Enslaved Philanthropists: Charity, Community, and Freedom in the Americas

Sylviane A. Diouf, PhD
Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice
Brown University

Abstract
This article explores a manifestation of Islamic philanthropy in the direst circumstances: charity, in the form of zakat and sadaqa, offered by enslaved and freed West African Muslims in Brazil, Trinidad, and the United States. They used charity to free coreligionists and support the community. In the Caribbean, their charitable undertakings influenced non-Muslims who reinterpreted sadaqa and integrated it into their own religious and cultural activities.

Keywords: *Islam, charity, slavery, African Muslims, United States, Trinidad, Brazil, West Africa, sadaqa, saraka, zakat*

Between the early 1500s and 1867, 12.5 million Africans were deported through the transatlantic slave trade. Among them were hundreds of thousands of Muslims from Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and the northern parts of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, and Nigeria.[1] They landed in almost every country in the Western Hemisphere. Reports of Muslims and of Islamic activities appear in plantations, court, missionary, and police records, as well as in newspapers, books, letters, runaway ads, and official correspondence. In the United States they include mentions and correspondence by Presidents Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams as well as Secretary of State Henry Clay and national anthem author Francis Scott Key. Muslims were also represented in paintings, drawings, daguerreotypes, and photographs. Moreover, they left a variety of manuscripts written in Arabic and *ajami*. When forced to convert to Christianity, some became crypto-Muslims while others continued to live their religion publicly, praying;

---

[1] Estimates of the number of Muslims vary from 7 to 10%. For a detailed study of the African Muslim presence in the Americas during slavery, see Diouf (2013).

fasting; abstaining from pork and alcohol; and wearing turbans, flowing robes, skullcaps, and veils. In Bahia, Brazil, well-known, officially acknowledged Muslims went one step further by operating secret Qur'anic schools and makeshift mosques.[2] Africans enslaved in Virginia who joined the British during the war of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain were resettled in eastern Trinidad where they built "a Mahometan place of worship," which may be the first documented consecrated mosque in the Americas (Burnley, 1842, p. 98). There, as well as in the United States, Brazil, and Jamaica, some enslaved and freed Muslims had Qur'ans written by themselves or imported from West Africa and France (Raeders, 1934, p. 75; Burnley, 1984, p. 60; Plumer, 1863; Gurley, 1837, 203; Campbell, 1975–1976, pp. 467, 471; Hodgson, 1844, p. 69; WPA, 1942/1986, p. 179; Madden, 1835, pp. 99).

Examples of Muslims' continued observance of their religious obligations can be found in several countries. Among these requirements, charity may seem the most impracticable given the terrible deprivation the Africans endured. Yet the two most important categories of charity, *zakat* and *sadaqa*, have been documented in the United States, Brazil, and the Caribbean and, given the Third Pillar of Islam's significance, they were most likely part of the Muslims' practices wherever they landed.

Zakat and Freedom in Trinidad

Zakat represents about 2.5% of the giver's wealth over a certain amount. There is no fixed date for giving zakat and it can be paid monthly. This mandatory contribution is to be distributed for the benefit of eight categories of people, as defined in the Qur'an (9:60). *Fir-Riqab,* the fifth, concerns the liberation of those held in slavery or bondage.

Long before the Emancipation proclamation in 1834, Trinidad had a free Muslim community whose members belonged to an association known variously as the Free Mandingo of Trinidad, the Mandingo Society, and the Free Mohammedans. They came from various lands—including Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Guinea, and Nigeria—and were Mandinka, Wolof, Tukulor, Hausa, Soninke, and Susu. The Senegalese Samba Makumba was one of its founders. He became a prisoner at 21 when the army of the Islamic state of Futa Toro launched a war against the kingdom of Kayor after it had attacked a Muslim community and sold the survivors to European slavers. The Futa Toro army was defeated in 1796, and Samba Makumba and hundreds of Muslims were deported overseas. The young man became the superintendent of a French man's plantation and bought his freedom by his own means. According to three American Quaker missionaries who met him in 1840, Makumba and others founded the association "to maintain their religious profession, Samba acting as their priest." They bought land, built houses, and made a living through agriculture and petty trading. They also contributed to a common fund and used it to redeem their coreligionists, including those who had just arrived. When a slave ship landed, they went on board and redeemed the Muslims (Truman et al., 1844, pp. 109–110).

---

[2] On prayers, see WPA (1942/1986, pp. 141, 161–166, 179); Curtin (1967, p. 41). On diet, see Hodgson (1844, p. 69); Teas (1941, p. 388); Debien (1974, p. 388). On dress, see WPA (1942/1986, pp. 162, 179–181); Conrad (1901, p. 252); Callcott (1954, p. 62); Campbell (1975–1976, p. 467); Freyre (1986, p. 319); Rodrigues (1977, pp. 53–56); Reis (1993, pp. 96–100).

Association members Mohammed Hausa (Philip Findlay) and Jackson Harvey testified that "The Nation to which they belong were enabled previously to the 1st August 1834 to set free by purchase every individual of that Nation in Trinidad with a few in some other Islands, hereby showing their peaceable & industrious habits" (Trotman & Lovejoy, 2004, p. 223). According to Makumba, the society had freed 500 people in Trinidad and extended its operations to other islands (Trotman & Lovejoy, 2004, p. 110). The number of manumissions in Trinidad (1808–1834) reached 2,956, and if Makumba's figures are correct, the association would have been responsible for 17% of them (Higman, 1995, p. 691). Other members offered different figures. Mohammedu Sisei from Gambia, a member for 20 years before he returned home, remembered that more than 20 people had been ransomed at a cost of $300 to $700 each (Washington, 1838, p. 450). Two men stated that between 1814 and 1834, over 50 coreligionists were freed; and John Mohammed Bath, the association's leader, remarked in 1838 that on Abolition Day, "very few, if any, of their tribe … remained in Slavery" (Campbell, 1975–1976, p. 474). British physician Andrew Halliday pointed out in 1837, "they all succeeded in procuring their freedom long before the abolition of slavery, and formed a distinct society of themselves, strictly bound together by their Mahometan faith" (p. 321). From 1831 to 1838, the Muslims also repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, petitioned the authorities to grant them free passage back to West Africa (Carmichael, 1961, pp. 414–415). Only a few returned, and they did it on their own. The Muslim community's emancipation scheme seems to have been unique; although Yoruba and people from Angola and Congo were the dominant groups—numerically and culturally—they did not engage in collective liberation schemes or repatriation.

Zakat in Brazil

Freeing enslaved coreligionists was also a major endeavor of Brazilian Muslims—variously known as musulmis, muçulumi, muçurumi, and malês—who formed close-knit, dynamic communities principally made of Hausa and Yoruba. Many arrived during the period of *jihad* in Central Sudan (Nigeria). Starting in the early 1800s, various wars and raids brought large numbers of Muslims principally to Brazil. Prisoners of war, they often had a military background and they staged nine uprisings in Bahia between 1807 and 1835. In the aftermath of the largest slave revolt in Brazilian history, on January 25, 1835 (*Lailat al-Qadr*, the Night of Destiny) in Bahia, the police discovered that the enslaved *alufa* Sanim, an old Nupe religious leader, was in charge of a fund to which participants paid 320 reis—which represented a slave's daily take-in—most probably on a monthly basis. Collecting money from enslaved people was feasible because urban owners sent many of them to work as porters, stevedores, laundresses, and street vendors, requiring them to bring back a specific sum every day. Whatever the individual got over that figure he or she could keep. A third of the Muslims' money was used to free coreligionists, another third to buy cloth to make white tunics (*adaba*), and a third went to slaveholders (Reis, 1993, pp. 132–33; Rodrigues, 1976, p. 154). The Muslims who did not work on Fridays still had to pay the equivalent of a day's work to their owners.

At the time of the uprising, Bilal, known as Licutan, another eminent religious leader, was already in jail awaiting auction. Twice already his companions had offered to pay his owner for the old man's freedom, but both times they had been rebuffed. As the head jailer noted, they were ready to try again, "it was known … that the others had the money ready to buy his freedom when he went on the auction block" (Reis, 1993, p. 131). Following their trial, Bilal/Licutan and Sanim were sentenced to 1,000 and 600 lashes, respectively, which they received, naked and in public.

If anything, the failed revolt and its aftermath could only have increased the community's efforts to free as many people as feasible. Twenty years later, according to two American Presbyterian missionaries, the Muslims had "a system among themselves of buying the freedom of any one of their number who was the most respected. After having paid their master the sum required by him daily, they club together their surplus to liberate the chosen favorite" (Fletcher & Kidder, 1857, p. 135). They went even further, the missionaries explained, since they also paid the passage of those who wanted to return to West Africa. In 1869, the French Minister to Brazil, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau—the theorist of scientific racism and the Aryan master race—informed the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the Muslims of Bahia, "form among themselves self-help societies, they own common funds.… Every year, they buy, in the name of and with the resources I just wrote about, a certain number of their compatriots. Often they send them back to Africa" (Raeders, 1934, pp. 74–75).

In the early 1900s the Brazilian Muslims were still active, visible, and the subject of study. Anthropologist Raimundo Nina Rodrigues's Os *negros maometanos no Brasil* appeared in 1900; journalist Joao do Rio published *As Religiones no Rio* in 1904. "La secte musulmane des Malès au Brésil et leur révolte en 1835," an article by French Catholic priest Ignace Etienne, a professor at the Bahia seminary, came out in 1909. Afro-Brazilian ethnographer Manuel Raimondo Querino devoted a detailed chapter, "Dos malês," to the Muslim community in *A raça africana e seus costumes na Bahia* published in 1916.

Etienne (1909), who got information from Iman Hassoumanou, "universal imam of all Mahometans in Brazil, two other imams and several believers," reported that Muslims met for prayers and deplored they did not have dedicated *masallaci*, mosques in Hausa. They observed Ramadan—they called it *assumy* (from *sawm*), and during a big feast, two months later, they "exchange the *saka* or gift consisting of money, corn, rice, etc." (pp. 100, 103).

Querino stated that at dawn during Ramadan, Muslims ate balls of rice pounded with milk and honey, and the month long fast ended with a feast, *eid al-fitr,* during which they exchanged gifts called "*saká"* (1938, p. 71;). Etienne (1909) and Querino's (1938) *saka* was zakat, often given during Ramadan and/or *zakat al-fitr*, the obligatory alms that traditionally consist of money or staple food such as wheat, barley, or rice so that those who have little means can celebrate *eid al-fitr*, known as *korité* in several West African countries and *sallah* in Nigeria. In the 1900s zakat evidently no longer served as an emancipatory tool, since Brazil, the last Western country to do so, had abolished slavery in 1888. However, supporting the disadvantaged continued to be a religious imperative. Moreover, the welfare and strengthening of the community were all the more critical as Muslims were witnessing its attrition. They complained bitterly of the young people's ungratefulness as they turned from Islam to Catholicism and local Yoruba religions (Rodrigues,1976, p. 62).

Sadaqa in The United States

In contrast to zakat, *sadaqa* or *sadaqa al-Tatawwu* (alms of spontaneity) is a voluntary charity and can consist of anything the believer wishes to give. It must always be offered with goodwill and can be granted publicly or secretly. However, in this latter matter the Qur'an stresses "if ye conceal them [acts of charity] and make them reach those really in need, that is best for you" (2:266). It is recommended that the gift be accompanied by a supplication to God. A sadaqa, considered an act of worship, provides donors expiation for sins, gives them heavenly rewards, and protection from evil and afflictions.

In the United States, sadaqa has been documented in the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina, which counted the largest concentration of Muslims. Because of their isolation, these communities preserved the most distinctive African heritage in the country. In the early 1930s African American linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner (1949/1969) interviewed elders in several communities (Parrish, 1942/1992). He identified over 4,000 words—most were used as personal names—in the local creole, Gullah. These words came from over 30 African languages and included West African variants of Arabic words and names, Islamic terminology, and some pure Arabic. Besides the linguistic evidence, Muslims' descendants and others interviewed in the 1930s provided a detailed, personal picture of the Muslims and their practices (WPA, 1942/1986).

Katie Brown of Sapelo Island explained that her grandmother Margaret, a daughter of Bilali Mohammed—a Guinean who wrote a 13-page document in Arabic—used to make rice cakes (Greenberg, 1940, pp. 372–75; Martin, 1994, pp. 589–601). She washed the rice and let it "sit all night" so that it was puffed in the morning. She then pounded it in a mortar. She added honey, sometimes sugar, "and make it in flat cake wid uh hans. 'Saraka' she call um." Shadrach Hall noted that his grandmother Hester—another daughter of Bilali—made the saraka every month with rice or meal mixed with honey and flattened. On nearby St. Simons, Ben Sullivan related that his father Bilali—the son of Salih Bilali from Mali—prepared the saraka. Shadwick Rudolph of St. Marys stated that his grandmother Sally's saraka, sweetened with brown sugar, were "the best rice cakes" (WPA, 1942/1986, pp. 162, 167, 182, 194).

The word *saraka* was understood as meaning rice cakes in an African language and it seems that the descendants had little understanding of their grandparents' religion, which some linked to a cult of the sun and the moon since they saw them pray at sunrise, sunset, and at night. But the rice cakes they enjoyed as children were not just a family culinary tradition. Rice cakes or balls are the alms West African Muslim women customarily offer on Fridays since the spiritual reward for almsgiving on a Friday is double that of offerings given on any other day. The rice cakes are also handed out during religious holy days. Fittingly, Katie Brown mentioned that her grandmother gave the saraka once a year, on "a big day."

The rice cakes are not called saraka but giving them is a sadaqa. Like many Arabic terms used outside of the Arab world, sadaqa has several variants in West Africa, including *sarakh*, *sarakha*, *saraka*, and *saraa.* In the Sea Islands, as in West Africa, this charity was given to the children. Shadrach Hall recalled, "Duh cake made, she call us all in an deah she hab great big fannuh full an she gib us each cake." Since it is recommended that the alms be accompanied by a supplication to God, West African women handing out the cakes say that it is a *saraka* or *sadaqa*, made in the name of Allah and utter *ameen*. The practice was similar in the Sea Islands, as Katie Brown recalled, "Den we all stands roun table, and she says 'Ameen, Ameen, Ameen,' an we all eats cake" (Turner, 1969, p. 167).

In Georgia and South Carolina, the reasons behind the giving of saraka, protection from tragedy and misfortune, would have been relevant to the women's particular lives in servitude. They may have wanted to bring in divine grace to avoid the separation—through sale—of their families, or punishment, or the arrest of a runaway. They may also have been concerned for their families left behind in West Africa and asked God's grace for the well-being of the enslaved community. Their almsgiving was true to the authentic spirit of sadaqa since tradition states that the best sadaqa is the one given by a person who owns little. The hungry and deprived children who were the recipients of their charity evidently appreciated the women's gesture: they created a song about the cakes that could still be heard in the 1940s:

> Rice cake, rice cake
> Sweet me so
> Rice cake sweet me to my heart. (Crum, 1968, p. 265)

For this particular form of saraka to be maintained in slavery's appalling conditions evidences the importance it had in the people's lives. The fact that at least one man made the rice cakes (an exclusively female activity) only reinforces this assertion. This practice is so far the only known manifestation of religious activity by Muslim women whose stories and experiences have remained obscure.

Sadaqa in the Caribbean

As shown above, Trinidad had an active Muslim community from the early 1800s. Muslims arrived in the island in three distinct waves. The first was made of Muslims coming directly from West Africa. The second, much smaller, consisted of soldiers and their families formerly enslaved in Virginia who fought with the British during the war of 1812 and were relocated to the eastern part of the island. Baptist missionary Edward Bean Underhill stressed, "Some relapsed in Mohammedanism, under the guidance of three Mandingo priests, brought to the island as slaves. One of them could read, and was accustomed to communicate to his followers scraps of the Koran that he had copied." (Underhill, 1862, p. 46).

In addition, between 1808 and 1867, about 200,000 Africans—among the 3.5 million who were deported—were liberated from slave ships and resettled in various areas, including the British Caribbean, as indentured workers. Muslims were among them. According to the governor of Barbados, the people sent to the island were mostly "mohammedans or idolaters" (George, 2020, p. 398). The large influx and late arrival of these men, women, and children brought a linguistic, cultural, and religious "re-africanization" of the Caribbean. In Grenada, the number of Muslims was multiplied by four when liberated Africans landed in 1851 (George, 2020, p. 397). Trinidad received close to 9,000 people. The number of Muslims among them is not known but some of their children were still alive in the late 20th century.

In the 1970s, a Trinidadian woman born in the 1890s recounted how her Hausa father offered saraka. At sunrise, he prayed and sacrificed a chicken or a goat, the *halal* way. He dug a small hole in the ground and let the blood run in before covering it. Throughout the ritual, he said "prayers." Once cooked, the food was given to the children. Another Hausa said *bismillah* as he gave away the food. His saraka, made of goat, sheep, or fowl, also included soaked rice. Some was mixed with milk and sugar and called *gumba*, a typical Hausa dish that still has the same name in contemporary Niger and Nigeria (Warner-Lewis, 1991, pp. 115–116). The Hausa Auta, officially an Anglican, kept his hair long, wore a kaftan and wide pants, named his first daughter Fatuma, his first son Idi, and three granddaughters Fatuma, Zainabu, and Asetu. One of his daughters, born in the 1880s, told linguist Maureen Warner-Lewis (1991) that she observed him bathing early in the morning, praying facing the sun with his palms raised, reciting the Qur'an, and sprinkling water three times on the ground. He also gave saraka every year on New Year's Day. It consisted of a goat and various dishes. On his deathbed, Auta asked his family for a Muslim "priest" to continue giving the saraka (Warner-Lewis, 1991, p. 69). Although his daughters kept the tradition alive until the 1970s, they chose a non-Muslim to do it.

Besides these personal devotions, some Muslim communities offered collective saraka into the early 20th century. In the 1960s and 1990s, linguist Maureen Warner-Lewis (2009) interviewed elderly women—children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of Muslims—about this practice held about 24 miles southeast of Port-of-Spain,

> In these rural communities there had existed persons regarded as priests who, as late as the early twentieth century, came to say the opening prayers in Arabic at saraka hosted by descendants of this community in towns such as Tabaquite, Brasso, and Siparia. These priests wore knee-length white shirts and pants that were loose but narrowed at the ankles, and while the women wore colorful headties and blouses and skirts, the men wore shirts of solid cream or blue along with khaki pants. The use of these solid and pastel shades was very much in keeping with the Muslim aesthetic. Among rituals they observed was bathing before saying prayers at sunrise, which was also the time for killing any animal to

> be used for food. And before meat could be eaten, these men said a bisimillāh. (p. 249)[3]

Throughout the Americas, whether they arrived early or late, Muslims came in close contact with non-Muslims, including people from West Central Africa where Islam was unknown, and some Islamic practices and Arabic terminology reached a larger population. In Peru, "people say [sala malecu] without knowing its meaning," noted writer Fernando Romero (1988), who also mentioned that these words were heard in an old song (p. 236). In Palo Monte Mayombe, a Kongo religion originally from Cuba, the ceremonial greeting among *paleros* is "Sala maleku, maleku nsala," also rendered as "sala malekun, malekun sala" (Fuentes Guerra & Schwegler, 2005, pp. 68, 70; Cabrera, 1979, p. 106). Cuban practitioners of Lukumi (Yoruba) divination use the word *alafia* to signify a positive omen, peace, and health (Barnet, 1967, p. 35; Lele, 2003, p. 590). [4] The expression, which had already been adopted by the Yoruba in Nigeria, comes from the Arabic *Al-afia*, meaning happiness, health, peace, absence of problem. In Haitian Vodun the *lwas* Senegal (spirits from Senegal) speak Arabic: they say, "Salam! Salam Malekoum! Salay' salam ma salay." In some *houmfors* (temples), when a lwa Senegal appears, the *houngan* greets him with the words *Salam, salam*, then kneels and raises his hands above his head, as Muslims do when they pray. In addition, the name Allah can sometimes be heard in the prayers (Rigaud, 1952, p. 236, 1958, p. 55; L. Desmangles, personal communication, April 14, 1997). According to a classification proposed by anthropologist Arthur Ramos (1940), the afro-Brazilian religions are made up of Gege, Yoruba, Muslim, Bantu, Indian, Spiritist, and Catholic elements. Out of seven combinations, only two do not contain Islamic features (p. 127). The Muslims are acknowledged in Macumba, which mixes Yoruba, Bantu, Gege, and Native American beliefs. In keeping with their Islamic origin, the *paes de santo* (priests) of the Muslim lines are called *pae alufa* or *tio alufa* from *alfa/alufa*, a Muslim honorific title for learned men and clerics. In Umbanda, the *orisha* Omulu, the Yoruba god of medicine and smallpox, leads the line of the skulls, souls, Indian sorcerers, and Muslims (Ramos, 1940, pp. 88–89, 75).

Not surprisingly then, saraka too made its way into the vocabulary and the practices of non-Muslims. The main manifestation of saraka in the Caribbean is in the form of food offerings to the ancestors, "the old parents." In Trinidad and

---

[3] Some respondents mentioned that their grandfathers had Qur'ans, could recite it, spoke Arabic, gave saraka on Emancipation Day or New Year's Day but were also Christians (Warner-Lewis, 2009, p. 255).

[4] Among the Gullah of Georgia and South Carolina, Alafiya is a female name, see Turner (1969, p. 49).

Tobago, Central Africans called Kongo honor their ancestors with saraka although Islam did not reach their forebears' lands (Warner-Lewis, 2003, p. 148). And so too does the Rada community, which follows the Vodun religion brought by the Fon Abojevi Zahwenu, a liberated African from Benin, who arrived in 1855. The Rada's sacrificial ceremony is called vodunu or saraka (Carr & Beard, 1953, pp. 36–54). In Grenada and Carriacou, people hold a saraka just before the Big Drum Dance or Nation Dance, which was introduced in the early 1700s. The nine nations whose descendants take part in the celebration are the Temne (Sierra Leone), the Shamba and the Igbo (Nigeria), the Kongo (Angola and Congo), the Koromantin (Ghana), the Arada, (Benin), the Banda (Congo), the Mandinka (Senegambia/Mali/Guinea), and the Moko (Nigeria and Cameroon). These are considered the founding communities of the islands' Black population (Simpson, 1978, pp. 102–103; McDaniel, 2002, pp. 127–139). Only two of these ethnic groups were Muslim in West Africa, the Mandinka and the Temne. The Mandinka (as well as Susu and Soninke from Guinea) brought Islam to the Temne in northern and Central Sierra Leone starting in the late 18th century (Skinner, 1978, pp. 32–62).

During the Big Drum Dance, each nation is introduced with a particular song, and Arabic vocabulary and Islamic practices can be detected in some. The Mandinka song goes "Ay laylay la la yay Ay lay lay la … Mandingo ce veni weh" (Biddeau, 2018). The first part is reminiscent of *La ila ila la*; the second, in French Creole, means "Mandingo, come and see." In Carriacou a Koromantin song concludes with *salamani-o*, which means "we greet you" (McDaniel, 1998, pp. 47–48). The expression may derive from *assalamu aleikum*. Another Koromantin song goes "Anancy-o, Sari Baba." In her study of the Nation Dance in Carriacou, McDaniel (1998) proposes two explanations for *sari baba*, both come from the Hausa: "people who have persistent back luck" or "the father's protection" (p. 47).[5] There is still another possible explanation for the expression. *Sari*, in Manding languages, Yoruba, and Hausa is a gruel made of cereal and milk that people eat, in particular, early in the morning during Ramadan. The word comes from the Arabic *sahur*, the predawn sweet dish eaten in particular during the annual fast. In several West African languages *baba* is a term of respect for a father or an older man. In the Caribbean, the word retained this meaning and is used to designate a father, grandfather, or senior member of a household. *Sari baba* could thus refer to giving an elder a dish specific to the Muslims. There is at least another retention of the word sari among people who gave saraka in the Americas: in Gullah sari is "boiled rice pounded" (Turner, 1969, p. 200).

---

[5] *Sai'baba*= Hausa word for people who have consistent bad luck; or *tsari baba* = Hausa for "the father's protection" or "the ultimate protection."

Whatever the etymology of the expression, “sari baba” is likely linked to the Muslims.

As its name indicates the Big Drum Dance is always associated with drumming. An 1839 description of sadaqa in Sierra Leone shows that this was not an innovation. In the Muslim town of Medina, the giving of alms in honor of a dead man, in the presence of “many Muslim chiefs,” included the sacrifice of 80 bullocks and other animals, as well as drumming. Another “satakah [sic] was perform[ed] at Robumsar for a child accidentally shot in the bush; and the travelers were much annoyed with the noise of tom-toming” (Clarke, 1846, pp. 169, 170, 176). During the Caribbean saraka, the community offers food—including sacrificed animals such as goats—and beverages to the ancestors to thank them for their past blessings and to ask for their continuous support. After they receive their share, the food is distributed to the children and, lastly, to the adults. Large communal saraka are held once a year but, on a personal or familial level, a saraka can be offered whenever needed, including to ask for the prompt recovery of a sick loved one, as thanks for a positive event, before a wedding, or after a death. Although it is not mentioned in the Qur’an or the Hadith, it is traditional among several Muslim populations to give sadaqa on the 40th day after a death. Family, neighbors, and friends recite the Qur’an and give alms, including food, to the poor and the needy. Similarly, saraka in the Caribbean is often held on the 40th day after a person’s death (Herskovits & Herskovits, 1947, pp. 151–152).

In Nigeria, non-Muslim Yoruba call saraka or *saraa* the offerings to their ancestors, having borrowed the word from the Muslims. They kept this tradition in the Caribbean “to placate and honor the ancestral dead as a means to ensuring material good fortune and psychic wholeness for the coming year” (Warner-Lewis, 1997, pp. 43–44). Nevertheless, Yoruba did not introduce saraka to the islands; their absence from the Nation Dance shows they were not among the first “importers” of the tradition. Actually, in Grenada, according to anthropologist Michael G. Smith (1965), the Nation Dance went through a decline after over 1,000 Yoruba indentured workers brought to the island in 1849 introduced *shango* (p. 34; Simpson, 1978, p. 82).

After emancipation was declared in 1834 but enacted only in 1838, migrant workers from Grenada, Carriacou, and other Grenadine Islands introduced the Nation Dance to Trinidad. However, saraka had been offered there long before by the well-organized Muslim community. The same is likely true concerning the Mandinka and Temne of Carriacou and other Grenadine islands. In both cases, Muslims might have given alms to their non-Muslim companions following the Quranic injunction that sadaqa may be given to anybody: “It is not for you to guide them to the right path. But Allah guides to the right path whom he pleaseth. Whatever of good ye give benefits your own souls, and ye shall only do so seeking the 'Face' of Allah" (2:272). The Muslims' saraka may have made a lasting impression on non-Muslims who borrowed the practice and the word, using them for their own purposes. The cooptation of saraka by non-Muslims started in Africa, as seen with the Yoruba or the non-Muslim Bambara of Mali who call the offerings to their deities sadaqa because they attribute special potency to this word (Sanneh, 1989, p. 207).

Today Saraka is a thanksgiving event honoring African ancestors held on the Friday after Easter Monday. In Christianity this day is known as Easter Friday or Bright Friday. Yet this familiar holy day is not mentioned by name when announcements for or writings about Saraka are concerned. The terminology "Friday after Easter Monday" is commonly used. One may wonder if Friday might in fact not be related to Christianity but could instead be a forgotten reference to the Muslim day of worship, when giving sadaqa brings double spiritual rewards. It is indeed most likely that the early Muslims who brought saraka to the Americas gave alms especially on that day.

Bright Philanthropists

During slavery, the Muslims' saraka offered for protection from evil and afflictions can be seen as an affirmation that despite enslavers' extraordinary power, through their religious practices the faithful could influence their present and future. For non-Muslims in the Caribbean saraka continues to be an expression of agency. It is a link to the past since it celebrates the ancestors, but the past is linked to the present and the future because the "old parents" are asked for protection, good fortune, and approval of future actions. Power and authority, in other words, lie not with outsiders, but with the family and the community.

In Brazil, Trinidad, and perhaps elsewhere, the freeing of coreligionists through zakat was the embodiment of collective agency. There is a clear distinction between self-emancipation on an individual or familial basis and emancipation through the efforts of a group. The latter is based on solidarity and altruism; it is achieved through the self-sacrifice of individuals for the welfare of other men and women and the well-being and improvement of the community. It is what the Quaker missionaries who praised Samba Makumba of Senegal and Trinidad understood as they called him "one of the brightest philanthropists of the age":

> When we consider the humble sphere in which he has moved, and the limited means at his command for accomplishing a benevolent scheme which had for its object the emancipation of all his countrymen in captivity (the Mandingo slaves),

> and contemplate the success which has attended the labors of Samba and his coadjutors, this brief account of him will be esteemed worthy of accord. (Truman et al., 1844, p. 112)

Beyond these individuals, the distinction also applies to unknown men and women who, in the direst circumstances, nurtured and strengthened their communities through piety, solidarity, and generosity.

References

Barnet, M. (1967). *Esclave à Cuba*. Gallimard.

Biddeau, J. P. (2018). *A study of saraka songs and rhythms in Trinidad*. https://uwispace.sta.uwi.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2139/46184/BiddeauJ_HUMN3099_2017_UWISTA.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Burnley, W. H. (1984). *Observations on the present conditions of the Island of Trinidad, and the actual state of the experiment of Negro emancipation*. Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman.

Cabrera, L. (1979). *Reglas de Congo: Palo Monte Mayombe*. Peninsular Printing.

Callcott, G. (1954, January). Omar ibn Seid, a slave who wrote an autobiography in Arabic. *The Journal of Negro History, 39*(1), 58–63

Campbell, C. (1975–1976). John Mohammed Bath and the free Mandingos in Trinidad: The question of their repatriation to Africa 1831–38. *Journal of African Studies, 2*(4), 467–495.

Carmichael, G. (1961). *The History of the West Indian Islands of Trinidad and Tobago 1498–1900*. Alvin Redman.

Carr, A. T., & Beard, E. (1953). A Rada community in Trinidad. *Caribbean Quarterly, 3*(1), 36–54.

Clarke, R. (1846). *Sierra Leone: Description of the manners and customs of the liberated Africans*. James Ridgeway.

Conrad, G. B. (1901, May). Reminiscences of a southern woman. *The Southern Workman, 30*(5), 252–257.

Crum, M. (1968). *Gullah, Negro life in the Carolina Sea Islands*. Negro Universities Press.

Curtin, P. D. (1967). Ayuba Suleiman Diallo of Bundu. In P. D. Curtin (Ed.), *Africa remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the era of the slave trade* (pp. 17–59). University of Wisconsin Press.

Debien, G. (1974). *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises.* Société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe.

de Rio, J. (1904). As religiões no Rio. *Gazeta de noticias*.

Diouf, S. A. (2013). *Servants of Allah: African Muslims enslaved in the Americas.* New York University Press. (Original work published 1998)

Etienne, I. (1909). La secte musulmane des Malès au Brésil et leur révolte en 1835. *Anthropos, 4*(1), 99–105, 405–415.

Freyre, G. (1986). *The masters and the slaves*. University of California Press.

Fuentes Guerra, J., & Schwegler, A. (2005). *Lengua y ritos del Palo Monte Mayombe: Dioses Cubanos y sus fuentes africanas*. Iberoamericana Vervuert.

George, S. (2020). Diaspora consciousness, historical memory, and culture in liberated African villages in Grenada, 1850s–2014. In R. Anderson & H. B. Lovejoy (Eds.), *Liberated Africans and the abolition of the slave trade, 1807–1896* (pp. 384–407). University of Rochester Press.

Greenberg, J. (1940, July). The decipherment of the 'Ben-Ali Diary': A preliminary statement." *Journal of Negro History, 25*(3), 372–75.

Gurley, R. (1837, July). Secretary's report. *African Repository*, 203.

Fletcher, J., & Kidder, D. W. (1857). *Brazil and the Brazilians, portrayed in historical and descriptive sketches*. Childs and Peterson.

Halliday, A. (1837). *The West Indies: The natural and physical history*. J. W. Parker.

Herskovits, M. J., & Herskovits, F. S. (1947). *Trinidad village*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Higman, B. W. (1995). *Slave populations of the British Caribbean, 1807–1834*. University of the West Indies Press.

Hodgson, W. B. (1844). *Notes on northern Africa*. Wiley and Putnam.

Lele, O. (2003). *The Diloggún: The Orishas, proverbs, sacrifices, and prohibitions of Cuban Santeria*. Destiny Books.

Madden, R. R. (1835). *A Twelvemonth's residence in the West Indies* (Vol. 2). Carey, Lea & Blanchard.

Martin, B. G. (1994). Sapelo Island's Arabic document: The "Bilali Diary" in context. *Georgia Historical Quarterly, 78*(3), 589–601.

McDaniel, L. (1998). *The big drum ritual of Carriacou: Praisesong in rememory of flight*. University Press of Florida.

McDaniel, L. (2002). Musical thoughts on unresolved questions and recent findings in big Drum research. *Black Music Research Journal, 22*(1), 127–139.

Parrish, L. (1992). *Slave songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*. (Original work published 1942)

Plumer, W. (1863, January 8). Meroh, a Native African. *New York Observer*.

Querino, M. R. (1938). *Costumes africanos no Brasil*. Civilização brasileira. (Original work published 1938)

Raeders, G. (1934). *Le Comte de Gobineau au Brésil.* Les nouvelles éditions latines.

Ramos, A. (1940). *O negro brasileiro*. Companhia Editorial Nacional.

Reis, J. J. (1993). *Slave rebellion in Bahia: The Muslim uprising of 1835 in Bahia.* Johns Hopkins University Press.

Rigaud, O. (1952). Vodou haïtien: Quelques notes sur ses réminiscences africaines. *Bulletin de l'IFAN, 27*, 235–238.

Rigaud, O. (1958, February–May). Le rôle du vaudou dans l'indépendance d'Haïti. *Présence africaine, 18–19*, 43–67.

Rodrigues, R. N. (1977). *Os Africanos no Brasil*. Companhia Editora Nacional.

Rodrigues, R. N. (1977). Os negros maometanos no Brasil. *Jornal do Comércio*, 38–70. (Original work published November 2, 1900)

Romero, F. (1988). *Quimba, fa, malambo, ñeque: Afronegrismos en el Perù*. Instituto de Estudios Peruanos.

Sanneh, L. O. (1989). *The Jakhanke Muslim clerics: A religious and historical study of Islam in Senegambia*. University Press of America.

Simpson, G. E. (1978). *Black religions in the New World*. Columbia University Press.

Skinner, D. E. (1978). Mande settlement and the development of Islamic institution in Sierra Leone. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 11*(1), 32–62.

Smith, M. G. (1965). *The plural society in the British West Indies*. University of California Press.

Teas, T. (1941, August). A trading trip to Natchez and New Orleans in 1822. *The Journal of Southern History, 7*, (378-399).

Trotman, D. V., & Lovejoy, P. E. (2004). Community of believers: Trinidad Muslims and the return to Africa, 1810–1850. In P. E. Lovejoy (Ed.), *Slavery on the frontiers of Islam* (pp. 219–231). Markus Wiener.

Truman, G., Jackson, J., & Longstreth, T. B. (1844). *Narrative of a visit to the West Indies, in 1840 and 1841*. Merrihew & Thompson.

Turner, L. D. (1969). *Africanisms in the Gullah dialect*. Arno Press and the New York Times. (Original work published 1949)

Underhill, E. B. (1862). *The West Indies: Their Social and Religious Condition*. Jackson, Walford, and Hodder.

Warner-Lewis, M. (1991). *Guinea's other suns: The African dynamic in Trinidad culture*. The Majority Press.

Warner-Lewis, M. (1997). *Trinidad Yoruba: From mother tongue to memory*. University of the West Indies Press.

Warner-Lewis, M. (2003). *Central Africa in the Caribbean: Transcending time, transforming cultures*. University of the West Indies Press.

Warner-Lewis, M. (2009). Religious constancy and compromise among nineteenth-century Caribbean-based African Muslims. In B. A. Mirzai, I. M. Montana, & P. E. Lovejoy (Eds.), *Slavery*, *Islam and diaspora* (237–267). Africa World Press.

Washington, C. J. (1838). Some account of Mohammedu Sisei: A Mandingo of Nyani-Maru on the Gambia. *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, 8*, 449–454.

WPA. (1986). *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes*. University of Georgia Press. (Original work published 1942)