

The *Jihad* of 1831–1832: The Misunderstood Baptist Rebellion in Jamaica

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Introduction

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.

This paper analyses the nature of the so-called Baptist Rebellion from an Islamic perspective since there was the call for *jihad* through a *wathiqah* (pastoral letter) believed to have originated from Africa. The presence of thousands of Muslim slaves on the plantation estates calls for an examination of the leadership of the rebellion. The correspondence and the autobiographical notes of the slaves have been critically analysed on the basis of the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Accounts left by His Majesty's government officials, religious ministers, plantation historians and travellers have been assessed to ascertain the dominance of the Islamic faith in the rebellion.

The *Mu'minun* from Africa

Mu'minun of African descent belonging to the Islamic nations of Mandinka, Fula, Susu, Ashanti and Hausa ceaselessly tried to maintain their Islamic practices in secrecy, while working as slaves on the plantations in Jamaica. 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—Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Mali, Benin, Ghana, and Nigeria. Among the British West Indies islands, Jamaica had 56.8% of her arrivals from Muslim areas.¹ A large proportion of the deported Muslims came from the intellectual elite—*marabouts* (clerical teachers), *ulema* (scholars in Islamic studies), *imam* (prayer leaders) and *talib* (students). The mobility of the Muslims as traders, clerical teachers, scholars, students, prayer leaders in their homelands in Africa made them susceptible to abduction for slavery by organized gangs, immoral traders, bandits, and kidnappers. Muslim captives in civil wars between Muslim and pagan rulers in Africa became victims of the Atlantic slave trade. Most of these Muslim warrior captives were learned and devout men who, in the New World, answered to the call for *Jihad* against the enemies of Islam. 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. They also displayed a gentleness of disposition and demeanour, which is believed to have been 'the result of early education and discipline'.² In Africa, which is a continent of oral tradition where no writing system was available, only the Muslims were literate. In West Africa, the spread of Islam was accompanied by a rise in literacy.³

Evidences of their Faith: From Others

Mrs A. Carmichael, a wealthy English traveller who resided in the British West Indies for some time and interviewed many Mandinka slaves in 1833, writes: 'It is a commonly received opinion in Britain, that negroes are professed idolaters ... There is not a trace of idol worship among them ... I am convinced there is not a negro, old or young, who could not tell that one God made the world, and created mankind; and that He is all Powerful and all Seeing.'⁴ These Africans in bondage seemed indignant at the idea that they were thought to be idol worshippers. They further stressed that in their country they went every fourth day to perform prayer. Mrs Carmichael's observation authenticates the presence of a large number of Muslim slaves in Jamaica who had a firm conviction in Islam during the period leading to emancipation. Hence, the participation of Muslim slaves during the so-called Baptist Rebellion.

The accounts left by Bryan Edwards, a plantation 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 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 a strict fasting. It was almost a sin, he observes, on that day to swallow his spittle; such is his expression.⁵

The recitation of the Confession of Unity *La ilaha illa Llah*—‘There is no god but Allah’—manifested the deep devotion of the Muslim slave and the shining vibrancy of his heart of the Ultimate Realm, the Truth. Such then was the beauty and purity of the hearts of the Muslim slaves.

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* ... 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 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.⁶

The account reveals that hundreds of African slaves who had been brought in chains from West Africa had been forced to observe the practices of their masters’ religion under rigidly specified conditions. In actuality, many of them remained faithful to their religion and practised Islam privately amongst themselves. They waged the true *jihad* in their struggle for self-preservation as Muslims despite all the odds against their faith.

Evidences of their Faith: From Themselves

The autobiographical notes, correspondence and letters written by slaves further bear testimony that baptism and their membership in the various nonconformist churches had not altered their belief in Islam. They also reveal the irresistible nature of spiritual power and knowledge of the African *Mu’minun*, contrasted with the unregenerate ingratitude, pettiness, helplessness and ignorance of the planter class and the religious leaders of the established churches. The Abrahamic heritage of Islam and Christianity enabled the Muslim slaves to secretly practise Islam, while outwardly professing Christianity and maintaining membership of the local Christian churches by paying regular dues at the rate of 3 pence each.

Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, a Mandinka slave assigned to Magistrate Robert Madden,

reveals through two autobiographical pieces written in Arabic that he was the son of a learned family in Islamic Jurisprudence from the city of Timbuktu, which had the world's first university. His father and his great-grandfathers, both paternal and maternal, presumably belonged to the class of juriconsult-*shahid al malik*.⁷ Furthermore, the family belonged to one of the *shurafa* clans in Western Sudan, which claims descent from Prophet Mohammed (SAW). Abu Bakr acquired advanced Qur'anic learning, initially in the city of Jenne and subsequently in Bouna, which was 'a place of great celebrity for its learning and schools, in the countries of the Mohammedan Mandingoes'.⁸ So strong was his Islamic teaching that even after 30 years of bondage in Jamaica he still knew the Qur'an and produced a written copy from memory. Robert Madden substantiates the authenticity of such a written copy.

Although Abu Bakr expresses bitterness against slavery and its oppression, he did not lose faith in Allah. He writes, 'But praise be to God, under whose power are all things. He does whatever He wills! No one can turn aside that which He has ordained, nor can anyone withhold that which He has given. As God Almighty Himself has said: Nothing can befall us unless it be written for us (in His book)! He is our master: in God, therefore, let all the faithful put their trust!'⁹ These statements echo many of the Qur'anic verses such as contained in *Surat At-Taghabun* (Mutual Loss and Gain): 'Whatever is in the heavens and on earth, doth declare the Praises and Glory of God: to Him belongs Praise: and He has power over all things' (64:1). 'No calamity can occur, except by the leave of God: And if any one believes in God, (God) guides his heart (aright): for God knows all things' (64:11). *Surat Al-Mulk* (Dominion) also begins: 'Blessed be He in Whose hands is Dominion; And He over all things hath Power' (67:1). 'No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence: That is truly easy for God' (57:22). Abu Bakr's notes demonstrate his thorough knowledge of the Holy Qur'an, and his unshakeable belief in Divine Decree and Predestination, which is an essential element of the Islamic faith (*iman*).

He accounts the Islamic values and practices of his parents in a tone of pride. He states: 'My parents religion is of the Mussalman; ... their devotions are five times a day; they fast in the month of Ramadan; they give tribute according to the law ... They fight for their religion, and they travel to the Hedjaz. They don't eat any meat except what they themselves kill. They do not drink wine nor spirits, as it is held an abomination to do so. They do not associate with any that worship idols, or profane the Lord's name, or do dishonour to their parents, or commit murder, or bear false witness, or who are covetous, proud, or boastful; for such faults are an abomination unto *my religion* [added emphasis]. They are careful in the education of their children, and their behaviour.'¹⁰ Interestingly, Abu Bakr unconsciously reveals his deep devotion and his roots in Islam despite baptism, which apparently had no impact on his religious belief. He regrets that he has lost his Islamic values since his bondage and considers himself to have 'become corrupt'.¹¹ However, he seeks God's guidance as is evidenced from his concluding statement which reads: 'I now conclude by begging the Almighty God to lead me into the path that is proper for me, for He alone knows the secrets of my heart and what I am in need of'. Abu Bakr's intense love of Allah is revealed through his fear of doing things against His Will. He remembers Allah intensely in his heart and 'Allah certainly has (full) knowledge of the secrets of (all) hearts' (67:13). Such intensity of love obtains forgiveness for any past as Allah promises: 'As for those who fear their Lord unseen, for them is Forgiveness and a great Reward' (67:12).

The Process of Baptism: Spiritual Genocide of the *Mu'minin*

While thousands of slaves were subjected to the process of baptism, the collective force of faith and virtue of the *Mu'minin* from Africa became an impregnable fortress of the Righteous. Many of them, apparently, were *Sufis* who stressed the personal dimension of the relationship between Allah and man. The practice of Christianity by many of these African Muslim slaves, as stated before, seems to have been only a pretension adopted to avoid confrontation and punishments from the plantation owners and the church. The Anglican Church played the major role in carrying out the spiritual genocide by forcefully baptizing thousands of African slaves. Under metropolitan urging and insistence, new colonial laws called for slave baptism, church marriages, Christian lessons and directives, and sabbatarianism.¹² Reverend George Bridges, the founder of the Colonial Church Union, claimed in 1823 to have baptized 10,000 slaves within two years in Manchester parish.¹³ It seemed to have been a profitable profession to be a religious minister as a fee of 2 shillings and 6 pence was charged to baptize each slave, as decreed by the Jamaican legislature. Reverend Bridges and his counterpart, Reverend Lindsay, are known to have physically attacked nonconformists and burned their places of worship. This is indicative of the possible existence of Muslim houses of worship in the guise of the less established or nonconformist churches such as the Moravian, Baptist and Wesleyan Methodist Churches, which became targets of Bridges' heinous acts of terror.

The accounts of Reverend Bridges reveal his anguish over the strong conviction of the Islamic faith of many of the slaves in Jamaica who had been baptized by him. The mere sprinkling of water had no effect on the *Sufis* who had become purged of self and its desires. Bridges writes:

... amongst the Negroes of Jamaica, who are natives of the northern coasts of Africa, many of its institutions (Islamic) may still be traced by the eye of a careful observer; and whatever maybe the influence of Christianity upon their sable offspring, it is to be feared that they themselves will never change their conduct or their faith ... The tribes of Foulis, Madingo, Ghiolofs, and Bambarra ... practice the rite of circumcision, and observe the *Jente Karafana* or Ramadan, with much greater respect and awe than they feel when they allow themselves to be sprinkled with the waters of baptism. Allah, the Mahometan appellation of the Deity, is still used in the different dialects of these tribes ... The Friday is their Sabbath, and though they rank the mother of Jesus as one of the four perfect women of the prophet's faith, they look upon her Son ... as an inferior prophet, famous only for his miracles. They maintain a Marbut, or a priest, in every village; believe implicitly in the doctrine of predestination ...¹⁴

Bridges' keen awareness of the deep conviction of the Islamic belief of the Muslim slaves and his anguish over failure to proselytise among them seem to have motivated him to destroy more than 17 of the less established or nonconformist churches. These included the Baptist, Moravian and Wesleyan Methodist Churches, which were demolished following the outbreak of the rebellion in 1832.¹⁵ The membership of these churches comprised of the so-called 'baptized slaves'. The virtues that are the seedbed of faith were laid by the *Mu'minin* in an environment where Truth was denied and its votaries of royal and learned lineages insulted and persecuted. These men of faith held fast to their faith because they knew it was true and Truth is one and must prevail.

The *Jihad* of 1832

The Righteous, working on the various estates, formed one Brotherhood to repel evil by goodness and faith in God. Despite the overwhelming power of the established authorities, the *mujahids* (fighters) made no compromise in matters of Truth as the Qur'anic guidance requires that in fighting for Truth, there is no room for faint-heartedness or half-heartedness.¹⁶ In accordance with the Qur'anic command: 'Fight it, and fall not in the test of your mettle. Be bold and establish the flag of Righteousness in the highest places. Thus comes Peace, for which due sacrifice must be made ...' the collective force of the *ummah* of the *Mu'minin* undertook to establish human dignity.¹⁷ 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'.¹⁸ 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. Of Mandingo parentage, Kaba came from Bouka, a short distance east of Timbuktu, and belonged to a well-to-do family learned in law and Islamic teachings. Apparently Kaba, who studied the Qur'anic law at Timbuktu, which was then regarded to be one of the most important centres of Arabic and Muslim studies, was a *marabout* and a *sufi*. So strong was Muhammad Kaba's belief in Islam that never in practice or in spirit did he give up his faith. Even as a member of the Moravian Church, Kaba and many of his fellow brethren who had gone through the process of baptism 'were in the habit of fasting three times a week, eating and drinking nothing from sunrise to sunset'.¹⁹ Such a practice, usually observed by a devout Muslim, irritated the masters who adopted every means to discourage it. On one such occasion, an overseer, finding his slaves fasting, ordered them to break stones all day with sledgehammers. The *Mu'minin* did not bow down to the pressures and break their fasts, but 'rapidly continued to do till evening without intermission, and so successfully, that he (overseer) could not refrain from expressing his surprise'.²⁰ Historians have interpreted such acts of fasting as a form of slave resistance.

The extent and nature of the rebellion also illustrate that Muslims formed a formidable number on the plantations throughout the length and breadth of the island. Prior to the rebellion, large numbers of slaves were baptized in a profane manner.²¹ They were not allowed into the Anglican Church, the established church of England, which was regarded to be 'a white man's church', advocating the cause of the local planters.²² The white established authorities never considered the slaves to be genuine Christians. The accounts of Madden, Edwards, Carmichael and even Reverend Bridges reveal that they were aware of the firm Islamic conviction of the slaves and their deep respect for their Islamic culture. The forced separation of the slaves from the European Christian culture and the isolation of the estates thus created room for preaching religious teachings, which apparently did not conform with Christianity. Evidently, these baptized slaves were crypto-Muslims practising Islam and teaching Islam while being only *occasional* or *nominal* members of the Baptist or Moravian Churches as required by the plantation system once they were baptized.²³ Furthermore, the presence of hundreds of Muslim slaves in Jamaica even during the apprenticeship period leading to emancipation, as confirmed and authenticated by Special Magistrate Robert Madden, gives credence to the argument that the insurrection in 1831–1832 was a *jihad*

against the indignity of slavery. Evidence further suggests that the rebellion had been essentially rural and was led by mature slaves belonging to the slave elite group such as drivers, slave headmen, carpenters, masons, coopers and blacksmiths.²⁴ Intelligence, education, specialized skills, discipline and good disposition, which were the characteristics of the Muslim slaves, must have earned them these elite positions. 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. This is further strengthened by the testimonials of the rebel leaders as to the innocence of the white missionaries.²⁵ Neither did the white brethren come to the assistance of their black brethren during the trial or even before, when blacks were butchered for no other offences than that of coming to chapels like the Baptists, Moravians and Wesleyan Methodists.²⁶ Apparently, an uncompromising religious difference existed between the black and white brethren. 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'.²⁷ Slavery is reprobated by the Islamic principles of liberty, equality and universal brotherhood and discountenanced by the Islamic code.²⁸ To the Muslim slaves who had been sprinkled with baptismal water, Christianity, the religion of the spiritually fossilized *bukra massa*, represented oppression. Despite flogging and severe punishments, even privileged slaves enjoying yearly pensions remained defiant and refused to leave their religion.²⁹ Such were the cases of Sarah Atkinson, once a privileged slave of Rural Retreat estate who enjoyed £10 a year pension, and Henry Williams, the head driver of the same estate, and the leader of the Wesleyan Chapel. No coercion or force on earth could change the indomitable faith of the Muslim slaves as the Qur'anic verses say: *La ikraha fi addin*, 'there shall be no compulsion in religion', and *lakum dinukum wa lyedin*, 'your religion for you and mine for me'.³⁰

The Preaching of Islam and Jihad

The *Mu'minin* in Jamaica got a further boost to practise Islam in-groups with the coming of American black Baptists after American independence. The island's established church authorities regarded them to be Baptist missionaries promoting Christianity, which had elements of African religious beliefs. 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 fulfilment (*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, the home of the deported Africans, 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.³¹ Slyviane 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'.³² Hence, Islam dominated the religious beliefs of these black missionaries.

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. Similar to the traditions of the *Sufis*, they formed religious followings among groups of slaves. The cohesive brotherhood of the *Sufi* slaves served as a social organization that linked its members over geography, ethnicity and social class. Such activities labelled as 'Baptist' activities became a movement in the island by the 1830s. The groups were based on a 'leader system', whereby followers were divided into permanent groups under a single leader. The leaders were more than teachers—they were spiritual guides.³³ There was also the absence of any single recognized authority or church hierarchy.³⁴ Although misunderstood by historians and sociologists, who suggest that the method was *myalism*, such a form of organization falls within the Islamic pattern of religious leadership. In accordance with the Islamic principle of no hierarchical priesthood but selection of a leader (*imam*) on the criteria of righteousness and Islamic scholarship, each community apparently selected its own leader. Reverend Bridges observes that this was a common practice among the Muslim slaves who were brought from Africa. These *marabouts* were apparently the so-called 'deacons'.

The Role of Slave Leaders and Black Preachers

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 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. Therefore, they also became political leaders, a feature common in Islamic Caliphate.

Furthermore, *jihād*, or exertion in the way of Allah whether in the form of self-purification or defensive war, regarded to be the sixth pillar of Islam, became the religious legitimacy of a revolt to attain freedom. Personal freedom in Islam is a natural right of man, a spiritual privilege, a moral prerogative, and above all, a religious duty. The Holy Qur'an commands: 'And fight them on until there is no more tumult of oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah. But if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression' (2:193). It is clear that *jihād* is essentially meant to fight oppression and exploitation. 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. Many of these slave leaders schooled in Islamic Jurisprudence and Islamic Studies at centres of learning such as Timbuktu, Jenne, Kano and Bouna, seem to have been strongly influenced by the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). He carried out an endless *jihād* throughout his life against the enemies of Islam to establish justice and human dignity. As mentioned earlier, 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.³⁵

These slave leaders were known by their Christian names but their teachings were

not the words of the Gospel. They never rejected the Bible (*Injeel*) as Muslims believe in all the revealed Books that are mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. By the very declaration that 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God', the believer announces his or her faith in *all* God's messengers, and the scriptures they brought. Indicating firm belief in the Holy Books, four Mandingo Muslim slaves, bearing Christian names, wrote to Robert Madden: 'We see plainly that every nation have a book towards the Almighty, all condemning each other. The nation of Mandingo condemns no books whatsoever, but we do not agree with the readers of them ...'³⁶ This is in line with the Qur'anic statement that reads: 'To every people (was sent) an Apostle' (10:47). As the human race progressed, the prophets—124,000 of them—were sent with laws that suited the requirement of that time. But His Truth—the Oneness of Allah—has been one throughout the ages. However, the Qur'an confirms in *Surat Al-Baqarah* that the followers of the Holy Books of Allah prior to the Holy Qur'an ignored the Books of Revelations and twisted and distorted their messages and guidance according to their own fancies.³⁷

Non-rejection of the Bible and respect shown to Jesus Christ, who is regarded as one of the most revered Prophets in Islam, perhaps convinced most of the established religious and political authorities that the slave preachers were preaching Christianity to the slaves with an African interpretation. But their unorthodox interpretation of the Bible and their activities among the slave population caused alarm among the political and religious authorities. Such incongruity and irreconcilability over the interpretation of the Gospel is indicative of the incompatibility of Islam and Christianity, particularly with regard to Prophet Isa (Jesus Christ). *Surah Maryam* (Mary) reveals the mysterious power of Allah and the birth of Jesus as 'A servant of God: He (God) hath given me Revelation and made me a prophet' (19:30).

George Lisle (or Leile), a Baptist preacher who came from Southern United States, frequently faced charges of sedition. It is likely that because of his thorough knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and the Bible, he was able to convince the authorities that his teachings were in line with the Gospel. The Holy Qur'an revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the final messenger of Allah, through Angel Gabriel is the manifestation of *Tawhid*, the Unity of Allah, the Oneness of Allah. The Holy Qur'an is an embodiment of the past and guidance for mankind through eternity. In *Surat Al-Baqarah*, Allah commands: 'Say: Whoever is the enemy of Jibreel (Gabriel)—for surely he revealed it to your heart by Allah's command, verifying that which is before it and guidance and good news for the believers' (2:97). Specific references have been made regarding the prophets and prophecies of the past throughout the Holy Qur'an, besides *Surat Al-Anbiyaa* (the Prophets), with a view to both admonish and guide mankind in this world (*dunya*) for the hereafter (*aakhirah*). Consequently, Muslims can quite readily identify the Prophets and the important Biblical events mentioned in the *Torah* and the Bible. The following verses from the Holy Qur'an categorically state that no distinction exists between the Prophets:

Surely those who disbelieve in Allah and His Messengers, or who seek to make distinctions between Allah and His Messengers, and who say, 'We believe in some of them, but we do not believe in others, and so we seek to choose a course that lies between them', these ones are in truth really disbelievers—and for the disbelievers We have prepared a humiliating punishment—but for those who believe in Allah and His Messengers, and who do not make any distinction between any of them, He will certainly give these ones their

reward—and Allah has always been Forgiving, Compassionate. (*Surat An-Nisa*, 150–152)

George Lewis, a black Baptist leader who was originally a slave from Guinea in West Africa, came to Jamaica from the United States. He was regarded to be a genuine heretic who had consciously rejected orthodox Christian instruction, which is expected of a *Mu'min* (Believer of the Islamic faith). He was much disliked by the planters and he was never invited to join the Moravian Brethren; nor did he seek membership in the Church. He offered his own services to the people in Manchester and St. Elizabeth. Slaves would secretly leave home at night, walking long distances, often 20 to 30 miles, to attend the meetings of George Lewis. The slaves joined together in the mutual teaching of faith, and of patience and constancy. Plausibly, they also prayed together as great rewards and merits have been promised for night prayer called *tahajjud*, when Allah descends to the lowest heavens in the latter part of the night and invites invocations and petitions. The motivation and stimulation given by Lewis to rise against the indignity of slavery found expression when the spiritually inspired slaves in Manchester rose in rebellion in early January 1832. George Lewis, who participated in the uprising in Manchester, was executed and became one of the martyrs. He had joined the group of *Mu'mimun* who responded to the call for *jihad* led by Mohammad Kaba in Manchester. Apparently, Mohammad Kaba and George Lewis were close companions. Mohammad Kaba, at a meeting with Lewis, confessed: 'Me do pray ... Me say me believe in God, but not in his Son; for in me country we pray to God and his prophet Mohomet'.³⁸ Michael Craton, in his *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*, mentions the 1832 uprising in Manchester as a 'small outbreak' of unrest in which six rebels were shot and two executed. He, however, views it as part of the great Baptist Rebellion that engulfed the parishes of St. James, Hanover, Trelawny, Westmoreland, St. Elizabeth, and Manchester, an area totalling some 750 square miles, involving more than 200 estates and about 60,000 slaves. The eastern end of the island, Portland, St. George and St. Thomas, the home of the Muslim Maroons, also reported of slave insurrection.

Muhammad Kaba's leadership in this *jihad* and his steadfastness in the performance of prayers and observance of fasting dispel his profession of Christianity. Both his first and last names are of great significance to every Muslim. Muhammad, meaning the praiseworthy, is the name of the Prophet of Islam (SAW) and *Kaba*, a symbol of Islamic unity, is the first house of Allah initiated by Prophet Ibrahim. Mohammad Kaba's letter to Abu Bakr, which commenced with the Islamic creed, 'In the name of God, merciful and omnipotent, the blessing of God, the peace of his prophet Mahomet', convinced Magistrate Madden that Kaba, who was 76 years of age, had an unshakeable faith in Islam. Madden amusingly writes, 'So much for the old African renunciation of Islamism'.³⁹ Fifty-six years of bondage on one property and his baptism apparently had no impact on his Islamic belief. The religious conviction of Muhammad Kaba and his fellow Muslim slaves often drew the suspicions of the local officials. On one such occasion, Muhammad Kaba and some others were taken before a bench of magistrates and examined as to the nature of the instruction that they received. Mohammad Kaba might have been a slave, but he was no fool. His answers convinced the judges that the gospels they were learning were aimed to make them more valuable servants and better members of society. Mohammad Kaba and his associates were quietly dismissed.⁴⁰

The Role of Daddy Ruler

Although the island-wide rebellion was not under a centralized leadership or directed by a single organization, Samuel Sharpe, alias Daddy Ruler Sharpe, a domestic slave of Croydon Estate, St. James, and a deacon of the First Baptist Church, Montego Bay, is believed to have encouraged the network of resistance.⁴¹ Islam apparently seems to be the common force that brought together the slaves belonging to different ethnic groups for the *jihad* to establish the principles of freedom, equity, justice, benevolence, compassion and wisdom. Islam initiated the restoration of human dignity to mankind and gave a deathblow to the perpetual serfdom of the slaves and to the institution of slavery as a source of economic labour. Slavery by purchase and sale was discountenanced.⁴² ‘Ye proceed one from another’ serves as Allah’s repeated reminder to mankind that everyone is of the same status.⁴³ The unity of humanity, emphasized even in the Prophet’s farewell address during his last pilgrimage: ‘Allah has made you brethren one to another, so be not divided. An Arab has no preference over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab; nor is a white one to be preferred to a dark one, nor a dark one to a white one ...’ left no room for slavery or bondage, nor racism.⁴⁴ Islam is the sworn enemy of racism, which became the basis of the Atlantic slave trade. Samuel Sharpe felt acutely the degradation of the human soul and the monstrous injustice of the slave system, and was bent upon its overthrow.⁴⁵ His leading role in the slave insurrection is indicative of his Islamic conviction that there is neither lineage nor caste in Islam: *La bedawi fil Islam*—there is no Bedouinism in Islam. No man can be possessed by another; he is Allah’s creation and thus requires submission to the Will of Allah and obedience to His Law. Hence, it was both, a religious duty and a moral prerogative on the part of Sharpe to destroy the evil institution and free the human spirit.

Samuel Sharpe became a group leader and built up his own base of support beyond the control of the Church. Such was his loyalty towards the First Baptist Church of Montego Bay! Secret consultation with his fellow slave leaders led to the formation of a society in September 1831, whereby the members took a solemn oath to unite themselves to secure their freedom.⁴⁶ This is reminiscent of the oath of Al-Hudaybiyah in 628 (6 AH) whereby the Prophet (SAW), sitting under a tree took from his comrades the oath—the Covenant of Fealty—that they would hold together and fight to death the overwhelming force of the Quraysh, which represented falsehood. ‘God’s Good Pleasure was on the believers when they swore Fealty to thee under the tree: He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down tranquility to them; and He rewarded them with a speedy Victory’ (48:18). Edward Kamau Brathwaite, a West Indian poet and historian, regards this oath as an Afro not a Euro-Baptist custom.⁴⁷ Evidently, religious legitimacy of a revolt to attain freedom was commonly heard at the meetings both outside and inside the churches.⁴⁸ The call for *jihad* to fight against oppression, as legitimized by the Holy Qur’an, obviously formed the essence of Sharpe’s speeches addressed to his fellow brethren. This religious conviction that ‘persecution is worse than slaughter’ was translated into political action. However, scholars like Mary Turner, relying on documentation of the religious and political authorities of the island, have failed to study the intrinsic connection that exists between religion and politics in Islam, the dominant religion of West Africa, the home of the African slaves.⁴⁹ So well versed was Sharpe on the subject of slavery and its rejection in Islam that he appeared to have the feelings and passions of his audience at his command.⁵⁰ Evidently, even Reverend Francis Gardner, the British Baptist Missionary, was ‘wrought up almost to

a state of madness' when he heard Sharpe speaking on the manifold evils and injustice of slavery and the natural equality of man with regard to freedom, which is a spiritual privilege in Islam.⁵¹ The society of Samuel Sharpe grew in numbers and influence and members were found on all surrounding estates and in neighbouring parishes. Apparently, Mohammad Kaba and his supporters from Manchester were close associates of this society and responded with open rebellion once the insurrection broke out in Salt Spring Estate, in the neighbourhood of Montego Bay, St. James, in December 1831. Sharpe was an independent preacher who roamed freely and widely and availed himself of prayer meetings held on different estates amongst the negroes themselves, to spread his views. In addition, the congregates in secret could perform the prayers in accordance with Islamic procedure. Prayer meetings also afforded him opportunities for holding secret talks with those slaves whose cooperation he wished to enlist. He also held an independent 'interpretation' of Biblical scripture, which apparently were Qur'anic teachings, emphasizing the principles of equality and brotherhood, freedom of the soul and the establishment of human dignity. He did not operate within the Baptist discipline or under the directives of the mission station. Furthermore, he had effectively detached the Baptist missionary organization from his society.⁵² The ambiguity of Sam Sharpe became evidently clear during the cross-examinations of the white missionaries. Neither missionaries nor government officials knew whether they were dealing with Sam or John Thorp or Tharp or Sharp or Sharpe. They were also not aware whether they were dealing with a slave from Croydon, Hazelymph, Capudopa or Cooper's Hill and whether his owner was a male solicitor or a female, then residing at Montego Bay, or a man called Gray.⁵³ However, it appears that the same Sharpe who Reverend William Knibb had approved was also the Sharpe he disapproved of. Apparently, Knibb did not wish to give credit to Ruler Sharpe of the Black Congregation (referring to secret meetings), since he had chosen 'Baptist' Sharpe to symbolize the spirit of freedom.

Regular secret prayer meetings were performed at the home of a slave called Johnson on Retrieve Estate, St. James. Among the tight-knit cadre of chief leaders who met regularly with Sam Sharpe were Colonel Johnson; John Campbell, a carpenter of York Estate; Captain Robert Gardner, head waggoner of Greenwich Estate; and Captain Thomas Dove, a literate slave from Belvedere Estate. With regard to the actions and aims of Sharpe and his chief leaders, Michael Craton suggests a close affinity to those of the rebel leaders led by Bussa in Barbados 'who were not Christians'.⁵⁴ *Bussa*, an Arabic term meaning 'glimpse', is applied to one who acts secretly. It would appear that the rebels in Barbados were also of Islamic faith and their struggle or *jihad* against the evil slave institution could not have been different from that of their Muslim brethren in Jamaica.

Evidence suggests that well before the rebellion, Sharpe's Islamic influence also extended to the Maroons of Accompong Town in Saint Elizabeth as the catechist of the Jamaican Auxiliary Society.⁵⁵ Obviously, the Islamic heritage of the Maroons had commonalities with Sharpe's Islamic teaching, and his independence and unrestricted mobility permitted him to be among the Maroons as a preacher. The Superintendent, Mr I. Hylton, made complaints to the Colonial government accusing Mr Sharpe 'of speaking slightly of Church government, of Anglican clergy, and individually of His Lordship (Bishop Lipscomb) of professing sectarian principles and preaching on particular occasions'.⁵⁶ Based on the investigative report of the Rector of Saint Elizabeth, Governor Lord Earl Belmore commanded that no stranger was to be permitted to enter the Town of Accompong without his sanction unless they produced a letter

from the *custos*. Under the order of Lord Bishop Lipscomb, Sharpe was denied visitation from his friends and persons attending his lessons for tuition and on Sundays, when he read the church services. Similar complaints were also received from Bishop Lipscomb regarding the refusal of the Maroons of Portland to allow regular catechism classes offered by the official catechist. The teacher of Moore Town was dismissed. Such disruptions in catechism in the Maroon communities of Accompong and Portland authenticate the common Islamic heritage of the Maroons and Sam Sharpe.⁵⁷

The enlistment of several freemen into Sharpe's society to fight against the oppressive slave regime is indicative of the powerful influence of Islam. The Muslim uprising of 1835 in Bahia, Brazil, also included freedmen amongst the insurgents.⁵⁸ The principle of *jihad*, which calls upon all followers of Islam to fight for the defence of Islam and the Muslim community from evil, oppression and tyranny, goes beyond personal and geographical boundaries. Hence, there was the involvement of the freemen such as the Mackintoshes (father and son), Largie and Campbell to destroy the oppressive slave institution and bring eternal freedom to the human soul. They had *never seen* a white Baptist minister, until they saw Messrs Thomas Burchell and Francis Gardner in the prison at Montego Bay before execution.⁵⁹ The only instruction that they received was from Sharpe, whose teachings, as stated earlier, did not conform to the orthodox interpretation of the Bible. Sharpe and his fellow Muslim slaves became convinced that the white Baptist and Moravian missionaries had no intention of leading the blacks to emancipation. In contrast to the Islamic principle of 'enjoining good and forbidding evil',⁶⁰ Sharpe was reminded by the white missionaries that the Scriptures require that slaves 'patiently submit to their lot, till the Lord in his providence is pleased to change it'.⁶¹ Mission leaders such as Francis Gardner from Savanna-la-Mar and William Knibb from Falmouth, then acting pastor of Montego Bay Baptist Church, tried to persuade the slaves to cease all plans for organized resistance and described the rebel leaders as 'wicked persons'.⁶² William Whitehorne from Falmouth and Thomas Fisher Abbot from Montego Bay joined Knibb and Gardner and begged their slave members to reprove the insurrection which they described as an 'unfruitful work of darkness'.⁶³ William Knibb, in his address to the slave congregates on 27 December 1831, exhorted them to return to work and pleaded, '... if you have any love to Jesus Christ, to religion, to your friends in England, do not be led away. God commands you to be obedient, and if you do not do as he commands you, he will not do you any good'.⁶⁴ The slave members received this gospel of peace made on behalf of Jesus Christ in a very sullen and bad spirit. They further accused the white missionary brethren of being bribed by the authorities to work against the freedom of the slaves.⁶⁵ Dissatisfaction and strong expressions of disapproval of Knibb's address are indicative of the slaves' disbelief of the Christian faith, which ran contrary to their Islamic belief as the Holy Qur'an categorically states: 'It is not befitting to (the majesty of) God that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it, *Be*, and it is' (19:35). Manifestation of physically harming Knibb also demonstrates the prevailing lack of respect and trust of the slaves towards the white gospel preachers. Evidently, 'Christianity was not essential to the slaves' resistance'.⁶⁶

The defence of Islam and the fight for the establishment of Truth and Faith became the dominant cry of the rebels. The white Mission Brethren apprehended that the spirit of insubordination was deeply rooted.⁶⁷ Perhaps they were also aware that the slave members had no strong devotion to the Christian gospels. The revolutionary spirit encouraged by the principle of *jihad* amongst the African slaves was too widespread to be contained. Refusal to work after Christmas of 1831 soon gave way to open *jihad* to

bring an end to the slave system and keep Faith all pure and undefiled. Sam Sharpe himself led large sections of the rebels in St. James. However, destruction of estate property, which was computed as £1,154,589, was not central to Sharpe's plan, and the actions of the slaves demonstrated that their aims were specific and directed and largely nonviolent.⁶⁸ The rebels carefully selected the targets that were to be destroyed and those that were to be protected. Despite the cruelties and oppressions that the slaves had experienced, and the outrages against modesty and humanity perpetrated upon their womenfolk—mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters—that they had been compelled to witness, the *mujahids'* actions were restrained. Perhaps a dozen in all were killed. This *jihad* in Jamaica can again be compared with the Muslim rebellion in Bahia in 1835, where 'the supposed white killing spree was not a reality, because the insurgents did not kill indiscriminately ...'⁶⁹ They both observed the Qur'anic command: 'Fight in the cause of God those who fight you. And do not transgress limits for God loves not transgressors' (2:190). Although much destruction had been caused, the behaviour of the slave fighters in their selective destruction in Jamaica and Brazil of the symbols of slavery is indicative of the very basis of Islam, which is peace. Islam permits violence only to remove sufferings and injustice. Allah commands: 'Be just; that is nearer to the observance of duty. O you who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably' (5:8).

The *mujahids* (fighters) displayed deep devotion to Islam and never sought Jesus Christ as their saviour. Their reference to God or Lord was their Supreme Reality, Sustainer, Cherisher, Creator—Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, the Almighty. Although the term *Allah* cannot be translated into any other word, the common English terminologies used by Muslims with reference to Allah are God and Lord. The African Muslim slaves sought refuge in God from every kind of ill arising from the nature and from the evil plotting of enemies by wearing amulets containing verses from the Holy Qur'an, which extends such protection. The hymn sung by slaves while plotting their *jihad* (rebellion) further dispels historians' belief that *obeah* and *myalism* were the inherent religious elements of slave ideology:

God Almighty thank ye! God Almighty thank ye!
 God Almighty, make me free!
 Buckra in this country no make me free:
 What Negro for to do? What Negro for to do?
 Take force by force! Take force by force!⁷⁰

The hymn speaks of the deep gratitude and trust of the *mujahids* in Allah. He alone can make them free from the oppressors who are referred to as the *buckra*, a distortion of the Qur'anic term *baqarah*, denoting the fossilization of the human soul as illustrated by an animal attitude. It further justifies the use of force by the oppressed as permitted by the Holy Qur'an: 'Permission to fight is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And surely Allah is able to assist them' (22:39). The Muslim Maroons and the *Mu'mimun* from Africa once again displayed their commonality in Islam in terms of the spirit of *jihad* and the allegories mentioned in the Holy Qur'an.

Conclusion

Although ruthlessly suppressed, the *ḥijrah* of 1831–1832, regarded by contemporary authorities as an 'extensive conspiracy formed by the Negroes' on the plantations that crippled the very basis of slavocracy, hastened the Emancipation Act of 1833 leading to

complete emancipation of the slaves in 1838.⁷¹ The *Mu'mimun* from Andalusia in Spain and West and Central Africa were those who fought with eager charge the hosts of evil and stormed the citadel of the planters, displaying spiritual humility and constancy.

In addition to many hundreds slaughtered during the uprising, no less than 340 *mujahids* went to the gallows as proud *shaheeds* (martyrs), for martyrdom in the way of Allah is a promised way to heaven. The Qur'an preaches that 'persecution is worse than slaughter'.⁷² Those killed in war 'rejoice in the Bounty Provided by Allah: And with regard to those left behind, who have not yet joined them in their bliss, the martyrs glory in the fact that on them is no fear nor have they cause to grieve'.⁷³ The exhibiting of heads of the leaders of the rebels on poles by the pro-slavery group seemed to have little effect on the *Mu'mimun*.⁷⁴ Very few broke their oath and returned to the estates. The last words of Sam Sharpe, who was executed on 23 May 1832, that he 'would rather die upon yonder gallows than live in slavery', echoed the Prophet's description of a *mu'min* (believer). The Prophet said: '*Afzal al-jihad kalimatun haqqun 'inda sultanin ja'irin*'. According to him, the *mu'min* (believer) is one who engages in the project of establishing social justice on God's earth and would not submit, under any circumstances, to injustices in any form. A *mu'min* would struggle until the last to establish a just society and would not refrain from speaking the truth even in the face of opposition by the most tyrannical ruler. This constitutes the best form of *jihad*.⁷⁵

NOTES

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31. Bakan, *Ideology and Class Conflict in Jamaica*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
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33. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
34. *Ibid.*
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