World Muslim League with its head office in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, have embraced the Islamic Council as members.²⁴ Over the years, these international organizations have contributed to the welfare and intellectual development of the *ummah* mostly in terms of Islamic literature.

Locally, the consultative body of the Council or the *Shura* has two representatives from each *masjid* and has various working Committees such as Education and Da’wah, Social Welfare and Women and Childcare. The Central Masjid, which is also the main congregational place for *Jumm’ah*, the annual *Eid* prayer and festivities, and other activities, is an old residential house bought by the Muslims in 1988 and converted into a *masjid*. It is presently maintained by the contributions made by the Muslim community members. It houses a library on Islamic theology and jurisprudence. On the premise of the Central Masjid, the Islamia Basic School has been opened for children between the ages of three and six. At present, the majority of the students are children of non-Muslim parents who want their children to learn Islamic *aadaab* (etiquette) and to be taught the basics of life by Muslim teachers.

Every year, the Islamic Council of Jamaica welcomes congregates from many Muslim countries attending the Annual Law of the SeaBed Conference in Kingston. Regular visits to the *masjid* by Muslims from the global *ummah* are common. Although Muslims

of African descent constitute almost 75% of its regular membership, representation is also very cosmopolitan, having congregates from Asia, Africa, North America, England and the Caribbean.²⁵

The reconstruction of the Central Masjid is at present being seriously considered by the Council because of the growing interest and increasing number of congregates. Frequent visits to the centre by different schools to watch the performance of *Jumm'ah* prayer and to have lecture sessions on Islam also urgently call for bigger and better facilities with appropriate technological support, which at present is lacking. The construction of a proper Central Masjid displaying Islamic architecture, the dome and the minarets, will help the *ummah* to project its image well and reestablish its past glorious history. The World Muslim League has extended some financial assistance for the construction programme to be off the ground. However, the completion of the reconstruction project needs the financial support from Muslim countries and International Islamic Organizations. With an illustrious Islamic history and heritage, a centre for Islamic studies housed at the Central Masjid could well become the panacea for the reconstruction of a rich, illuminating and enlightening history of Jamaica and the Caribbean.

The Muslim community in Kingston also has the privilege of performing prayers and participating in Islamic festivities at Jamaat As-Salaam in Red Hills, which is approximately five miles from the Central Masjid. The *masjid*, which is again a former residence, in recent times, has attracted many of the Muslims of Indian origin who are expatriates and businessmen.²⁶ This *masjid* is also under renovation and is expected to have Islamic architectural design.

While the first two *masjids*, Masjid Ar-Rahman and Masjid Hussain, were built with individual family donations, the latter ones have been built or are on lease, held mostly through contributions made by the Muslims and maintained with the help of regular donations by the *ummah*. Masjid Ar-Rahman has been reconstructed with a dome and the congregates are an equal representation of African descent and Indian origin. Muslims of Indian origin continue to be the dominant ethnic group at the second oldest *masjid*, Masjid Hussain in Westmoreland, representing about 80% of the congregation.²⁷

The parish of St. Mary, which saw the first resurgence of the Islamic faith since the 1960s, ranks second to Kingston in the number of Muslims and almost 95% of its membership is of African descent.²⁸ The two *masjids* in St. Mary, Masjid As-Sobr built in 1987 in Albany, and Masjid An-Nur, established in Port Maria in 1991, together have 500 Muslims, representing almost 14% of the total Muslim population in Jamaica. Masjid Taqwa in St. Elizabeth, erected in 1992, is perhaps the most dynamic in propagating Islam and embracing the new adherents into the fold of Islam.²⁹ This *masjid* also caters to the needs of the growing Muslim community in the Manchester parish. The setting of a *masjid* at Old Harbour in 1998, which is about fifteen miles from Masjid Ar-Rahman in Spanish Town, followed by another at Riversdale in 1999, is indicative of the growth of the Muslim community in the St. Catherine parish. The parish now has three *masajid*. St. James, known for tourism, is now the home of *masajid*. The Muslims attending Masjid Al-Basir, which was established in Montego Bay in 2001, are led by an *imam* trained in Islamic studies from Saudi Arabia, the home of the two most holy places of Islam.

Besides bringing about the unity of the *ummah* through congregational prayers, the *masjids* have helped shape the Muslim identity in the region. They also act as agencies to collect *Zakah* and distribute the same among the poor and needy Muslims. The

masaajid, realizing the importance of the family to its eventual growth and development in a society, which is beset by a high rate of illegitimacy, take much pride in arranging prospective couples for marriage. The community strives to observe the Islamic dietary principles and the *masaajid* make arrangements for the availability of *halal* meat during religious festivals and on Fridays. This is done through small poultry and livestock farms owned by a few members of the *ummah*.

Although the leadership is in the hands of men who constitute about 70% of the Muslim *ummah*, women are in charge of almost all social and welfare activities. They are not only the connoisseur chefs for the delicacies prepared for festive occasions but are also the teachers who run the Islamia Basic School. They are the fund-raisers and the organizers for recreational outings. The activities of the female members of the community extend into homes for the aged and hospitals, educating young mothers about the healthy effects of breast-feeding. Young Muslim women are also pursuing degree programmes at the University of the West Indies in the Faculties of Social Sciences and Medical Sciences. Much is expected of these young women in terms of their contribution to the Muslim community in Jamaica once they enter their professional careers.

***Da'wah* Movement**

Da'wah activities are mainly carried out by the Islamic Council and the *masaajid* located in the various parishes. The strategies pursued for *da'wah* to the new Muslims who lack proper education include weekly study circle sessions held at the *masaajid* in reading and writing of Qur'anic studies in Arabic and English and lessons on the fortification of the Islamic faith and Islamic etiquette. Many of the zealous members carry the message of Islam beyond the *masjid* premises and are involved in the free distribution of Islamic literature in schools, universities, penal institutions, markets, bus terminals, parks and stadiums throughout the length and breadth of the country.³⁰ *Jumm'ah* prayers are often organized by Muslim academic staff members and students on the university campus to make non-Muslims aware of the presence of the Islamic faith. The recreational outings or periodic camps are also aimed to improve the understanding of Islamic teachings and the Oneness of Allah, which promotes the unity of people.

Da'wah is no longer confined only to public lectures, discussions, symposia and seminars conducted in educational institutions and elsewhere. Through weekly television discussion sessions called *Islam, the Way Forward*, the Muslim community makes its presence felt and heard in many homes on the history of the community, the essence of Islam and on the varied issues and areas covered by the Holy Qur'an and Hadith. However, due to financial problems, the popular weekly radio programme on Islam and the monthly newsletter *Al-Qalamul-Mubeen (The Clear Words)*, a publication of the Islamic Fundamental Youth Group of the Islamic Council of Jamaica, could no longer continue to entertain, encourage and inform the *ummah* and the wider society about its activities. Besides the reinstatement of these media, the creation of a web page on the *ummah* and Internet connection with the Muslim world are essential for accessing Islamic information.

The *da'wah* programme is further handicapped due to the lack of scholars or trained teachers in Islamic studies, literature material for the discussion groups and general classes, *da'wah* facilities, transportation, etc. The most important problem now, which contributes to the above factors, is the lack of financial resources. Under the auspices of Dar-ul-Ifta, the government of Saudi Arabia finances the appointment of a *sheikh*

who is largely responsible for the teaching of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence.³¹ The present scholar is a citizen of Nigeria and studied at the University of Madinah for over seven years. The International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations and the Muslim World League have contributed literature on Islam and Islamic studies to alleviate the educational aspect of the situation.

The Socio-economic Characteristics of the Muslim Community

The local members of the Muslim community are mostly first generation, coming from the underclass and the underprivileged, who accepted Islam as it offers them human dignity. Lack of proper education and skills have restricted employment opportunities for the local Muslims who are mostly between the ages of early teens and late 40s. Hence the lack of economic solvency. Almost 50% are unemployed, which is a reflection of the larger society that at present has a high unemployment rate of about 16%.³² The Muslim women are economically worse off as only 20% enjoy some form of employment. During the mass emigration in the 1970s and 1980s, the community saw the brain drain of its professionals—medical doctors, engineers, teachers, nurses and accountants.³³ The community has never been able to fully recuperate from that loss as non-Muslim Jamaican professionals and the well-to-do are hesitant to come forward and embrace Islam despite their interest because of the fear of offending the traditional churches. The indigenous Muslims are mostly engaged in private businesses and farming and a few are in government services. Most of the professionals within the community are expatriates or recent immigrants from the Subcontinent, Africa or the Middle East. Among them are scientists, medical doctors, academics, teachers, nurses and businessmen.

The community members are making efforts to educate their children so that the next generation is in a position to adequately compete with the rest of the society and enhance their economic situation. Almost 50% of the youth are now students at tertiary institutes doing the sciences, arts and vocational studies. These tertiary institutes such as the University of the West Indies and the University of Technology, however, do not offer Islamic studies nor is Islam studied as part of their history and heritage. The government schools teach Islam as part of the religious studies curriculum. Much of the knowledge imparted on Islam is either superficial or distorted, as there are no institutions of higher Islamic studies in the country. The *ummah*'s invisibility in terms of its numerical strength, educational background and economic power on the one hand, and religious and social prejudices among the educated and the elitist on the other, have influenced the perpetuation of the absence of Islamic studies in the educational institutions.

The priority of the Muslims to establish their community based on Islam is indicative of their non-participation and non-representation in the political directorate of the country. The absence of political representation has strengthened the religious prejudice towards Islam. Such prejudices have often found expression in the form of subtle though grave discrimination of the Muslims in their work place and in educational institutions. While Muslim students who had obtained outstanding results in their degree programmes, have been denied scholarships academics have been shunned from their deserving promotions or acknowledgement of their achievements. Those working in the government services have also found their positions made redundant under the pretext of restructuring. The media houses often express views and sentiments that are repugnant to Islam. Research on the Islamic paradigm in West Indian



FIG. 1. Distribution of *masajid* in Jamaican parishes.

history is, however, gaining recognition among the wider community through radio and television interviews and the print media.

Popular prejudices towards Islam, however, have inspired the Jamaican Muslim community to strive for the best despite all the limitations imposed on them. A few members have achieved outstanding accomplishments both locally and internationally. In the area of performing arts, Naim Bashir, popularly known as Jimmy Cliff, has won international acclamation as one of the first world class reggae singers. In recognition of his illustrious achievement, the University of the West Indies, which is the highest seat of learning in the region, awarded him Doctor of Philosophy (*Honoris Causa*) in 1997. Some Jamaican Muslims have been acclaimed for their scientific contributions in the areas of biotechnology, chemistry, geology and life sciences. Among these scientists, Belal Ahmed has been duly recognized in Marquis' *Who's Who in the World, 2000 Millennium Edition*.

Conclusion

The seed of Islam sown by the *mu'minun* from al-Andalus, West Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa and subsequently watered by those from Moghul India have the potential of germinating into a dominant faith by winning the ground inch by inch against all kinds of resistance and inertia. Through intellectual discourse and research work revealing the Islamic heritage of the invincible Maroons, the indomitable African slaves and the determined Muslims from the Subcontinent, the present day multi-ethnic society can once again manifest the Divine Unity of Allah, reminiscing the unity among people during the heydays of the Great Maroons.

NOTES

1. Description of the island is taken from D. J. R. Walker, *Columbus and the Golden World of the Island Arawaks*, Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1992, pp. 263, 265. Information on Morisco Pilot gathered from Museum, Seville Great House, Miami, St. Ann, Jamaica.
2. Sultana Afroz, 'From Moors to Marronage: The Islamic Heritage of the Maroons in Jamaica', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1999, pp. 161–179.
3. Information on Muslim population gathered from interviews with Amir Mustafa Muhammad, President of the Islamic Council of Jamaica, and Sheikh Musa Tijani, a scholar in Islamic studies from Nigeria whose appointment is funded by Dar-ul-Ifta, Central Masjid, 5 April 2000. Information on Jamaican population and fertility rate gathered from 'Overview', *Economic and Social Survey Jamaica, 1999*, prepared by the Planning Institute of Jamaica, Kingston: Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2000.
4. Gathered from oral testimonies, Central Masjid, March and April 2000.
5. Afroz, 'From Moors to Marronage', *op. cit.*, pp. 165–166; Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Before Columbus, Exploration and Colonization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229–1492*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987, p. 203.
6. Afroz, 'From Moors to Marronage', *op. cit.*, p. 168; Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655–1796*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990, pp. 15–16.
7. Ahmad Y. al-Hasan and Donald R. Hill, *Islamic Technology: An Illustrated History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and UNESCO, 1992, p. 34.
8. Campbell, *The Maroons*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
9. Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492–1969*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1983, p. 141.
10. Campbell, *The Maroons*, *op. cit.*, pp. 126–127.
11. Bev Carey, *The Maroon Story: The Authentic and Original History of the Maroons in the History of Jamaica 1490–1880*, Gordon Town, Jamaica: Agouti Press, 1997, p. 148.
12. Afroz, 'From Moors to Marronage', *op. cit.*, p. 175.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 170–172.
14. Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the West Indies (1819)*, Vol. II, New York: AMS Press, 1966, p. 72.
15. Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans From the Era of the Slave Trade*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968, p. 153.
16. Edwards, *The History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–72.
17. Robert R. Madden, *A Twelve Months Residence in the West Indies during the Transition from Slavery to Apprenticeship*, Vol. I, Philadelphia: Carey Lea and Blanchard, 1835, pp. 99–101.
18. Philip Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, *op. cit.*, p. 164; Madden, *A Twelve Months Residence*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 135.
19. Based on oral testimonies collected in Kingston and Spanish Town in January and February 2000.
20. Based on oral testimonies collected in Kingston in May 1995, January and February 2000.
21. Reinoh Bartlet, 'The Development of Islam in St. Mary Since 1960', Caribbean Studies, University of the West Indies, 1993, unpublished.
22. Based on oral testimonies gathered in February and April 2000.
23. Based on oral testimonies gathered in April 2000.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. Interview with Brother Rafique Abdur Rashid, Jamaat As-Salaam, Kingston, 2 May 2000.
27. Oral testimonies gathered from Kingston, April 2000.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Interview with Brother Omar, *imam* for Masjid Taqwa, St. Elizabeth, 20 May 2000.
30. Oral testimonies gathered in Kingston, April 2000.
31. *Ibid.*
32. 'Overview', *Economic and Social Survey Jamaica, 1999*, *op. cit.*
33. Based on oral testimonies gathered in Kingston, April 2000.

