

Islamic Impulses to the Economic Growth in Zamfara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Before the coming of Islam in Nigeria and the Zamfara area in particular, the inhabitants had their traditional religion, culture, customs and beliefs, which they attached value to. However, traditional religion plays a vital role in the lives of the people in the region. Thus, with the coming of Islam into the state, it changes the mode of their living. More so, Islam had impacted their beliefs, economics, and socio-political lives. Nonetheless, religion comes with its mode of operation because of its nature and belief system. In light of this, the paper examines what impact Islam had on the religious development of the people of Zamfara (Zamfarawa) using historical analysis. The attainment of reliable data for the reconstruction of a historical phenomenon in the study relies on the type and nature of instruments used for data collection. Therefore, this research adopted a multi-disciplinary approach and used qualitative data generated from different sources of information. This research played a strategic role in improving the religious and economic activities of the people in the country and it should contribute to the existing literature.

Keywords: Islam, Trade, Religion, Zamfara

Introduction

Africa was the first continent, outside of Arabia, where Islam spread into the early 7th century. Almost one-third of the world's Muslim population resides in Africa. However, Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion and at its present rate of expansion, it will soon be the predominant religion of mankind (Loimeier, 1997). Islam is concerned about the religion of Islam and its adherents. Muslim is an Arabic word meaning one who has devoted his worship exclusively to Allah. Muslims and their religion have greatly influenced the economic, social and political setup of Nigeria, especially in Hausa States, and from there, they have advanced to other parts of the country. Islam has impacted the people of Zamfara because of its nature and the activities of the Muslim reformist movement (Loimeier, 1997).

Although the majority of Muslims in the state are Sunni, the complicity of Islam in the area is revealed in the various schools of thought, traditions, and voices that constantly confide in the dominance of many African countries. Islam in the study area is still moving, not static, and is constantly being reshaped by the prevalent religious, economic, social and political conditions of the people. It is also being adapted to the indigenous cultural contest and belief system forming the state. The inhabitants have generally appropriated Islam in both a more inclusive and a more radical way; it also has both a national and global dimension (Malami, 1996). Despite the economic activities, the people in the state were not left behind. They empower themselves by engaging in various trades and economic or business ventures. These professions were not only carried out in trading activities but also in the production and manufacture of various commodities that could be used at home as well as for commercial purposes (Tambari, 2019). This paper highlights both the spiritual and economic aspects of people's empowerment in the region of Zamfara.

There is an enormous amount of literature on the economic impact of Islam in Hausa States, but there is a wide gap in scholarly works on the economic impact of Islam in Zamfara area, with particular reference to trade and commerce. Islam has significantly contributed to the generation of substantial development for the funding and growth of Zamfara communities and Hausa states of Nigeria. The challenges and viability of this economic impact have not been fully addressed. To this end, this research seeks to address these existing gaps and thereafter propose viable and sustainable alternatives for providing relevant information on the subject. Besides the numerous pieces of literature, the main objective of this study is to explore the historical religious development in the area.

Historical Contextual of Islam in Zamfara State

Before the introduction of Islam in Nigeria, especially in the Hausa States, there was a traditional African religion in the area. However, the presence of Islam in Hausaland can be traced back to the 7th century, when the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) advised a number of his companions who were facing persecution by non-believers in Mecca to seek refuge across the Red Sea at Annajashi. In the Muslim tradition, this event is known as the first migration (*Hijrah*) (Nadama, 1977). Thus, Muslim migrants provided Islam with its first major trumpet and coastline because it was the first haven for Muslims and the first place Islam would be practiced outside the Arabian Peninsula. Seven years after the death of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) in 639 AD, the Arabs advanced towards Africa, and within two generations, Islam had expanded across the Horn of Africa, including the Hausa States of Nigeria (Holger, 2002; Rahim, 1981).

However, in the following centuries, the consolidation of Muslim trading networks connected by lineage trade and the Sunni Brotherhood reached a crescendo in West Africa, enabling Muslims to wield tremendous economic and socio-political influence and power. During the reign of Umar II, the governor of Africa, Ismail ibn Abdullahi, was said to have won the Berbers of North Africa to Islam by his just administration. Other earlier notable missionaries include Abdullahi ibn Yasin, who started a movement that caused thousands of Berbers to accept the religion of Islam (Chafe,

1999). Similarly, in Northern Nigeria, Islam made its way inland, spreading at the expense of traditional African religions. This expansion of Islam in Hausa States not only led to the formation of new communities in Nigeria, but it also reconfigured existing Hausa States communities and empires to be based on Islamic models. Indeed, in the middle of the 11th century, the Kanem Borno Empire, whose influence extended into Sudan, converted to Islam at the same time, but more towards West Africa. The reigning ruler of the Borno Empire embraced Islam. As these kingdoms adopted Islam under the leadership of Mai Umme Jilmi, who ruled between 1085 and 1097 and embraced Islam at the hands of a great Islamic scholar, Hamed Muhammad Mani, their populace thereafter devotedly followed suit (Umar, 2006). In praising the people's zealousness for Islam, the 14th-century explorer Ibn Batutta stated that mosques were so crowded on Fridays that unless one went very early, it was impossible to find a place to sit. The learning of Arabic and Islam continued to flourish in this empire even after the demise of the ruler. His son, Dunama I (1097–1150), succeeded him, and maintained his father's legacy. At the time of Dunama II (1221–1259), contacts were made with Tunisia and the Maghrib. These were done through correspondence. As a result of the contact, the Kanem embassy was established in Tunisia in 1257 (Tahir, 1975).

This is based on the fact that Islam encompasses: knowledge, ideology, teaching, law and civilization. The history of Islam in Hausa State can be explained in three stages: containment, mixing and reform. In the first stage, Hausa rulers contained Muslims segregated from Muslim communities. In the second stage, the rulers blended Islam with indigenous norms and traditions as the population selectively appropriated Islamic practices, and finally, in the third stage, the Muslims in the area pressed for reforms to rid their societies of mixed practices and implement Sharia. This three-phase framework helps shed light on the historical development of the mediaeval empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai and the 19th-century jihad, which led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in Hausaland (Rahim, 1981). One of the important groups that accepted Islam thereafter was the Fulani (Garba, 1985). This is a group that moved from the edge of the Southern Sahara down into the Inland Delta of the Nile River, and then elements of them moved to other areas, such as Futa Toro and Futa Jallon, and eventually moved eastwards into northern Nigeria. By the ninth century, North African Muslims (Berbers) began to cross the Sahara for trade and to obtain slaves, and no doubt they influenced the conversion of the rulers they contacted (Anagbodu, 1990).

In Hausa states, the penetration of Islam into the states neither depended on conquest nor the conversion of its rulers. It lay on the shoulders of traders (Wangarawa traders) and scholars who came to Hausaland in the early 14th century. Kano had its first Muslim ruler in the 14th century, and Islam entered Kano during the time of Ali Yaji, who ruled from 1349 to 1385. A mosque was built at that time, and an *Imam* as well as a *Qadi* were appointed in the mosque. At the time of Yaqub (1452-63), some Fulani scholars migrated to Kano. There, they taught Islamic theology and jurisprudence with the books they brought with them. During the reign of Muhammad Rumfa, Muslim scholars from Timbuktu came to Kano to teach and disseminate the religion of Islam (Adamu, 2020).

However, Islamic thought also gained ground in Katsina during that period. Scholars from Sankore University in Timbuktu brought with them books on Islamic divinity and etymology to Katsina. With all these academic activities, Katsina was able to produce Islamic scholars of high standard. Among these indigenous scholars were Muhammad Dan Masina (1667) and Muhammad Dan Marina (1655). As a result of this development, Zamfara and Sokoto also embraced Islam, and some notable centres in the areas are Yandotto, Gusau, Worno, Gwandu, Raba, etc. There was intellectual harmony among indigenous scholars during that period, while the state of learning was much higher. One of the factors that facilitated the scholarship activities and intellectual glory was the contact the scholars used to make with Timbuktu, which was an excellent stronghold of intellectuals at that time. Islamic education, which was done in Arabic, gave cultural prestige to Islam at that age and equally boosted commercial activities in the area (Anagbodu, 1990).

Islam has changed the Hausa States and Zamfara area at large. The presence of Islam in the state affects all segments of life endeavour, be they economic, political, or socio-cultural. With the introduction of religion, people began to change their traditional way of living and embrace Islamic culture. However, an additional factor that may have contributed to the success of Islam in Zamfara area was the adaptability of the culture of Islam to various indigenous circumstances (Doi, 1984). This is because (*urf*), which means custom” and usage of a particular society, both in speech and in action, is accepted as a source of Islamic legislation in so far as it means the customs and usages of a particular area, provided there is no contradiction between that custom and the Islamic sources—the Quran and the Sunnah. Over time, certain norms come to function as expected standards for a particular service or profession without necessarily being explicitly stated in legal terms. Similarly, certain kinds of commercial transactions are done because of a mutual understanding of terms that are not necessarily written out. The basis for accepting indigenous customs and practices is the Qur’an and Sunnah. Some of the pre-Islamic practices of the Arabs were approved, and some were annulled by the Qur’an. Similarly, the prophet accepted some of the inherited ways of doing things and forbade or altered others. This system applies to Hausa culture and traditions, like those of Arabs (Loimeier, 1997).

However, Islam, being a religion of knowledge and education, is spread through Islam. Islamic education leads to learning documentation of development in writing African history, economy, geography, and politics, among others. Thus, it brought about the development of states such as the Sokoto Caliphate and the introduction of Islamic Sharia in Zamfara State and some northern states like Kano, among others. It also introduces a new system of jurisprudence into Islamic Sharia law in which the Qur’an and Hadith become sources of law (Umar, 2006). Therefore, Islam introduces new taxation patterns and shafts of wealth through zakat, where the rich are expected to give ten percent of their wealth to the needy. Lastly, Islam preaches against all sorts of immorality and injustice. Culturally, Islam introduces new modes of dressing, clothing that makes people look decent, etc.

Islam was brought to West Hausa states through commercial activities between North African Berbers and West African Indigenes. As a result of this development, Islam was peacefully spread

at various commercial centres in Hausa States between Hausa buyers and North African sellers in Jenne, Timbuktu, Sankore, Awdaghast, Kanem-Borno, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara. Consequently, Islam contributed to the economic growth of these states since it came to them through commerce transactions between West Africans and North Africans. (Doi, 1984). There were commercial contacts between North Africa and West Africa between the 15th and 18th centuries. Different routes were established through which caravan traders passed into Western Sudan for commercial activities. The language of a transaction between the buyers and the sellers then was Arabic, and the traders were Muslims, and Islamic scholars were among them. Centres were established in different parts of West Africa, such as Gao, Timbuktu, Katsina, Janne, Bornu, and Gazargamu (Kanem Borno capital). The traders' language, culture and religion were showcased in these centres. The noble person during those days was the person who identified himself with these North African traders or Islamic preachers (Doi, 1984).

During that period, there were six main trade routes linking North Africa with ancient Western Africa. The first trade route started in Morocco, running through Mauritania and stopping in Senegal. The second one began with Taghaza coming down to Taodeni and ending at the Niger Bend. The third trade route started from Tunis, linking Tripoli and running down to Ghadames, and from there to Katsina, Kano, and other parts of Hausa States. The fourth trade route started from Fezzan in the north with Chad in the old Western Sudan. The fifth one began from Egypt down to Kanem and the Chad Basin (Borno area). The sixth route also began from Egypt through Darfu to Waday and Kanem Borno, then to the Hausa States (Trimingham, 1970). There were other subordinate routes, even though they were not as important as those mentioned. From time to time, people from West Africa would travel on foot or with animals like camels, bullocks, and asses, carrying goods from West Africa to North Africa. Among the goods they often brought from West Africa to North Africa were ivory and gold. Unfortunately, slaves and guns. The products from North Africa with which the exchange was made included guns and clothing materials. There were settlements (*Zango*) where commercial people used to stay conveniently along the trade routes for a while, exchanging goods and services and also sharing their socio-religious feelings (Malami, 1996).

Consequently, the advent of Islam in the area marked a notable landmark in the socio-cultural life of the people. Before the advent of Islam in Hausa States, people had a comprehensive way of life, such as human interrelations (family and tribal ties), festivities, and ceremonies (marriage, naming, burial rites, and festivals). Islam eradicated and modified some of these social ways of life because they were supported by Islamic principles. This is highly notable in the marriage, naming, and burial rites in the Hausa States (Trimingham, 1970). Culturally, Islam introduced new forms of dressing, greeting, and architectural design into the area, which have now become traditional in the States. For instance, white robes, long kaftans, and turbans are worn freely by Muslims in the states. Similarly, the features of Arabian architecture appear in many buildings today, such as mosques and palaces of emirs.

Conclusion

Islam came into Zamfara through North African traders via the Kanem-Borno Empire. With their activities, Islam, from its cradle, continued to spread in Hausa States. The early presence of Islam in the area was linked to trade and commerce with North Africa. While the presence of Islam in the area dates back to the 7th century, the spread of the faith in the regions that are now the modern states of Zamfara, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto and Kebbi was, in actuality, a gradual and complex process. Several major trade routes connected Hausa states below the Sahara with North Africa, such as Tunis, Morocco, and Egypt. The Hausa States have direct linkage with the four great West African empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem Borno, developed as products of the link between the Northern and Hausa traders. Thus, Islam has affected all segments of life endeavour in the Hausa States, and Nigeria is not in isolation with the entrenchment of Islam into the area; it affects the economic, socio-cultural, and political wellbeing of the people and their economic activities as a whole.

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