

## A Socio-Economic Impact of Islam on the Development of Trade in Zamfara State, Nigeria

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### Abstract:

This paper aims to trace the historical impact of the socio-economic development of trade in Zamfara State and how it changes the lives of people in the area and their neighbours. It brings to attention the emphasis on the introduction and spreading of Islamic religion in the study area through the activities of Muslim traders from North Africa, Borno and other parts of Hausa states. The activities and legacies left by the early generations of itinerant and indigenous Muslim scholars in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively, are what led to the foundation of Islamic religion in Nigeria. The trend also continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo established the Sokoto Caliphate, which covered many parts of Northern Nigeria. This movement, from its inception, boosted trading activities in the region by jihadists and opened different commercial centres of trading. Nowadays, Katsina in particular is witnessing the proliferation of mass centres of both agriculture and handicraft activities where such activities are imparted to the population. Therefore, this paper digs up the impact of religion on improving trading activities by transforming the socio-economic lives of people in the area.

**Keywords:** Islam, Trade, Socio-Economic, Zamfara

### Introduction:

The beginning of Islam in Nigeria could be traced back to the time it was known in the northern part of the country. Scholars, who were also traders from North Africa, made their way across the trade routes of the Sahara Desert, bringing with them both Islamic culture and learning (Doi, 1984). The part of Nigeria in which Islam had its earliest contact was the extreme north-east, in the Kanem-Borno Empire, which flourished as early as the 7<sup>th</sup>

century and was accepted formerly by the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Many itinerant scholars had come to the Kanem-Borno Empire, as well as other Hausa States in the north, to propagate Islam and Islamic knowledge. Islam was first documented in Nigeria in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Hunwick, 2006).

There is no way one would talk about Islam in Zamfara without mentioning its passing through

other Hausa States of Northwestern Nigeria. Zamfara is one of the seven states in the political zone of the country, others are Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto (Lawal, 2016). The study focuses on Zamfara State in the Hausaland of Northwestern Nigeria. The people of Hausaland were converted to Islam through the activities of Wagarawa traders, although most of their populations practiced African traditional beliefs (*Maguzanci*). Commerce also aided Islam in spreading to the towns of Nigeria. That was why the ancient empires of Kamem-Borno, Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, as well as the Hausa States, had Muslims in them (Ismael, 1975). It was the travellers who brought Islam who made efforts to convert some traditional religionists in Nigeria and Zamfara in particular. It was not only common people who embraced Islam; businessmen and women also embraced the religion. To one surprise, the rulers and heads of families who were initially idol worshippers embraced Islam (Trimingham, 1970).

A good example among these rulers who embraced Islam was the King of the Kanem-Boro Empire, Mai Umme Jilme, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and Hausa rulers in *Kasar* Hausa (Hausaland) in Northwestern Nigeria. Thus, Kano State had its first Muslim ruler in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and Islam entered Kano during the lifetime of Ali Yaji, who ruled since 1349 (Tahir, 1975). Each ruler had a number of his subjects who accepted Islam along with him. After accepting Islam, royal mosques were built where congregational prayers were offered. During the early days of Islam in Hausaland, whenever a ruler embraced Islam, a large number of his subjects would also embrace Islam, not because they were convinced that Islam was good but because their ruler had embraced it. Living an Islamic-guided life became the thought of those ages (Lawal, 2016). Though the downfall of those states later came to pass, the Islamic culture still lives today, either in one way or another.

Despite the relatively short time Shaikh Usman Danfodiyo spent with his teacher, Jibril bin Umar, At the time Shaikh Usman Danfodiyo intended to accompany his master, Jibril, on pilgrimage in

1774–1775, his father disallowed him to embark on such a journey during that period. This consequently left him as a preacher and a teacher in Zamfara, Kebbi, Gobir, and other parts of Nigeria and Niger for approximately twenty years. During this period, he was able to gather around himself loyal disciples and followers (*Jama'ah*). Shaikh Usman Danfodiyo was proclaimed *Amir al-Mu'minin* at the end of the *Hijrah* and thus established the Sokoto Caliphate when the Gobir state was overthrown and other Hausa states, such as Kano, Katsina, Zaria and Zamfara, were established. Shaikh Usman Danfodiyo was able to found the city of Sokoto five years after the Jihad. In 1812, he divided the administration of the new Islamic empire between his brother Abdullahi Danfodiyo and his son, Muhammad Bello, and finally, he went into seclusion, worshipping Allah till his demise in 1817. Since then, Islam penetrated in Hausaland and other Nigerian communities as a whole. This also stimulated trade and commercial activities in Zamfara area and its neighbouring communities (Tambari, 2019).

Usman Danfodiyo's followers were required not to remain idle. They were encouraged to learn a craft to earn their living. It was considered improper to eat what one had not earned by one's own efforts'. They engaged in various handicrafts to produce the necessities of life. Economic issues attracted the attention of Shehu Usman Danfodiyo. But he was not a philosopher or theoretician. His career had been that of an Islamic reviver and reformer. The same role is reflected in economic matters. The Danfodiyo advocates the foundation of an economic system based on values such as justice, sincerity, moderation, modesty, honesty, etc. According to him, justice is the key to progress, while injustice leads to decadence. A just government can last even with unbelief, but it cannot endure injustice. On the other hand, he warned against unhealthy practices such as fraud, adulteration, and extravagance and their bad consequences for the economy. He exalted labour and hard work and rejected begging. He encouraged his followers to engage in earning a livelihood even through an ordinary occupation. Division of labour and cooperation occupies a very

high place in his economic thought (Malami, 1996). There is little information on the socio-economic impact of Islam on the development of trade in Zamfara State. This study was intended at investigating the growth of trade in Zamfara State, Nigeria. This study was aimed at investigating the development of trade in Zamfara State, particularly how Islam contributed to its commercial progress. To achieve the objectives of the study, secondary sources of information were consulted, such as books and journals. The data collected through document analysis.

### **Islam in Zamfara State, Nigeria`**

Islam spread to Africa from its place of birth, which was Saudi Arabia. This spread began during the regime of the second Caliph, Umar bin al-Khattāb. Then, it got to North Africa, and from there, it spread to *Bilad al-Sudan* (meaning, the countries of West Africa). Islam penetrated West Africa (the Savannah region) in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, not in the manner in which it entered North Africa (Hunwick, 2006). This was the time when the writing of West Africa's history began. Historians agreed that Islam spread in West Africa principally through trade and commercial activities, and since the maxim in Islam is the Prophetic tradition that says, "Preach even if it is one verse" or "Quote on my behalf even if it is one sentence," the Muslims went out like educationists to preach the words of Islam (Basil, 1995). Therefore, the spread of Islam in West Africa was through Muslim traders and Muslim scholars. Some Muslim businessmen introduced the religion to the ruling class, their business associates, and rural areas. Literacy was gradually introduced to parts of *Bilad al-Sudan* or West Africa, which gradually affected or influenced the inhabitants of Nigeria and Zamfara State in particular. It is important to note that trading and commerce are linked between the people (Zamfarawa) on the one hand and the Berbers of North Africa as well as the Arabs of the Middle East (Anagbodu, 1990).

Among the early West Africans to adopt Islam were the Dyula, that is, the Wangara, a clan of the Mande ethnic group. The Dyula were well-known for commercial activities. With their trade

activities, they influenced other people to adopt Islam. Another important ethnic group that accepted Islam thereafter was the Fulani. This is an ethnic 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 Futan Jallon, and eventually moved eastwards, into Hausaland in present-day Northern Nigeria and Chad, particularly in present-day Borno State and Darfur (Mansur, 2013). By the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, North African Muslims (Arab or Berber) began to cross the Sahara for trade and to obtain slaves, and no doubt they influenced the conversion of the rulers they contacted (Mansur, 2013). For Nigeria, Hausaland and Kanem Borno have been directly connected to North African states since before the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Islam started to spread through peaceful means; in other words, there was no war between North African and West African Muslims. The routes that Islam spread to these parts of Nigeria were, the Trans-Sahara route, which connected Kano-Katsina with Tuwat (in today Algeria), Chad and Libya across Tripolitania (in Libya), i.e., Tunisia via Ghademes, and Agadez to Hausaland. The second route is through Egypt to Kanem-Borno, then to Hausaland, i.e., from Tripoli via Fezzan to Bornu (Nadama, 1977).

### **Impact of Islam on Trade in Zamfara:**

Trade simply means the purchase and sale of goods and services, while trade creation could be defined as the ability to bring into existence business ideas, products, and processes through imaginative skills. It is very important to note that the word creation here has a wider connotation. Hence, trade creation usually depends on the entrepreneur, type of entrepreneurship, capital, enabling environment, and demand for goods and services. Trade is one of the important factors identified, having a significant effect on the emergence of human habitation in the Hausaland since early years and Zamfara communities as part of its domain (Mas'ud, 2021). The importance of human settlements has been known to emerge and develop into prominent cities due to their position along strategic trade routes; for example, the rise of

prominent city states like Kano, Katsina, Zazzau and Borno, just to mention a few. These cities contributed to trans-Saharan trade, which existed for many centuries between the inhabitants of West Africa and their North African counterparts (Adamu, 2010; Chubado and Juliet, 2022).

The Kingdom of Zamfara has been an important centre of local and long-distance trade in Western Sudan for several centuries before the Jihad. It was next to the city-states of Kano, Katsina, Daura and Sokoto in importance in this regard. Trade linked it with different economies and cultures and acted as a medium for the exchange of material and non-material aspects of culture. Trade linked Zamfara with its neighbours states of Katsina, Zazzau, Kabbi and others far afield such as Gwanja in Ghana, Liptaku, Borno and Adamawa, and the city states of North Africa. Zamfara's trade involved exchanges mediated through regional and local markets, as well as trade that linked households. Numerous items of trade were exchanged along numerous routes. These included salt, sulphur, gold, slaves, dried onion leaves, jewellery, textiles, livestock, Kola nuts, grains and a host of others manufactured goods. As a result of these commercial activities, urbanisation occurred in many communities in the state (Umar, 2006).

Therefore, the socio-economic impact of Islam on the development of trade in Zamfara State has to do with the socio-economic activities of the people and their neighbours in trade and intergroup relations. During that period, there were trade routes linking North Africa with the ancient empires of West Africa, Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem-Borno, as well as the Hausa States of Nigeria (Loimeier, 1997). The most notable among the trade routes that were directly linked to Hausaland were those that started from Tunis, linking Tripoli, running down to Ghadames and from there to Katsina and Kano. Another one began from Egypt, connecting Cyrenaica down to Kanem-Borno and Chad Basin; other alternate route also began from Egypt, connecting Darfur to Wadai and stopping at Kanem-Bornu. These routes, in one way or another, contributed to the development of socio-economic and political

affiliations in Hausaland because, through those routes, many socio-economic skills and ideas were introduced and spread across the Nigerian communities. One of the major impacts was the introduction of the religion of Islam, and another important aspect was the trade link, which also boosted the system of trade and commerce in Zamfara and its neighbouring states (Chafe, 1999).

There were other subordinate routes, even though they were not as important as those mentioned earlier. From time to time, people from Hausaland, Nigeria, would travel on foot or animals like camels, bullocks, and asses, carrying goods from Nigeria to people in North Africa. Among the goods, they often brought from Hausland and Nigeria as a whole to North Africa were ivory, gold, kola, salt, and unfortunately, slaves and guns. The products from North Africa with which the exchange occurred included dates, papers, guns and cloth materials (Holger, 2002). There were settlements (*Zongo*) 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 (Chafe, 1999). Therefore, bit by bit, popular places of rest developed into centres where people from various parts of Hausaland mixed with their counterparts from North Africa and the wider world. An important result was that such centres gradually developed into commercial towns. Besides that, wherever the travellers had a reason to stay many nights, they continued mixing with their counterparts and informally shared religious cultures and traditions (Hunwick, 2006). This explains why many non-Muslims from various parts of Nigeria gradually embraced Islam, which they eventually brought back to their people at home, that is, those who were not travellers. It is observed that by travelling from place to place, people imbibe fresh ideas, which they also sell to others (Trimingham, 1970).

It is important to note that Gusau, the capital city of Zamfara State, lies along the all-important trade routes that connect principal towns and cities in Hausaland and beyond. This was the trans-Sahara trade that connected North Africa's empresses with



the Hausa kingdoms of Kano, Katsina, Daura, Zazzau and Gobir among others, since time immemorial. The long-held trans-Saharan trade largely accounted for the reason why Gusau superseded almost all its neighbouring communities in Hausaland in terms of wealth resulting from agriculture, mines and trade. Thus, Gusau continued to evolve both under Zamfara and Katsina before it was finally brought within the fold of the Sokoto caliphate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Usman, 2006).

### Conclusion:

Islam came into Hausaland initially through the North African and Kanem-Borno traders. With their activities, Islam, from its cradle, continued to spread in the Hausa States of Northern Nigeria. The early presence of Islam in the area was linked to trade and commerce with North Africa and Kanuri in the Kanem-Borno Emirate. While the presence of Islam dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the spread of the faith in the regions that are now the modern states of Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, Kano, and Jigawa was, in actuality, a gradual and complex process. Several major trade routes connected Hausaland below the Kanem and North Africa with the Mediterranean and Middle East. The four great empires of Kanem-Borno, Ghana, Mali, and the Songhai developed as products of the link between the Northern and Western African traders. The paper examined in brief the composition of Hausa states and how Islam came into Nigeria, particularly the Zamfara area. It also discussed the region and the emergence of Islam there. The main routes through which the Northern African Muslim traders and the Western African people, particularly the Wangarawa traders, contacted each other were also analysed.

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