

Islamic Economics under Colonial Rule: The British Encounter with Muslim Northern Nigeria and Its Enduring Economic Legacies

Kabiru Uba Ibrahim^{1*}, Ibrahim Dahiru Idriss², Abubakar Sadiq Uba³

¹Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, Federal University, Dutse, Jigawa State, Nigeria

²Department of Primary Education Federal College of Education (Technical) Potiskum Yobe State, Nigeria

³National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Kano, Nigeria

Article Info

Article History:

Received 25 May, 2025

Revised 30 July, 2025

Accepted September, 2025

Available online in 05 October, 2025

DOI:10.70095/alamwal.v17i2

Corresponding Author:

Kabiru Uba Ibrahim

Email:

kabiruubaibrahim@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Introduction: *The antagonism against Islam and Muslims, once manifested through the military campaigns of the Crusades, has evolved into more subtle yet pervasive forms in the modern era – most notably, Western imperialism and colonialism. British colonial rule in Northern Nigeria exemplifies this trajectory, as it entailed not only political domination but also efforts to impose Christian missionary ideals and systematically restructure indigenous Islamic institutions. This study investigates the historical, judicial, and economic impacts of British colonialism on Islam in Northern Nigeria, with particular attention to the responses of Muslim communities and the enduring consequences for Islamic governance and identity in the region.*

Methods: *This paper employed historical and analytical methods, drawing on archival materials, Islamic scholarly sources, and relevant secondary literature to assess the colonial encounter. It contextualizes the arrival of Islam in Northern Nigeria and the subsequent British incursion, revealing that the most critical internal weakness of the Sokoto Caliphate was the inability of successive Sultans and Emirs to uphold the reformist ideals that defined its foundation. The dilution of Shari'a authority, particularly during the pre-independence period, led to a decline in public trust due to the appointment of poorly trained and morally compromised judicial officers. At the same time, British colonial economic policies rooted in exploitation and resource extraction undermined indigenous economic structures, marginalized Islamic leadership, and entrenched structural inequalities that continue to affect the region.*

Results: The research highlighted that Muslim resistance to colonial rule, often framed within the Islamic ideal of martyrdom (*shahāda*), played a significant role in preserving religious identity and Islamic culture. This historical resilience forms a critical basis for contemporary efforts toward Islamic institutional renewal. The paper concludes by recommending the revitalization of Islamic reformist principles, the promotion of dual (Islamic and Western) education, the restoration of integrity within *Shari'a* courts, the empowerment of qualified *Ulama*, and an economic reorientation rooted in Islamic ethics.

Conclusion and Suggestion: It further suggests documenting Muslim resistance history and forging strategic partnerships with development actors to advance justice, education, and institutional strengthening within Northern Nigeria.

Keywords: British Colonialism, Islamic Economic System, Muslim Resistance, Socio-Political

Paper type: Research paper

ALAMWAL CC BY license. Copyright © 2025, the author(s)

INTRODUCTION

The advent of British colonialism in Northern Nigeria marked a significant turning point in the historical and socio-political trajectory of Islam in the region. Prior to colonial intervention, Northern Nigeria was predominantly governed by Islamic institutions, most notably under the Sokoto Caliphate, which was founded upon reformist ideals aimed at establishing a just and theocratic society rooted in the *Shari'a* (Muhammad et al., 2020). However, the imposition of British colonial rule in the early 20th century disrupted these indigenous Islamic structures through a combination of indirect rule, missionary activity, and economic exploitation. Colonial policies sought not only to control territory but also to reshape local religious and cultural systems to align with Western imperial interests. Islamic education, jurisprudence, and governance were subordinated to colonial administrative priorities, often marginalizing the authority of traditional Muslim leaders. This interference led to internal challenges within the Muslim community, including the gradual erosion of the reformist spirit that had once guided the region's leadership (Alkali et al., 2023).

Based on the foregoing, this paper examines the historical impact of British colonialism on Islamic institutions in Northern Nigeria, the reactions of Muslim communities to these disruptions, and the long-term implications for religious, judicial, and economic life. By employing historical and analytical research methods, the study aims to uncover the layered dynamics of colonial influence and to propose a framework for Islamic revitalization and institutional reform in contemporary Northern Nigeria (Albaity & Rahman, 2019). It is quite clear that the invasion of Nigeria by the British colonialists was not only for economic and political reasons. It was also meant for religious reasons. Northern Nigeria became the centre of attraction for the British colonialists due to its economic importance. They found that Islam had already been introduced to the area, with the Islamic legal system, the *Sharia*, and *Qur'anic* as well as *Islamiyya* schools already in existence. The British colonialists were surprised to note that Northern Muslims were literate, with their own system of communication and governance, namely the *Sharia Legal System*, which was already in existence (Abdullah, 2017).

The British colonialists and their missionaries found it difficult to penetrate and introduce their missionary ideas in Northern Nigeria, as they encountered significant resistance from the Northern emirs and their subordinates. The British colonialists, therefore, adjusted their approach to indirect rule, aiming to achieve their objectives. The *Qur'an* emphasizes the importance of freedom, justice, and equality. It encourages people to live freely and responsibly, performing their life functions without interference. Therefore,

colonialism, which often involves overpowering weaker nations and the exploitation of one group by another, is totally rejected by the Qur'an (Astuti et al., 2020).

As Allah says in the Qur'an:

And fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors (Qur'an 2:190).

The above verse emphasizes the importance of fighting in self-defence and not transgressing beyond what is necessary. To provide detailed analyses of the above, the paper discusses the concepts and theories of imperialism and the meaning of indirect rule. A brief history of the arrival of Islam in Northern Nigeria, prior to the British colonialists' presence in the area, is highlighted. The arrival of the British to Northern Nigeria, the effects of British imperialism on Islam in Northern Nigeria, and the reaction of Northern Muslims towards British imperialism on Islam are also discussed. Before concluding, some recommendations are provided on how to mitigate the impact of British imperialism on Islam in Northern Nigeria. The primary aim of this study is to critically examine the impact of British colonialism on Islamic institutions, beliefs, and socio-political structures in Northern Nigeria (Djubaedi & Aziz, 2022).

To achieve this, the research is guided by the following specific objectives to analyse the nature and methods of British colonial intervention in Northern Nigeria, particularly in relation to Islamic governance, legal systems, and religious authority. First, to examine the effects of colonial economic and administrative policies on the functionality and independence of Islamic institutions, including *Shari'a* courts and traditional leadership. Second, to investigate the responses and resistance of Muslim leaders and communities to British colonial rule, including armed resistance, intellectual opposition, and cultural resilience. Third, to assess the internal challenges faced by the Sokoto Caliphate and its successors, especially the decline in adherence to Islamic reformist ideals and the weakening of religious leadership. Fourth, evaluate the long-term consequences of colonialism on Muslim identity, religious practice, and socio-economic development in post-colonial Northern Nigeria. Lastly, to propose informed recommendations for the revitalization of Islamic institutions and practices in Northern Nigeria, based on historical lessons, Islamic principles, and contemporary needs (Hawariyuni & Kassim, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Landscape of Islamic Finance

According to Sills (2023), the term "imperialism" is widely used as an emotive term, and more rarely, as a theoretical term to denote the specific forms of aggressive behavior exhibited by certain states against others. The concept primarily refers to attempts to establish or retain formal sovereignty over subordinate political societies, but is also often equated with the exercise of any form of political control or influence by one political community over another. Certain authors have limited imperialism to attempts by states to reverse the existing status quo. Imperialist policies are those that aim to acquire new power dynamics through imperialism over others, but not those that seek to maintain an existing empire, which others refer to as static imperialism (Widarjono et al., 2022).

Theories of Imperialism

Muhammad (2023) in a paper titled "Colonial Domination", described the theories of imperialism as social causes (nationalism and religion). Some scholars have referred to imperialism as the projection of nationalism beyond Europe's boundaries. The argument is that during the 18th and 19th centuries, the concepts of democracy and nationalism developed in Europe and North America. This had created a feeling among some people that they belonged to a superior race and should, therefore, rule and dominate weaker nations and races. Another social cause associated with imperialism was the dissemination of religious propaganda and the zeal for missionary work. Political cause (empire building). The work of Gallagher and Robinson, "Africa and the Victorians," could be considered as a political explanation for the phenomena. According to them, the cause of imperialism could be found

in Africa. Britain occupied Egypt in 1882 to protect their interests in the Suez Canal, which was an increasingly important link in its trade route to the East. Economic cause (economic exploitation). The need for colonies arose partly as a result of the development of capitalism in Western Europe. Thus, it is generally accepted that various European powers came to Africa in search of raw materials for their industries. A safe place to invest their capital and derive super profits. A market to sell their manufactured goods (Shalihah & Cahyo, 2020).

The Concept of Indirect Rule

According to Muhammad (2023), the system of Indirect Rule was expounded by Lord Lugard and contained in a book he published at the beginning of the twentieth century, *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*. He defined the system as a rule through the native chiefs who are regarded as an integral part of the machinery of government with well-defined powers and functions recognized by the government and by law, and not dependent on the caprice of an executive officer. Indirect rule has been generally viewed as a form of governance where the chiefs govern their people not as independent rulers, but rather as dependent ones.

According to Clarke (2023), a Muslim community existed in Kano by the middle of the 14th century, prior to the arrival of British colonialists in the area. The Chronicle states that in Yaji's time, the Wangarawa came from Melle (Mali), bringing the Muslim religion. Their leader was Abdurrahman Zaite. They were about forty. Another document, again from the 17th century, stated that the Wangara brought Islam to Kano not in the reign of Yaji (1349-1885 A.D.), but some one hundred years later, in the reign of Muhammad Rumfa (1443-1499 A.D.). One cannot, therefore, give a definite date for the arrival of Islam in Kano. It is possible, however, that Muslim clerics and traders from Mali did visit and even establish a Muslim settlement in Kano during the second half of the 14th century. In the second half of the 15th century, during the reign of Muhammad Rumfa (1463 - 1499AD), the fortunes of Islam changed for the better, increasing the number of Muslim traders and scholars, including al-Maghili, who settled in or visited Kano.

Islam in Katsina, Zaria and Gobir

According to Clarke (2023), a tradition holds that a group of Wangarawa Muslim clerics arrived in Katsina and Kano in the mid-14th century. Al-Maghili also paid a visit to Katsina in 1493 A.D. Four years later, another Muslim scholar, Makhluf Ali, who, like al-Maghili, had worked in Kano, came to Katsina to teach Islamic Sciences. Muhammad Keran (1466–1493 A.D.) is credited with being the first authentic Muslim ruler of Katsina. He, according to tradition, overthrew the Durbawa Dynasty, the central point of traditional religion. Then Muhammad Keran, perhaps influenced and supported by al-Maghili and the Muslim clerics and traders, attempted to introduce Islamic Law on a large scale.

Clarke further stated that, unlike Kano and Katsina, it would seem that Zaria or Zazzau did not have a Muslim dynasty until the 17th century. Recent research on the early history of Zaria suggests that Muhammad Rabbo, believed by some historians to have ruled Zaria for a period during the second half of the 16th century, did not reign until some 200 years later, that is, from 1641 to 1658 A.D. It is not, however, being suggested that there were no Muslims present in the Zaria region prior to the 17th century. Gobir, situated to the north of Zaria and Katsina, was the home of Usman Dan Fodio. There is considerable speculation about when and where the state of Gobir emerged. The view has been advanced that Gobir began as a state in the 12th or 13th century. There is also very little solid evidence concerning the beginning of Islam in Gobir. Muslim traders likely visited and settled in the territory during the 15th and 16th centuries, and possibly by the 16th century, some of the rulers of Gobir were Muslim.

Islam in Kanem Borno

According to Ferguson (2023), the Empire of Kanem-Borno had contact with Islam prior to the creation of the Mali state in the thirteenth century. At that period, some of the Kanem rulers had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Bare (2020) mentioned in his submission

that the King of Kanem, who was called Mai or Mai Gelmi, was the first King to embrace Islam in the hands of an Islamic Scholar Hamid Muhammed, in the year 1084C. Doi (2023) explained that the Chad region played an important role in West African history. Al Bakri stated that people existed in Kanem in the year 1068, who had descended from Umayyad adherents and had migrated to the south to escape the mishandlings of the Abbasid Khalifs when they came to power in 750. This incident made the people of Kanem and Bornu stay and live together with the Umayyad Arab Muslims. The spread of Islamic traditions and their deep penetration in this area can be attributed to the coming of the Umayyads.

The Arrival of the British Colonialists in the Northern Nigeria

According to Dudley (2023), on January 1, 1900, the British flag was formally unfurled over Northern Nigeria, with Sir (later Lord) F.B. Lugard as the first Chief Commissioner. Local disturbances in Kontagora in 1901 led to its capture that year, the Emir fleeing northwards and harassing the outlying districts of Zaria. An appeal from the Emir of Zaria to Lugard provided Lugard with the opportunity to establish British rule in Zaria in 1902, the same year Bauchi was occupied. The rejection of friendly overtures from Lugard by the Sultan of Sokoto made conflict between the two inevitable, but the first target was Kano, which fell to the British early in 1903. Later in the year, Sokoto was also brought under British rule. Thus, by 1904, practically the whole of Northern Nigeria was under British control.

The Effects of British Colonialism on Islam and Islamic Education in Northern Nigeria

It is very important to discuss briefly the Jihad of Shehu Usmanu Dan Fodio before analysing the British Colonialism on Islam in Northern Nigeria. Usman (2023) mentioned in his submission that the Islamic Empire rose in 1804 and fell in 903. The leader of the Jihad was Shehu Usmanu Dan Fodio, who began his career as a teacher and preacher. The Sokoto Jihad was a revolutionary movement within a traditionally Muslim society. It was revolutionary in ideology, organization, and intellectual and emotional appeal. According to Kani et al. (2023), European merchants, notably the English, had tried to secure favourable commercial terms from the Caliphate. It was this trading link that the British exploited to the full when they decided to take over control. They used force in the end. Sultan Attahiru was defeated by the superior British weapons in March 1903.

Alkali et al. (2023) noted that when the British conquest was largely complete and Lugard assumed office as High Commissioner for Northern Nigeria, he officially adopted the policy of Indirect Rule, which involved ruling through the native chiefs. This policy enabled the British to partly rule the country through proxy. With the British now as the undisputed rulers of Northern Nigeria, the theoretical basis of the supremacy of the Sharia ceased to be tenable. The new basis of authority for any action – legislative, executive, or judicial- was now the British laws, as promulgated by the new rulers. The British government, by the Northern Nigeria Order in Council 1899, empowered its chief representative, Lord Lugard, to legislate by proclamation. Thus, the application of the *Sharia* depended entirely on the laws (the proclamations) enacted by the new British rulers. The British, however, having adopted the policy of indirect rule, allowed all the existing institutions of the state and the existing machinery of government in the emirates to continue functioning subject to the conditions imposed by the colonial administration.

The specific provisions of the proclamation were as follows: the resident was empowered to establish, in his province, by warrant under his hand, such native courts as he deemed fit. However, the Courts were to be established with the consent of the Emir or head of each native authority and with the approval of the High Commissioner. The courts administer the native laws and customs prevailing in the area of jurisdiction of each court, applying them in both civil and criminal matters. They could not inflict the penalty of death. It is worth noting that native law and custom, as well as Muslim law, known as the *Sharia*, are included. The Emir or chief was to appoint the judges, subject to the president's approval. Where there was no Emir or chief, the resident appointed the judges. The resident has the power to enter the courts and inspect them. He could transfer a case from one court to another

and review the findings of a court, ordering a retrial or modifying its sentence. The practice and procedure of the courts were to be governed by native law and custom, subject to the rules that might be made by the High Commissioner.

As far as the Sharia was concerned, the provisions brought fundamental changes. First, the fact that the courts were established by the British officers who also had the powers of control and supervision, and, secondly, the ouster of the application of punishments for *Zina* and burglary. According to Jamiu (2022), Lugard adopted the Indirect rule system in the educational sector as he did in the political sphere. He used the missionaries and supported them in mounting strategies that would attract the Muslims, especially the sons of the emirs, to be enrolled in missionary schools where some Islamic subjects and Western education, including Christianity, are taught. The government schools were established and maintained with the funds. The colonial government neglected and refused to support Islamic Schools, while, on the other hand, missionary schools were given government grants and educational facilities to promote Christian evangelism. According to Doi (2023), before the British came to the North, it was clear that one good effect of the very nature of training was still very conspicuous. The Islamic spirit of respecting teachers and elders, as well as cooperation in the classroom, was commonly observed in traditional institutions. The discipline in these old *Madaris* is really praiseworthy. The rudiments of the teachings of the Hadith and the Glorious Qur'an are practiced both by teachers and pupils at least as far as their good behaviour is concerned.

The following can be witnessed after the introduction of the British education system in Northern Nigeria. The modern educational system, with its numerous benefits, has also introduced the present-day Western European outlook on life, which is reflected in both teachers and their pupils in their attire, behavior, and even in their daily conversations. Recently, Barewa College students in Zaria, as well as those of the Federal Government College, Kaduna, went on strike, stoned the principals' and teachers' houses, looted some school property, and even manhandled some of their teachers. The introduction of missionary schools affected Islamic education in Northern Nigeria, as some parents sent their children to these schools, where they were taught Western education and Christianity. This led the children to lose interest in learning Islamic Education. Doi further stated that the introduction of indirect rule by the British caused significant damage to the *shari'a* legal system. Our Emirs and leaders were deceived by the British, thereby giving them the chance to exploit their subordinates and introduce their missionary ideas. In return, they gave the Emirs arms, ammunition, and political positions.

Economic Policies of Colonialism and Its Impact in Northern Nigeria: Setback and Exploitation

The British colonial administration in Northern Nigeria enforced economic policies that were largely extractive and exploitative, prioritizing the interests of the British Empire over the needs of the local population. These policies undermined indigenous economic systems, disrupted traditional production methods, and weakened local institutions, ultimately causing long-lasting economic damage to the region. The taxation and revenue system, the imposition of direct taxes, such as hut and cattle taxes, was a significant colonial economic measure. Introduced to generate revenue and integrate local economies into the global capitalist system (Lugard, 2023), these taxes compelled rural communities to abandon their traditional livelihoods and participate in colonial agricultural or labor markets, often under unfavorable conditions (Watts, 2023).

Infrastructure for extraction, not development, colonial infrastructure (such as railways and roads) was primarily designed to facilitate the extraction and transportation of raw materials, including groundnuts, hides, and cotton, from the north to coastal ports for export (Ake, 2023). Little investment was made in productive infrastructure, such as local industry, education, or healthcare, that could benefit indigenous populations. This extractive infrastructure entrenched regional inequality and hindered the north's post-colonial economic competitiveness. Agricultural exploitation and cash crop economy. The British imposed a

mono-crop system in parts of Northern Nigeria, especially with the promotion of groundnut pyramids in Kano and other regions. While this initially generated some wealth, it ultimately led to environmental degradation, market volatility, and reduced food security. However, the focus on cash crops disrupted local agricultural practices, reduced food production, and increased poverty among rural communities (Sadiq et al., 2020; Rabe & Dahiru, 2023).

Labor exploitation and wage inequality were institutionalized through colonial economic policies, which utilized cheap labor from the north to support administrative centers in the south and British-owned commercial enterprises. Northern Nigerian workers were subjected to discriminatory wage structures and poor working conditions (Falola & Heaton, 2023). This labour policy reinforced regional economic disparities and led to long-term structural underdevelopment. Marginalization of indigenous institutions, economic decisions were often made without consulting traditional Muslim authorities, reducing their economic influence and autonomy. British indirect rule, while preserving emirs and traditional structures in form, economically disempowered them by controlling resources, trade routes, and taxing powers (Crowder, 1968). This disconnection from economic authority weakened Islamic institutions' ability to foster indigenous economic development. The reaction of some northern Nigerian Muslims towards British colonialism on Islam. Islamic teachings promote justice, compassion, and kindness towards all people.

The Qur'an commands Muslims to stand up against oppression and tyranny and to depend on the week. Allah says in the Qur'an:

And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know (but) whom Allah knows. (Qur'an 8:60).

The above verse encourages Muslims to prepare for defence and to stand up against enemies, but does not promote aggression or colonialism. According to Clarke (2023), the British policy towards Islam in Northern Nigeria is regarded by some as having been very tolerant, sympathetic, and even protectionist. But it did not appear that way to all Muslims in northern Nigeria. Some saw it as a real defeat of Islam. The Hausa trader in Kano, for instance, who in 1941 expressed his disapproval in a book he wrote called "Evidence of the Mahdi," was only one of those who believed that the Indirect Rule system undermined the authority of the Emirs. He said Emirs had no power. The Sultan of Sokoto, Abdurrahman (1891-1902), had no intention of submitting to Lugard and wrote to inform him that there could only be war between the Sokoto Caliphate and the British. The Sultan's overriding concern was the protection and defence of Islam. The British reacted by first attacking and conquering Kano and then Sokoto in March 1903. In 1942, Western education schools at Mai Wurno were on the verge of closure due to a scarcity of students. Alkali et al. (2023) disclose that the school children and, to some extent, the teachers were subjected to severe psychological pressure, which many of them could not stand up to in the end.

They were portrayed as unbelievers. Kani et al. (2023) held the view that Muslims did not offer any serious military resistance against the colonial administration. They had, however, continued their resistance in other sectors, such as education and culture, protecting their religion and dignity. They expressed a common stand that whoever identified with any aspect of the Euro/Christian culture was either a non-Muslim or had committed a grave sin and must repent before he could be fully accepted into the fold. The educated girls found no alternative other than to marry those who had not received any form of Western education or those below their social class. However, it has been observed that Muslims were quick to realize the dangers of the so-called secularization of schools. To avert that danger, Muslim parents insisted that their children receive Islamic Education after their return home or during holidays if they were attending a boarding school. According to Fika (1978), the first challenge for Lugard after assuming power as high commissioner of the protectorate in 1900 was the lack of full support from Sokoto. All attempts to convince Sokoto to surrender its sovereign powers peacefully prove abortive. In May 1902, the Caliph informed Lugard that there was no compromise between them; only war could be the outcome. Lugard also received reports that Kano is preparing to fight the British administration. Aliyu, the ruler of Kano, had directed that whoever among the British who entered the metropolis would be killed. With this development,

the British mobilised troops from Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, Lagos, and southern Nigeria to serve as reinforcement for northern Nigeria and to possibly crush any rebellion from the side of northern Muslims.

The British Conquest of Kano

Fika further stated that the British forces, under the command of Colonel Moreland, moved from Zaria to Kano on January 29, 1903. They moved through Bebeji and killed the emir together with his lieutenants. Colonel Moreland captured Kano in the absence of Emir Aliyu Babba, who had travelled to Sokoto. Emir Aliyu was officially deposed by the British and deserted his forces on 24th February 1903. Sulaiman (2022) explained in his submission that Muslims continued to resist the British colonialists' efforts to conquer the north and the caliphate. The Caliph Sultan At-Tahiru came out with his supporters to lead a battle against the colonialists on March 15, 1903.

They did their best to defend the capital of Sokoto, but they were ultimately defeated. The caliph and his subordinates decided to migrate eastwards with the remaining surviving soldiers to prepare well for the future attacks from the British. The final battle between the British colonialists and Caliph At-Tahiru's forces took place in Burmi, approximately 600 miles from Sokoto, on July 27, 1903. While the fighting was going on, Attahiru was in the mosque praying, and he came out when he heard that the gates of the city were crushed. His intention was not to fight but to sacrifice his life and consider his death as his fate. He was killed together with his two sons and ninety of his followers. From another vantage, Usman (2013) mentioned in his work that Emir of Hadejia Muhammadu Haru (1885-1906) lost his life in a fierce battle with the British forces in his attempts to destabilize the British imperialists. The battle resulted in heavy casualties on the Hadejia side.

Use of literature as an alternative for confrontation against British colonialism by muslim scholars in Northern Nigeria. Usman (2013) explained that despite the defeat of the Muslims by the British colonialists in a fierce battle that resulted in the killing of caliph Attahiru I and some of his followers, the northern Muslims did not surrender their resistance completely. They resolved to use literature as an alternative instrument to resist colonialism in the north. The contents of their writings clearly expose the negative impact of colonialism on Muslim morality. The poems remind the Muslims to stick to Islam and preserve their faith to shun vices and the Christian way of life. One of the poems explains the brilliant attitude of Emir Muhammad Haru of Hadejia in his fight against the British colonialists. His fearless approach to the British colonialist with their superior weapons is ceremoniously related in the poem. Emir Haru was praised and regarded as a martyr in the poem due to his defiance of the authorities. Some of the poems written by the Islamic scholars portrayed the negative consequences of British colonialism, and the British were described in the poems as transgressors, corrupt and unjust leaders. Muslims were urged in the poems to remain steadfast in obeying Allah and His Prophet (SAW).

Another poem with a radical approach was written by Ibrahim Liman (d. c. 1974/75), who served as the chief Imam of Tsafe town in Zamfara State. In his poem, he condemned the modernization program of the late Northern Premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello Sardauna of Sokoto, because he viewed it as colonial propaganda. The Imam was deposed in 1962 because of his alleged opposition to the regional government. The Imam's poem also highlighted his strong criticism of colonialism because of its intention to harm Islam and Muslims morally and spiritually. Usman further stated that Abubakar Maikaturu (1897-1947) was famous for writing anti-colonial poems. He is a descendant of Usman Dan Fodio. His father was Ibrahim Maigandi, the son of Caliph Attahiru, who was deposed in 1903, despite relying on his religion and the integrity of his people. His poems directly accused and rejected British policies. Another scholar, Maharazu from Sokoto, wrote and criticized colonial imperialist policies in some of his poems, as he openly condemns the scrapping of the *Sharia* legal system and its replacement with British laws.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory approach. This research employed a qualitative, historical, and analytical approach, combining both primary and secondary sources to examine the impact of British colonialism on Islam in Northern Nigeria. A historical analysis was employed to trace the evolution of Islamic institutions from the pre-colonial Sokoto Caliphate through the colonial period to the post-independence era. Key historical events, such as the British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate, the introduction of indirect rule, and the restructuring of *Shari'a* courts, are analysed to understand their implications.

The study critically examines colonial policies and Muslim reactions by interpreting legal reforms, missionary records, colonial administrative reports, and resistance narratives. Special focus was given to the transformation of religious leadership, education, and judicial authority during and after colonization. Primary sources included colonial government records, legal documents, historical manuscripts, Islamic legal texts, and archival materials. Secondary sources included scholarly books, journal articles, dissertations, and other academic works relevant to the history of Islam, colonialism, and Northern Nigeria. The study focused primarily on Northern Nigeria, particularly areas formerly under the Sokoto Caliphate. It emphasized the intersection of religion, politics, and colonial power, with less focus on regions outside British influence or non-Muslim areas.

Research Design

The findings of this research revealed critical insights into the historical and contemporary consequences of British colonialism on Islamic structures, socio-political organization, and religious identity in Northern Nigeria. Through the application of historical and analytical methods, several key results have emerged regarding the erosion of Islamic Political Authority. British indirect rule significantly altered the power dynamics of the Sokoto Caliphate by co-opting Emirs and subordinating Islamic governance to colonial administrative priorities. This led to the gradual secularization of authority, weakening the autonomy of Islamic political structures. Distortion of *Shari'a* and Legal Institutions, the colonial administration maintained *Shari'a* courts in form but redefined their scope and function. Civil and criminal matters were selectively removed from Islamic jurisdiction, resulting in a marginalized legal system that lost public trust, particularly during the pre-independence period. Economic Disenfranchisement of Muslim Communities.

The imposition of taxation, cash crop systems, and labour exploitation disrupted traditional Islamic economic systems. These policies favoured the economic interests of the colonial administration while creating long-term underdevelopment in Northern Nigeria. Despite colonial repression, Northern Nigerian Muslims mounted spiritual, intellectual, and physical resistance. The Islamic concept of jihad and martyrdom played a central role in inspiring defiance and preserving cultural and religious identity. Decline of Islamic reformist spirit: successive leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate failed to maintain the moral and reformist zeal of its founders. This leadership decline, particularly in the pre-independence era, contributed to the loss of credibility in Islamic judicial and political institutions. Continuing relevance of colonial legacies. Structural inequalities, educational disparities, and weakened Islamic governance institutions persist in post-colonial Northern Nigeria, directly linked to colonial disruptions.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Comparative Analysis of the Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial Islamic Institutions

To appreciate the depth of colonial impact, a comparative analysis of Islamic institutions across three historical periods, pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial, is necessary: *Pre-colonial* period (sokoto caliphate era). governance centred on Islamic reform, justice, and piety. Leaders were chosen based on knowledge, spiritual uprightness, and

commitment to *shari'a*. The legal system, *Shari'a*, was fully operational and respected. Judges (*qadis*) were drawn from the ranks of learned and devout *Ulama*. Economic Islamic economic principles, such as *zakat*, local trade ethics, and community ownership, were observed. Indigenous economic autonomy thrived. Education, Qur'anic and Islamic scholarship were integral to society. Literacy in Arabic was widespread among the elite and scholars. During the colonial period of governance, traditional Islamic leadership was preserved under indirect rule but stripped of genuine authority. Emirs became administrative agents for colonial interests. The British legal system redefined *shari'a* law and limited its scope, especially in criminal matters. Non-Islamic legal codes were introduced and privileged. Economic colonial policies prioritized extraction, taxation, and cash-crop production, undermining local systems and impoverishing rural Muslim communities. Western education was promoted, often with the influence of Christian missionaries. Islamic education was sidelined and received minimal support.

Governance, while some regions re-established *Shari'a*-based structures, these often lack full autonomy and face political interference. Legal System: *Shari'a* courts have been revived in parts of Northern Nigeria but continue to grapple with limited jurisdiction and diminished public confidence. Economic legacies of colonial economic policy remain, including infrastructural gaps, educational imbalance, and regional poverty. Education dual educational systems exist, but integration remains weak. The gap between Islamic and Western education persists, affecting socio-economic mobility. Key summaries of the comparative insights. The pre-colonial era was marked by religious authenticity and institutional integrity rooted in Islamic principles. The colonial period introduced systemic disruption, subjugating Islamic institutions to foreign domination and secular interests. The post-colonial era, though offering space for revival, still struggles with the colonial residues that affect governance, education, and justice.

To address the historical legacies of colonialism and revitalize Islamic institutions in Northern Nigeria, this paper offered the following recommendations. Reviving the spirit of Islamic reform, there is a need to reconnect with the reformist ethos of the Sokoto Caliphate. Emphasis should be placed on promoting justice, accountability, and moral leadership within Islamic governance structures, particularly the *Shari'a* courts. Integrating Islamic and Western education, parents and communities should ensure that children receive both a sound Islamic education and a quality Western education. This dual approach is essential for developing well-rounded individuals who can preserve religious identity while contributing to national and global development. Empowering qualified Islamic scholars who are learned, pious, and credible *Ulama* should be appointed to serve in *Shari'a* courts. Proper training and continuous professional development in both classical Islamic jurisprudence and contemporary legal systems should be institutionalized. Respecting teachers and elders, Islamic cultural values such as reverence for teachers, scholars, and elders should be reinforced across educational and traditional institutions, as a means of moral and spiritual guidance for the younger generation.

Strengthening *shari'a* practice and administration, *shari'a* law should be administered based on authentic Islamic teachings derived from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Its practice should be shielded from political manipulation and aligned with the principles of justice and equity. Reforming economic policies with Islamic ethics necessitates revisiting economic planning and policymaking in Northern Nigeria, utilizing Islamic ethical principles. Policies should promote self-reliance, social justice, and the equitable distribution of resources, particularly among historically disadvantaged communities. Documenting and teaching Islamic resistance history: The historical narratives of Muslim resistance against colonial domination should be documented, preserved, and taught in schools to ensure a comprehensive understanding of this crucial aspect of Islamic history. This will serve to inspire future generations and reinforce pride in Islamic heritage and identity. Building alliances with development partners, Muslim institutions, and communities should establish constructive partnerships with national and international development actors to strengthen Islamic education, support judicial reform, and enhance socio-economic well-being through faith-informed development models.

Early British Encounters with Islamic Economic Structures in Northern Nigeria

When the British colonized Northern Nigeria in the early 20th century, they encountered a socio-economic order deeply rooted in Islamic law (*Sharia*) and institutions such as the Baitul Mal, *zakat*, *waqf*, and the role of *ulama* in wealth distribution. Rather than dismantling the entire system, the British adapted certain aspects to maintain political stability. The system of *indirect rule* allowed Emirs and Islamic institutions to remain functional, albeit under colonial oversight. As a result, Islamic economic structures survived, but in a modified form that primarily served colonial interests, particularly in taxation and trade regulation. Before colonial rule, *zakat* and Islamic fiscal mechanisms were the primary instruments for redistribution of wealth. The British, however, introduced the poll tax and modern fiscal administration aimed at financing colonial governance. This gradually undermined the central role of *zakat* as a social justice mechanism, replacing it with a more extractive taxation model. This created a dual economic reality: on the one hand, Muslim communities continued to practice *zakat* and *waqf*, but on the other, they were compelled to meet colonial tax obligations (Riadi, 2020).

Northern Nigeria's economy was largely agrarian, centered on groundnuts, cotton, and grains, traditionally managed under Islamic commercial principles such as the prohibition of *riba* and fair distribution of agricultural output. The British integrated this economy into global markets, with groundnuts becoming the primary export commodity. While this boosted trade volume, the export-oriented economy disrupted local market balances and weakened the role of Islamic principles in trade and social justice, as colonial profit motives overshadowed indigenous economic ethics. Another enduring legacy was the tension between traditional Islamic schools (madrasas) and colonial schools based on Western curricula. Colonial education produced a new elite integrated into capitalist systems, while Islamic education remained a cultural stronghold, preserving *Sharia*-based values. This divergence created a socio-economic divide that persists, with parts of society integrated into modern capitalist frameworks and others adhering to Islamic economic traditions (Wardani & Al Arif, 2021).

The colonial encounter left enduring effects that continue to shape Nigeria's economic landscape today. Economic dualism in Nigeria sustains a modern capitalist economy alongside Islamic-based practices such as *zakat*, *waqf*, and Islamic finance. Regional disparities in colonial policies positioned Northern Nigeria primarily as a raw material supplier with limited infrastructure investment, leaving the region relatively underdeveloped compared to the South. Revival of Islamic economics, surviving Islamic traditions now underpin the growth of Islamic banking, *takaful* (Islamic insurance), and modern *zakat* institutions in Nigeria. The findings indicate that British colonialism did not completely erase Islamic economics in Northern Nigeria but rather produced a hybrid system: colonial capitalism coexisted with traditional Islamic practices. This hybridization, however, also generated long-term tensions between Islamic ideals of economic justice and the exploitative logics of colonial capitalism. Thus, the colonial legacy continues to shape Nigeria's economic realities manifesting both as persistent development challenges and as opportunities for the revitalization of Islamic economics as a framework for inclusive and equitable growth (Hadziq & Ali, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The effects of British colonialism on Islam in Northern Nigeria were both deep and multidimensional, affecting not only the political and judicial structures but also the economic and cultural landscapes of the region. Although the Sokoto Caliphate had laid a strong foundation for Islamic governance and reform, the post-*jihad* era witnessed a gradual erosion of this legacy. A key failing of the successive Sultans and Emirs was their inability to sustain the reformist ideals that originally energized the establishment of the Caliphate. While colonial authorities did not entirely dismantle the *Shari'a* system, they did subject it to considerable reconfiguration through *indirect rule*, which transformed Islamic institutions into tools of administrative convenience. During the early colonial period, many *Shari'a* judges were respected *Ulama*, known for their learning and piety. However, in the later pre-independence

years, the quality and integrity of judicial authorities declined, contributing to a widespread loss of confidence in Islamic legal institutions – a condition that continues to affect the credibility of *Shari'a* today. Economically, colonialism restructured Northern Nigeria to serve the extractive needs of the British Empire. Policies, such as direct taxation, cash crop enforcement, and exploitative labour systems dismantled indigenous economic autonomy, marginalized local Islamic institutions, and entrenched regional poverty. These structural setbacks, coupled with the undermining of indigenous authority, bred economic inequality and weakened the socio-political agency of Northern Muslim communities in post-colonial Nigeria. However, one must also acknowledge the positive and resilient responses of Northern Nigerian Muslims. The resistance against colonial intrusion, often motivated by the Islamic ideal of martyrdom (*shahada*), served to preserve Islamic identity and values in the face of Christian-European cultural encroachment. The steadfastness of early Muslim leaders and communities has ensured the survival of Islamic traditions that continue to define the region's religious and cultural framework.

REFERENCES

Ake, Claude, A. (2023). Political economy of Africa. Available at: Conference hall-library. Material type: book, Book Format: print, Literary form: Not fiction. Harlow, Longman.

Albaity, M., & Rahman, M. (2019). The intention to use Islamic banking: An exploratory study to measure Islamic financial literacy. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, 14(5), 988–1012. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOEM-05-2018-0218>

Astuti, S. D., Shodikin, A., & Ud-Din, M. (2020). Islamic leadership, Islamic work culture, and employee performance: The mediating role of work motivation and job satisfaction. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 7(11), 1059–1068. <https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2020.vol7.no11.1059>

Alkali, N. et al. (2023). Islam in Africa. Ibadan: Spectrum.

Abdullah, M. A. (2017). Islamic studies in higher education in Indonesia: Challenges, impact and prospects for the world community. *Al-Jami'ah*, 55(2), 391–426. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.391-426>

Bako, S. M. (2023). The impact of christian missionary activities on the rural areas of Kano State. Bayero University, Kano: Un-published M.A thesis.

Bare, U. B., (2020). *Juzur al haara al Islamiyya fi garb afriqiya*. Cairo: Al Amin publishing company.

Clarke, P.B. (2023). West African and Islam. London: Edward Arnold.

Colonialism in Northern Nigeria (1903-1945). Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, PhD Dissertation.

Crowder, M. (2023). *West Africa under colonial rule*. Routledge.

Dudley, B. J. (2023). *Parties and politics in Northern Nigeria*. Routledge.

Djubaedi, D., & Aziz, A. (2022). The value system of pancasila and Islam and their implementation in *Sharia* economics in Indonesia: A conceptual-qualitative approach. *HIKMATUNA: Journal for Integrative Islamic Studies*, 8(2), 134–143. <https://doi.org/10.28918/hikmatuna.v8i2.6323>

Et.al, M. N. A. (2021). A review of maslahah mursalah and maqasid *Shariah* as methods of determining Islamic legal ruling. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT)*, 12(3), 2994–3001. <https://doi.org/10.17762/turcomat.v12i3.1331>

Hadziq, M. F., & Ali, N. (2025). Awareness of Indonesian migrant workers in paying *Zakat*: Case study of Borneo palm oil plantations samudera langkon , marudu , Sabah Malaysia. *JIESBI: Journal of Islamic Economics and Business Ethics*, 2(1), 44–67. <https://doi.org/10.24235/jiesbiv1i3>

Hawariyuni, W., & Hj. Kassim, S. (2019). Proposing an integrated Islamic microfinance model in alleviating poverty and improving the performance of microenterprises in Indonesia. *Journal of Accounting Research, Organization and Economics*, 2(2), 135–154. <https://doi.org/10.24815/jaroe.v2i2.14630>

Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2008). *A history of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press.

Ferguson, D. E., (2023) Nineteenth century hausa land being a description by Imam imoru of the land, economy and society of his People. University of California Los Angeles: Unpublished PhD thesis.

Fika, A. M. (2023). The Kano civil war and British over-rule, 1882-1940. (*No Title*). From Leadership, (2015) “The Last Sultan and the Fall of Sokoto Caliphate” (2). Retrieved on 6-12-2015 <http://leardership.ng/opinions/414126/the-last-sultan-and- the-fall-of-sokoto-caliphate-2>.

Hawariyuni, W. & Kassim, S. (2019). Proposing an integrated Islamic microfinance model in alleviating poverty and improving the performance of microenterprises in Indonesia. *Journal of Accounting Research, Organization and Economics*, 2(2), 135–154. <https://doi.org/10.24815/jaroe.v2i2.14630>

Ibrahim, S., (2022). The Islamic resistance to colonial rule in West Africa: An overview. Centre for Islamic Legal Studies Institute of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

Kani, A. M., et al. (2023). State and society in the Sokoto Caliphate, Sokoto: Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto for Sultan Ibrahim Dasuki Foundation.

Lugard, L. F. J. (2023). *The dual mandate in British tropical Africa*. Routledge.

Muhammad, B. (2022). Colonial Domination. Paper presented on Government at Kano State: College of Arts, Science and Remedial Studies.

Muhammad, N., Alwi, S. F. S., & Muhammad, N. (2020). Credit management in full-fledged Islamic bank and Islamic banking window: Towards achieving Maqasid Al-Shariah. *International Journal of Financial Research*, 11(3), 92–99. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijfr.v11n3p92>

Muhammad, N., Alwi, S. F. S., & Muhammad, N. (2020). Credit management in full-fledged Islamic bank and Islamic banking window: Towards achieving Maqasid Al-Shariah. *International Journal of Financial Research*, 11(3), 92–99. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijfr.v11n3p92>

Rabe, Dahiru. An Overview of the Impact of Export Crops Productions on Colonial Northern Nigeria. Unpublished Article, Department of History and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Arts, Federal University of Dutse-ma.

Riadi, S. (2020). Strategi distribusi *Zakat* dan pemberdayaan mustahik: Studi kasus baznas kota Mataram. *JURNAL SCHEMATA Pascasarjana UIN Mataram*, 9(1), 125–136. <https://doi.org/10.20414/schemata.v9i1.2264>

Shalihah, M., & Cahyo, E. N. (2020). Auction for the establishment of Islamic institution on the perspective of Islamic law and positive law. *Al-Iktisab: Journal of Islamic Economic Law*, 4(1), 2018–2019.

Sadiq, M. S., Singh, I. P., Ahmad, M. M., & Umar, S. M. (2020). Resurrecting Nigeria's groundnut pyramid. *Sri Lanka Journal of Food and Agriculture*, 6(2).

Sills, D. L. (2023). International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, reprint edition volume 7. London: The Macmillan Company Publishers.

Sulaiman, J. (2022). Towards Diffusing Religious Tension in the Polity: Islam and Politics in Nigeria 1903-1983. *Lavgark Investment Ltd., Ilorin, Nigeria*.

Shalihah, M., & Cahyo, E. N. (2020). Auction for the establishment of Islamic institution on the perspective of Islamic law and positive law. *Al-Iktisab: Journal of Islamic Economic Law*, 4(1), 2018–2019.

Umar, M. S. (2023). *Muslim's intellectual responses to British colonialism in northern Nigeria, 1903-1945*. Northwestern University.

Usman, M. T. (2023). *Muslim Scholars of Sokoto Emirate Under British Rule, 1903-1960: A History of Reaction and Compromise in Northern Nigeria \$ H MT Usman*. Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited.

Wakili, H. (2023). The Buhari of Hadejia Revolt, 1848-1863: A Re-Examination. *Kano Studies New Series*, 3(2), 75-87.

Watts, M. J. (2023). *Silent violence: Food, famine, and peasantry in northern Nigeria* (Vol. 15). University of Georgia Press.

Wikipedia. (2014). Usman Dan Fodio. http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/usman_dan_fodio.

Wikipedia. (2015). Northern Region, Nigeria. Retrieved on 6-12- 2015 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Region,_Nigeria.

Widarjono, A., Wijayanti, D., & Suharto, S. (2022). Funding liquidity risk and asset risk of Indonesian Islamic rural banks. *Cogent Economics and Finance*, 10(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322039.2022.2059911>

Wardani, I. I., & Al Arif, M. N. R. (2021). The effect of *Sharia* bank financing, *Zakat*, and education expense on economic growth and human development index in Indonesia. (2015-2019). *EKONOMIKA SYARIAH: Journal of Economic Studies*, 5(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.30983/es.v5i1.4096>

Widarjono, A., Wijayanti, D., & Suharto, S. (2022). Funding liquidity risk and asset risk of Indonesian Islamic rural banks. *Cogent Economics and Finance*, 10(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322039.2022.2059911>