

CHAPTER TWO

ISLAM AND COLONIAL RULE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

In the vast Northern Nigerian emirates, where the Sokoto Jihad had profoundly altered relations of state and society in the nineteenth century, Islam proved critical to the British colonial enterprise in local communities starting in the twentieth century. As crucial structural and ideological frameworks on which colonial society was ultimately rationalized, Islamic structures were decisive in the administration of the heterogeneous communities that were incorporated into Britain's newly established Northern Nigerian Protectorate.

The presence of the British in the Sokoto Caliphate, the epicenter of what would become colonial Northern Nigeria, began with the visits to Sokoto by Captain Hugh Clapperton, a Scottish explorer, who met Sultan Mohammed Bello in 1822 and 1825. This was followed by visits by two Cornish explorers, Richard Lander and his brother John, in 1830 and by German explorer and scholar Heinrich Barth in 1852.¹ The initial visits by these European explorers were followed by the establishment in 1860 of a British consul in Lokoja, at the confluence of River Niger and River Benue. With the rapid growth of the Royal Niger Company, which was chartered in 1882, British authorities established a foothold in two southern emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate, Ilorin

and Bida, before the conquest of the caliphate in 1903. Following the extension of constabularies from Ilorin and Bida emirates to some of their northern neighbors in 1897, the West African Frontier Force, under the command of Colonel Frederick Lugard, formally proclaimed all communities within the Sokoto Caliphate and the old Kanem-Bornu Empire as the British Protectorate of Northern Nigeria on January 1, 1900. This culminated in the fall of Sokoto in 1903. With the exception of Satiru and Hadejia uprisings in 1906, British rule encountered little serious resistance from dissidents in emirate society in the early years of colonial rule.² In the Sokoto Caliphate, as well as in most of Nigeria's Southern Provinces, the administration of local communities was sustained by the now-famous system of indirect rule, imposed by Lugard, governor of Northern Nigerian Protectorate and later governor-general of Nigeria, after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Provinces in 1914.³

Many scholars of British rule in Northern Nigeria agree that prevailing Hausa-Fulani emirate structures were transformed into a more centralized administrative system under the British system of indirect rule. This colonial system established the Northern Nigerian Protectorate as a distinct political unit in which Muslim and non-Muslim communities were brought under the control of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers within clearly defined administrative jurisdictions. Mohammad Umar notes the political implications of this administrative system for Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers and the diverse communities that constituted the Northern Nigerian Protectorate following the imposition of colonial rule:

One reason for the seemingly smooth running of colonial rule in Northern Nigeria was the British appropriation of the ancient sarauta-emirate political institutions to form the basis of British indirect rule. Between the imposition of colonialism in 1903 and the beginning of decolonization in 1945, the British transformed the sarauta-emirate system in various ways. Beginning with territorial reorganization that got rid of absentee district heads in the 1900s, subsequent development of territorial administration turned sarauta-emirates into colonial machinery of local government administration, while the introduction of technical departments (agriculture, health, works, etc.) made sarauta-emirate institutions part of British colonial bureaucracy. Loyalty to the British took precedence over all the sarauta-emirate political values, including Islamic values. But the British found much to admire in sarauta political institutions and values, preserving, strengthening, and modernizing them. An important aspect of the colonial transformation of the sarauta-

emirate was its extension over ethnic minorities who had resisted Sokoto imposition of the system in the nineteenth century.⁴

For these expedient reasons, British authorities coopted Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers, largely influenced by the *qadiriyya* order,⁵ which dominated the politico-religious hierarchy in the region when the Sokoto Caliphate came under British rule.⁶ Additionally, it was colonial rule that formalized Islamic law as a legal system throughout the Northern Protectorate, and only with the colonial rulers' arrival was Maliki inheritance law first enforced and slavery and concubinage banned in the region.⁷ Importantly, colonial administrators paid attention to contending interpretations of Islamic practices and then entrenched the power base of the dominant politico-religious ruling class. The response of British administrators to religion at this juncture was made difficult by the protean nature of Islam in a culturally heterogeneous region. In many cases, interpretations of Islam were far from discrete ideas and categories; rather, prevailing political, religious, and social conditions encouraged varied interpretations of Islam, even among those who claimed to share the same Muslim belief. Contested interpretations of Muslim authority required British administrators to invest considerable imagination in constructing doctrines to legitimate Islamic political authority.

Consequently, in order to control the diverse people of the newly established Northern Protectorate, British authorities did not simply embrace the existing political structures under the leadership of the rulers of the Sokoto Caliphate; British administrators strengthened Fulani conquerors and imposed their political hegemony on the "subject" peoples of the region.⁸ However, this expedient system of local administration was incongruous with the diverse religious, social, and political realities of the vast region. Moreover, by embracing caliphate rulers as junior partners, British colonial administrators consolidated the powers of the dominant Muslim rulers as legitimate traditional rulers, while marginalizing their competitors in local politics. Naturally, this policy strengthened the authority of the dominant *qadiriyya* order, while simultaneously jettisoning the leaders of other Sufi orders.

Jonathan Reynolds's conceptualization of "good" and "bad" Muslims provides a useful framework to explore how British authorities navigated this complicated power structure among Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers. Reynolds holds that colonial construction of political authority in Northern Nigeria was shaped by British preference for the dominant Muslim aristocracy in this region, especially in the early decades of colonial rule. While British administrators claimed neutrality on local religious matters, colonial officials embraced leaders

of the major Sufi order they deemed “good” Muslims because they legitimated the colonial order. The beneficiaries of this colonial policy were leaders of the qadiriyya order that dominated the *masu sarauta*, the Hausa-Fulani emirate structure. As the qadiriyya consolidated their power base, competing Sufi orders, such as the *tijaniyya*, *sanusiyya*, and *mahdiyya*, were officially castigated as “bad” Muslims because of their tendency to question colonial policies.⁹ In the case of the relationship between the qadiriyya and their main competitor, the *tijaniyya*,¹⁰ tensions would grow between the two groups in Kano, where the *tijaniyya* became more powerful in the 1930s and 1940s.¹¹ Nevertheless, colonial authorities identified the qadiriyya as “good” Muslim rulers because of their willingness to embrace new colonial rules and reject religious doctrines British administrators considered “fanatical.”¹² Captain G. Callow, the district officer in Adamawa, captures the affinity of British administrators for the qadiriyya:

The majority of the Muslims here [Adamawa] follow the Khadariya [Qadiriyya] form of worship. It appears to be by far the most lenitive [soothing] sect . . . and perfectly harmless to the state; I think it would be quite impossible to arouse followers of this sect to any fanaticism; they take their religion much too easily, rather in fact like the average Englishman of today [1926], who reserves his devotional exercises for Sundays—if it is too wet to play golf.¹³

Consequently, British authorities embraced the rulers of the emirates and the qadiriyya order to which most of them belonged, while gathering intelligence and employing repressive measures against leaders of movements they deemed subversive, especially Mahdism.¹⁴

Mahdism and Colonial Surveillance

It is understandable that British authorities, given the emphasis on local administrative control, were obsessed with the maintenance of order, and this comes through clearly in the intelligence reports and memoranda of G. J. Lethem, an astute British administrator in the Northern Nigerian colonial service. British authorities claimed that the Mahdist movement harbored “bad” Muslims who perpetuate anticolonial propaganda, and they devised strategies to monitor Mahdist activities throughout the Northern Nigerian Protectorate. Lethem’s detailed records of Mahdist and other “fringe” Muslim movements also shed light on how various Islamic doctrines shaped the social and political landscape of the Northern Provinces in the early decades of colonial rule.¹⁵

Colonial authorities had good reasons to place Mahdists on their watch list, because the movement's ideology contained doctrines of impending anarchy that threatened colonial order. Mahdist clerics prophesied a period of political tumult that will eventually lead to the end of all political hierarchies; with the arrival of the Mahdi (the Direct One), this process was predicted to lead to the end of the world in 1980 (1400). More importantly for British colonial rule, some Mahdist leaders insisted that the disruptions precipitated by European colonial rule would ultimately trigger this millenarian process. Thus British administrators contended that neo-Mahdism harbors seeds of violence, since many followers of the Mahdi had fiercely resisted foreign rule in the Sudan in the late nineteenth century.¹⁶

In the specific case of Bornu Province, the revival of this new trend of Mahdism among the Fulani was partly due to colonial administrative policy that transformed the preexisting political order. Some threatened local Muslim rulers capitalized on the political uncertainties of the earlier years of colonial rule to incite disaffected Muslim clerics against British colonial authorities and their local interlocutors. While some colonial administrators thought the Mahdist threats were exaggerated, Lethem's intelligence reports emphasized that some new colonial policies made Mahdist doctrine attractive to the masses of poor Muslims, especially marginalized Fulanis. In truth, the rise of Mahdist doctrine among the Fulani coincided with harsh colonial policies, especially the imposition of jangali taxes and other levies. Indeed, local Fulani clerics tailored Mahdist doctrine to the prevailing political context, even going so far as to appropriate the legacy of Usman dan Fodio as a manifestation of Mahdism.¹⁷

Mahdism had evolved into a movement of international significance when Muhammad Ahmad adapted its basic principles to form a radically enhanced religious strand, with the capacity for fierce military resistance against foreign incursion. Its main purpose was to fight imperial rule in his native Sudan in the late nineteenth century; later the movement would confront "enemies of Islam" in Ethiopia and Egypt.¹⁸ Thus the Mahdiyya state was created in the 1880s to serve as the political base of the Mahdi movement; the entity never gained sovereign standing in international law, though it provided an organizational platform for its adherents to confront British and Egyptian forces.¹⁹ Ahmad's success in creating a political community that challenged colonial rule, at least in the short term, meant that Mahdism was capable of providing an alternative vision for those who saw British rule as anathema.²⁰ Mahdism's popularity across various religious and social groups meant that it extended beyond the purview of localized political issues. When Ahmad proclaimed a jihad

against the Egyptian and British governments following their attempt to arrest him, he gained a large number of recruits among the Baqqara and notable leaders of the Rizeigat and T'a'isha "tribes."²¹ In addition to establishing itself in the Sahel, according to Lethem, Ahmad's Mahdism gained influence in some areas that would constitute Northern Nigeria. After Ahmad's death, Abdullahi ibn Muhammad emerged as the new leader of the Mahdist state, and the struggle continued unabated. He refused to cooperate with religious movements in neighboring countries, such as Ethiopia, which offered to join with the Mahdists against European powers.²² Instead, Muhammad led attacks on Ethiopia, Egypt, and Eritrea.

In the early twentieth century, Abd Al Rahman emerged as the leader of the Mahdist movement, drawing on the broad support of his predecessors.²³ British administrators traced the rise and fall of neo-Mahdism (or Abd Al Rahman's Mahdism) in the second and third decades of the twentieth century to Northern Nigeria, keeping track of the movement's prominence in the region. To do this, British intelligence officers in Northern Nigeria communicated with their counterparts in Sudan and Egypt, creating an expansive intelligence apparatus. Lethem's memoranda connected the influence of Mahdism with the improvement of overland communication between East and West and the subsequent circulation of newspapers, letters, and messengers. Lethem seemed to suggest that although the British and French both clamped down on Mahdism in their colonial territories, a lack of coordination of effort undermined the effectiveness of their policies.²⁴

Lethem considered Abd Al Rahman an opportunistic rabble-rouser who manipulated information about colonial activities in order to rally local support and to enhance his political power. British administrators nevertheless enlisted his support during World War I to suppress movements sponsored by the Ottoman Empire for a jihad against British occupation. Abd Al Rahman traveled through the Nile Valley to spread a message of strategic support for the British through a more restrained interpretation of Islam, and as he did so, he also expanded his power, wealth, and popularity. His messengers, who were meant to drum up support for Britain, collected *zakat* taxes for Abd Al Rahman and encouraged adherents to use the Mahdist prayer book. In the years following World War I, Abd Al Rahman made similar calculated decisions, offering official interpretation of Islam that enabled him to promote his power under British colonial rule.²⁵

Lethem's papers reveal how religious interpretations shaped political dynamics in the Northern Provinces in the early decades of colonial rule. By the second decade of colonial rule, Lugard, through the mechanisms of indirect

rule, had embraced Fulani Muslim interpretations that drew on the religious vision of Usman dan Fodio, squashing opposing religious movements in the region. Lugard had defeated various Islamic potentates, such as the sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Attahira I, in the Battle of Burmi in 1903. Remnants of radical opposition to British rule within the caliphate were also suppressed: in 1905–1906, Mahdist uprisings were brutally crushed in Satiru by the combined forces of the British and the Sokoto Caliphate; indeed, the whole town was destroyed, and two thousand Mahdist rebels and fugitive slaves were killed.²⁶ Satiru was a Mahdist stronghold, and Satiruwa, the people of Satiru, had to pay the bitter price of rebellion because their Mahdist ideology threatened the new order. British authorities and the Sokoto Caliphate found common ground to collaborate against Satiru because both felt a deep sense of political insecurity. The British felt threatened because its hold on power was tenuous, and Sokoto was rattled because “revolutionary” Mahdism was a Hausa-based movement of “peasants, fugitive slaves, and radical clerics who were hostile both to the indigenous authorities and the colonial regime.”²⁷ Fear of a common enemy therefore cemented the partnership between British authorities and caliphate rulers,²⁸ though pockets of resistance continued to pose minor security threats to British rule until the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigerian Protectorates in 1914.²⁹

Frontal attack by the colonial authorities on fringe “Islamic radical” elements was mostly effective by the 1920s. For example, in 1924, the *shebu* of Bornu, under the prompting of British administrators, identified sources of potential anti-British revolts, encouraged moderate interpretations of Islam, and arrested “carriers of seditious propaganda.” Furthermore, to combat what authorities considered “Islamic fanaticism,” British colonial rulers prohibited pilgrimage to the Mahdi holy site in Aba in Sudan in 1923.³⁰

Lethem’s work is relevant to this study not just because his intelligence reports and memoranda underscored the relations between Islamic doctrine and British colonial rule, but more importantly because he identified conflict triggers that presumably could threaten the colonial order. For example, Lethem focused on the social and political interactions among “fringe” Muslim orders such as the Nazaru and warned that the strict way in which the Nazaru *tariqa* structured the lives of its followers suggested a proclivity for religious intolerance. The Nazaru, Lethem observes, “despise other Muslims, refusing to eat, intermarry, drink, shake hands, or pray with them. . . . They also would not eat meat prepared by other Muslims and they had to convert” their prospective partners before marriage. Lethem’s account of religious “propaganda” in Bornu and other Northern Nigerian communities illustrates that religious

interpretations could become freighted with political intent. He wanted colonial administrators and missionaries to work together to stem the strong opposition of some “fanatical” Islamic movements to Western institutions such as Christian schools and hospitals. He advised British colleagues to allay the fears of Muslim clerics about the dangers of Western cultural intrusion. A vast knowledge about local cultures and of their precolonial relations in their setting was evident in Lethem’s memoranda, indicating that specific tariqas had differing attitudes toward colonial powers. He noted that Fulani peasants preferred the British to other colonial powers, especially the French and Germans, who had been hostile to the Ouddai regime. The Sanussiyya fought against the British in World War I, but eventually embraced colonial rule by the 1920s. The tijiyya placed enormous emphasis on loyalty and fairness; they thought the British colonial regime in the region could be trusted.³¹

Lethem’s proclivity for details seems self-evident: his memoranda are replete with detailed accounts of many personalities and activities that most colonial administrators in his position would have considered too marginal to the central purpose of colonial intelligence. But Lethem deployed extensive analytical fervor to capture, for example, a religious leader in Bornu (1924) who was preaching the inevitability of an impending millenarian event—a condition that was supposedly linked to colonial domination. The imam was said to have attracted a large crowd and drew significant ovation when he chastised the colonial government and called local Muslim supporters of the colonial administration *kufar*, or unbelievers.

In similar fashion, Lethem’s memoranda reveals that political and religious crises in Sudan and Egypt had significant effects on political developments in Northern Nigeria. For example, in the notable case of Bornu he writes about various messengers from the East who predicted the imminent arrival of Isa—the chosen one—who will precipitate the millenarian event. His findings about the crisis in Egypt drew from systematic analyses of political and religious events and included clear narratives of their consequences. His repeated attempts to decipher the causes of religious riots in the Sudan in September 1924 are striking: he investigated a popular imam in Khartoum and his alleged role in inciting riots; commented extensively on the leadership qualities of Ali Abd al Latif (the founder of the White Flag League); and examined the crisis in Gordon Memorial College, Sudan’s elite institution of higher learning. Importantly, Lethem reports that the Sudanese crisis might have influenced unrest in Northern Nigeria, especially Bornu. In all of this we can see that Lethem was acutely concerned about the underpinnings

of religion-based conflict and defined strategies to mitigate its worst consequences.³² He demonstrated how the main contours of religious interpretations could fuse with ethnic differences to explode violent crises. In this regard, Lethem insists that the new wave of Mahdism was linked to Fulani aspirations about the future.³³

With improvement in regional communication and infrastructure in the early twentieth century, religious doctrines steadily spread throughout Northern Nigerian communities. Lethem was exasperated that better means of communication and travel were facilitating the spread of Mahdism into parts of Northern Nigeria. He warned as follows: religion is a major instrument for mobilizing the “masses” in Northern Nigeria across cultural divisions; and Mahdism’s message is effective in arousing the “ignorant and credulous African Mohammedan to fanaticism and unrest.” But what seemed to disturb him most was that Mahdism had been used to unify some Fulani communities across the Sahel against colonialism.³⁴

Native Administration and the Imposition of Islamic Law

Once the Sokoto Caliphate fell in 1903 to the military onslaught of Colonel Lugard,³⁵ what followed was the imposition of indirect rule on the diverse communities that constituted Britain’s Northern Nigerian Protectorate, a region in 1906 that had three hundred thousand square miles and 7 million people, under the control of just seventy-five British military officers.³⁶ Lugard specifically picked Northern Nigeria for the implementation of his indirect rule system because it was considered an ideal environment to test a decentralized administration, already practiced on a smaller scale in India and Uganda.³⁷ Taxation was reformed within the bounds of Islamic doctrine, resulting in rapidly increasing revenues. In a 1903 treaty, Lugard guaranteed Fulani rulers that British authorities would not interfere with the practice of Islam; he soon would renege on this promise.³⁸ As Murray Last writes, the experience of subordination of emirate rulers to a Western (Christian) power must have been a disjuncture of enormous dimensions:

Here the reader needs to go back briefly to mid-March 1903 and imagine the full shock of having Christian colonial rule suddenly imposed upon you, with the vast, century-old Sokoto Caliphate defeated within the space of a few months. Dar al-Islam was no more; the legacy of Shaikh Uthman dan Fodio [Usman dan Fodio] and his son the Amir almu’minin Muhammad Bello come to naught. And it was Muslim Hausa troops

recruited in Kano, under a few white Christian officers, using bigger and faster-firing guns more professionally than the Sokoto or Kano armies could muster, that did the damage.³⁹

Doubtlessly, the region's legal systems were modified to comply with British conception of law and justice.⁴⁰ The Native Courts Proclamation Numbers 4 and 5 gave British authorities broad powers of review over Islamic courts, which in principle subjugated sharia to colonial law; and special provisions deriving from it offered non-Muslims protection against the application of some aspects of sharia, and eliminated harsh punishment following convictions for murder, theft, and adultery.⁴¹ Proclamation Number 6 of 1900 (amended in 1901) further regulated Islamic law and transformed alkali courts into formal native courts for indigenes while also establishing common-law courts for British subjects.⁴² Most controversial, however, was the establishment of what would become known as the Repugnancy Test,⁴³ which dictated that punishment found to be "repugnant to natural justice, equity, and good conscience"⁴⁴ would be instantly overturned—a sort of *deus ex machina* clause that ensured no British territory would enforce "unconscionable" legal sentences.⁴⁵ This included punishments such as cutting off limbs, stoning, and crucifixion.⁴⁶ All crimes punishable by death in sharia that were treated as lesser crimes under English common law were reclassified to conform with common-law standards.⁴⁷ Moreover, sharia was subject to the authority of British administrators,⁴⁸ which ensured that local application of laws did not conflict with written law promulgated by British administrators. The British conception of justice was also infused into Islamic law and practices.⁴⁹ For example, alkali courts were compelled to accept police and medical reports as evidence, as well as the testimony of non-Muslims, despite strong objections from Muslim clerics based on Maliki law.⁵⁰ Some scholars have noted that British authorities gave Muslim jurists some authority in civil litigation and reviewed only a small percentage of criminal cases for compatibility with repugnancy standards.⁵¹ Be that as it may, the main thrust of reform in the caliphate's legal system was definitive and deliberate.

The Native Courts Proclamation of 1906 further weakened sharia by broadening English common-law courts and streamlining native courts from a four-tier system into a two-tier system.⁵² The Judicial Council was created to serve essentially as an Islamic court of appeal. In addition, Islamic law was denied recognition as a system deserving separate jurisdiction unto itself when it was merged with customary law during the unification of Nigeria's Northern and Southern Provinces in 1914.⁵³ The unification ordinance also dictated that customary judicial sentencing could not break from the requirements of common-

law courts, particularly in criminal cases.⁵⁴ Most importantly, it extended the Northern court system to the south, violating long-standing principles of separation of jurisdiction between these two very different regions.⁵⁵ Reform continued with the 1922 Constitution,⁵⁶ as further changes to the criminal and penal codes and the structure of the judicial system eroded the authority of Islamic law. Furthermore, the colonial government took a major step with the Native Courts Ordinance of 1933, which further weakened sharia by expanding the power of common-law courts. High courts were created⁵⁷ and given jurisdiction over appeals from native courts (including sharia), an arrangement that lasted until independence in 1960.

Despite the influence of common law on sharia, Islam grew steadily with the modernization that accompanied colonialism. This can be attributed to improved communications among local communities, increased security, better political organization of emirate society, more effective administrative control of non-Muslim regions by emirate rulers through the indirect rule system, and access to modern elementary school education.⁵⁸ Most researchers say the last factor was most significant because improvements in education served to link diverse peoples together, especially those who relocated to the cities in search of work. Indeed, this rapid process of social change was significantly encouraged by the arrival of the Lagos-Kano railway in 1912, bringing thousands of Southern Christian migrants who stimulated economic growth in the region. This heterogeneous mix of people, consisting of Christian migrants from the south and Hausa-Fulani Muslim settlers in non-Muslim sections of the Northern Nigerian Protectorate, as well as numerous non-Muslim “tribal” groups throughout the region, were effectively brought under the control of caliphate rulers within the indirect rule system. In the specific case of Zaria, Moses Ochonu underscores the subordination of non-Hausa Muslim peoples to Hausa-Fulani Muslim rule under the indirect rule system:

Through a long, convoluted process, Zazzau [Zaria] emirate, a strategic frontier caliphate state, came to extend a loose political influence on the non-Muslim Southern Kaduna polities. In the early twentieth century, the British accelerated this historical process. They vested authority in Zazzau, its satellite emirates, and its officials and brought the southern Kaduna peoples under their sway. British imposition of Zazzau subcolonial rule on the Southern Kaduna peoples culminated in a complicated and volatile subcolonial administrative system comprised of Hausa-Fulani colonial chiefs, scribes, administrators, tax collectors, and other colonial operatives working for the British.⁵⁹

A 1917 survey on the social diversity of Keffi and Nasarawa emirates by Resident Morgan further illustrates this complex mix of communities under Hausa-Fulani Muslim rule. Christians of any ethnicity were left uncounted, while nearly 20,000 Muslims were tallied, 75 percent of whom were Fulani and Hausa (with 584 Nupe Muslims). The survey found nearly three times as many “pagans,” totaling roughly 55,000 persons, split among Bassa, Gwari-Gangan, Yeskwa, Afo, Gwandara, Igbera, Gade, Agatu, Kinkera, Gwari Yamma, Koro Funtu, Koro, Gana, Toni, Kamberi, and Arago peoples. In addition, the report ruminates on demographic shifts in earlier years, particularly the widespread migration by the “hill top villagers of the pagan tribes” from their overcrowded and “unsanitary” sites to new villages in the open, level country, establishing new farms. However, far from chipping away at Hausa-Fulani Muslim power, the report shows that early British administrators consolidated Hausa-Fulani Muslim hegemony “with detached pleasure.”⁶⁰ Consequently, the ethno-religious tension that dominated Nigeria’s Middle Belt and core Northern Muslim areas with significant non-Muslim communities (so-called pagans) by the period of decolonization in the 1950s was already apparent in the early colonial period. An extract from the 1907 annual report by Thomas Alvarez, a CMS missionary to the CMS secretary in London, is instructive:

Mr. Low appears to have given the idea in England that the Society wished the Gwari work to be conducted through the medium of Hausa, i.e. that the Gwaris were to be instructed in Hausa and that the scriptures were not to be translated into Gwari. I cannot help feeling that Mr. Low is mistaken, or there has been some misunderstanding of the members of the Gwari tribe. The Gwaris are the most numerous and compact pagan tribe in Northern Nigeria and to endeavor to reach them by means of the language of their inveterate enemies the Hausa-speaking raiders is to my mind ridiculous. . . . So I shall be grateful if you assure Mr. Low that CMS mean to take up the Gwari work seriously and encourage him to try and master the language.⁶¹

The influence of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers also was enhanced in native administration and native courts throughout the Northern Protectorate. For example, in 1931, in Kano Province, British administrators established a mixed court to provide legal services to non-Muslims under the authority of the waziri (the Muslim chief judge), who held power of appeal. And in 1940, the Kano *sabon gari*—the areas of non-Hausa-Fulani native settlers—was placed under the emir’s control for the first time since 1903.⁶²

The Limits of Indirect Rule

What was stipulated in the legal reforms analyzed above was not always easily reflected in colonial administrative practice. Firsthand accounts of the implementation of local government policies by British administrators on the complicated process of colonial administration reveal the complexities of their rule in Northern Nigeria's diverse communities. In this connection, the memoranda of long-serving administrators revealed how British officials attempted to reinforce the bond between religious, social, and political hierarchies of power in a region where such relations were fluid under the Sokoto Caliphate in the preceding precolonial era.

Commander J. H. Carrow (district officer and resident of Kano and Sokoto) provides a vivid illustration of the challenges to the implementation of colonial policy in a region where the balance between religious, social, and political power was far from clearly defined. After British administrators adopted indirect rule in Kano, they convinced the emir of Kano to reorganize the judicial, financial, and political structure under his authority along the lines of what British administrators considered acceptable Islamic rules. In addition to reforms in the native courts and the tax system, British administrators introduced fixed salaries for native administrators, including the emir. Significantly, to implement their reform, British authorities appealed to what they projected as Kano's Muslim traditions.⁶³

While the inhabitants of Sokoto Division were loyal to the sultan of Sokoto as the Sarkin Musulumi (commander of the Muslim faithful), those in Kano Division had conflicting allegiances, presumably because of Kano internecine conflicts in earlier decades and the colonial administrators' initial application of direct rule in the region. The deposition of the waziri of Kano in 1909 is an example of the complicated nature of political allegiances in Kano Emirate. In 1908, British officials appointed Dan Rimi, a "slave" from the Warji "tribe," as waziri. Before he was appointed, Rimi was a confidant of the emir and had served as a messenger to the resident. Once appointed waziri, Rimi separated himself from the authority of the emir, claiming that he was the "appointee of the white man." Rimi soon had his own following and was eventually charged by the emir with contravening Kano's "time-honored traditions." Because of growing instability in the division, the governor sacked Rimi in 1909 and replaced him with a Fulani, a loyal of the emir.⁶⁴

The events surrounding this brief colonial saga in Kano illustrate the varied dimensions of power relations in the Fulani emirates in those years. Even though the Sokoto Caliphate had existed for a century, internecine conflict

remained a persistent problem between various groups in Kano Emirate, hampering the ability of the emir, district heads, village heads, chiefs, and various Muslim clerics to effectively rule in their communities. In Kano Province, like many other emirates in the Northern Provinces, communal allegiances were tangled with religious associations. Rimi's ability to gather a significant following under the banner of the "white man" suggests that power within the emirate was not a simple, linear chain of command through the emirate structure. The governor's response to the incident illustrates that colonial administrators sought to centralize the Muslim hierarchy under the leadership of the emir. As he tried to stabilize the upper echelons of the caliphate, the governor relied on his understanding of ethnic conflict, appointing a Fulani, imposing ethnic and hierarchical differences that in fact were not firmly in place when the British conquered the caliphate in 1903.

Resident C. L. Temple's 1909 annual report on Kano Province reveals the ambiguity between legitimacy and authority of Kano Emirate officials. Temple notes that a local leader might often fail to follow the orders of superior members in the emirate. The subdistrict head of Damberta refused to collect the *haraji* tax even though he had been ordered to begin collection several months beforehand; he felt that he had the leeway to conduct his administrative responsibility as he pleased. Temple also mentioned that three sarkis (Sarkin Kura, Sarkin Godia, and Sarkin Kabba) had embezzled funds from the jangali tax they had collected from Fulani "pagans." The overt nature of the sarkis' embezzlement of tax funds reveals that Muslim village heads were not always under the firm control of the emir. When British officers called the embezzlement to the emir's attention, he failed to see the seriousness of the charges, revealing the tendency of some Muslim rulers to ignore British policy.⁶⁵

Despite these underlying conditions, British policies on recruitment to political leadership positions in the Kano Emirate streamlined a tight-knit clique of potential rulers from the established Fulani hierarchy. Temple's 1909 report further reveals that when leaders were deposed for perceived opposition to British policies, their replacements often were drawn from the emir's court. When Chiroma Hamsa (one of the Madaki's subdistrict head men) was deposed after he "failed to fulfill his duties," the emir, with the support of the resident, divided Hamsa's jurisdiction into two parts. The first part was placed under the leadership of Umaru, a son of Madaki Hassan; the younger brother of Hamsa, Malam Aliu, was appointed as the leader of the second district.⁶⁶

The actions of local community leaders reflected their pliant nature in the Kano emirate's politico-religious hierarchy. Temple's report describes local people applying to several local authorities for the adjudication of Islamic

law. In conjunction with a growing distrust in the Islamic courts, local people presented their cases to British district officers, suggesting some lack of confidence in the Muslim order derived from the Sokoto Caliphate.⁶⁷

The persistence of slavery added another important layer to the structures of Muslim rule in local communities. Despite the outlawing of slavery in the Northern Protectorate by the British authorities, Temple revealed that slavery remained widespread in Kano Province. Following the famine of 1907–1908, many slave owners quietly transferred their slaves to more affluent slaveholders, and according to District Officer Dupigny, some Gongola “pagans” voluntarily “sold” themselves to wealthy slave owners. The relationship between slaves and slaveholders provided another layer to the hierarchy of social relations in some of Kano Province’s communities, often lying beyond the control of the native authority system.

In the face of dynamic political conditions, British officials, with mixed success, attempted to create an overarching colonial order across the Northern Provinces. They worked feverishly to modify the preexisting sociopolitical structure with a more effective local administrative system premised on what they considered legitimate Muslim traditions. In this vein, they insisted on specific Muslim “rules” that affirmed colonial administrative priorities in the levying of taxes and rents. For example, Temple wrote that rents and taxes, based on “Islamic law,” would be collected within fixed time frames. The *jangali* tax was to be collected between July 1 and October 31, while the *zakka* and *haraji* was meant to be collected from November 30 to March 31. Temple also stated that district and subdistrict heads had been informed that they would lose their positions if they did not turn in the requisite amount of taxes and rents by the stipulated dates. His report further revealed that there was evidence of the tightening control that British administrators were placing on local rulers: for example, as noted above, the district officer and the emir replaced Damberta; they deposed Sarkis Kura, Godia, and Kabbo for the embezzlement of *jangali* tax, and deposed Chiroma Hamsa for administrative irregularities.⁶⁸

The tendency of the British to affirm Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers’ conservatism was best shown in the crucial area of colonial policy on education in the Northern Provinces. Carrow’s recollection in the 1960s of what stood for British education policy in Kano Province provides a vivid assessment of colonial policy in the region. Before World War I, British administrators had established a Western-type primary school for the children of emirs, chiefs, and Muslim clerics, but these local rulers instead sent their slaves to school. Further, local ambivalence for Western education also was apparent with the poor enrollment of students in another primary school that colonial authorities established in

a “pagan” area of Kano Division before the outbreak of World War II. Carrow recalls that the resistance to Western education persisted until the end of the war. Not surprisingly, when British authorities established a school for girls in 1929, opposition from the Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers was stiff. These rulers naturally believed that Western education would not give their children the requisite religious and traditional training that emirate society required.⁶⁹ In the early decades of colonial rule, Islamic schooling remained the dominant form of education in the region. In 1913 there were only 209 Northerners in British schools, but more than 140,000 students in 19,073 Islamic schools; the next year enrollment figures were 527 (British government schools) and 218,615 (Islamic schools) respectively, with only 1,682 in mission schools in the vast Northern Nigerian Provinces. Nevertheless, the marginalization of Western education before World War II led to the crisis that would consume Northern Nigeria for many decades. In the short term, this crisis was evident in the inability of the colonial authorities to carry out basic administrative functions, including staffing the Kano medical dispensaries and administering native courts in the 1920s and 1930s.⁷⁰

As British administrators sought to close the gap between theory and practice in local administration, Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers were content to use the evolving native authority system to legitimate their power and authority. Tensions again were apparent in Carrow’s account in Sokoto and Kano Provinces. In 1932, the Resident of Sokoto sacked the sultan that was appointed in 1924 after persistent fiscal “irregularities” and charges that he practiced “black magic.” The new sultan, with the waziri, regularly used religious practices to affirm colonial authority in the Sokoto Caliphate. Although the sultan’s religious practices were not always clear to Carrow—who became Resident of Sokoto in 1933—Carrow did think they advanced British colonial influence in the province. For example, he recalled how the sultan and the waziri would take him to the tomb of Usman dan Fodio to pray for Carrow’s safe travel each time before traveling out of the province.⁷¹

Additionally, British administrators were selective about prevailing interpretations of Islam. They picked their battles, as did their caliphate junior partners, and also disagreed on which battles to pick. Although it was easier to administer Sokoto than Kano, Carrow was able to convince the religiously conservative emir of Kano, Abdullahi Bayero, to ban stoning for adultery. Even though there was not a single account of stoning in Northern Nigeria, Carrow felt a need to alter the law so as to state emphatically that Kano Division was in compliance with the British authorities’ repugnancy rule. Emir Bayero promptly agreed with Carrow’s request, since such a question was largely irrel-

evant among the custodians of local state administration in the Kano Emirate. Furthermore, when renowned British colonial researcher Margery Perham attempted to gain access to the main section of the chief alkali court in Kano in 1930 and 1931, British administrators refused to overturn the objection of the chief alkali.⁷²

Carrow recounts a moment of frustration while working with Emir Bayero of Kano in the early 1920s that illustrates the challenges experienced by colonial administrators when they attempted to apply abstract theory of indirect rule to Northern Nigeria's strong yet sometimes opaque religious environment. When a series of native administration construction projects began and a British engineer requested Western-trained workers, Carrow appointed two Northern Christians who had grown up in a mission school in Zaria, on the condition that they wear traditional Muslim attires and turbans so as not to offend the sensibility of Muslim rulers. Although Carrow felt he had resolved a sensitive problem, he found to his "horror" that Emir Bayero had figured out that the two men were in fact Northern Christians. In a private conversation, the emir told the Resident that he would rather have "a full-blooded Southerner" than an "apostolic Northerner" working on the project.⁷³

Carrow also believed that colonial administrators' failure to create a more self-reliant native administration undermined the implementation of indirect rule. He said that Kano was far from the modernizing city some British administrators tended to project. Carrow thought real progress in the Northern Provinces could be achieved only when the native administration began taking responsibility for its own work instead of looking for direction from the district officer. He recalls returning to Kano as Resident in 1943 from Sokoto only to find the "old nonsense" he had left behind a decade before when he was district officer.

Implicit in the assessments of British administrators are tensions between colonial administrators who insisted on preserving the essence of the caliphate system and officers who believed by the 1920s that Northern Nigeria required a more efficient administrative system. No senior colonial administrator in the 1920s exemplifies the tension between these two critical positions better than Herbert Richmond Palmer, lieutenant governor of the Northern Provinces from 1925 to 1930. To confront this problem, Palmer undercut the autocracy of the Islamic aristocracy, while working hard to prop up the mystique of the emirs and members of their courts. In the case of Kano Province, Palmer attempted to modernize the emirate by limiting the power of the emir and his courts. Thus when the elderly and conservative emir died in 1925, Palmer seized the opportunity to push through substantial reforms that significantly altered the province's political landscape. Along with other leading members of

Kano native authority, Palmer urged the new emir to sign on to several reforms before his inauguration. However, to protect the public image of the new emir, Palmer, during the emir's installation in 1927, directed his assistants to create the impression that the emir was the towering political figure in the province from whom all authority flowed down to his subjects.⁷⁴

In the Katagum Division of Bauchi Province in the 1920s colonial administrators sought to make local administration more efficient by reforming the native authority system, including Islamic law that had proven inefficient since the early twentieth century. A careful reading of Assistant District Officer J. C. Guy's touring diary reveals that the inefficiency British administrators attributed to emirs, district heads, and village heads was not always a simple matter of ineptitude, but was sometimes a result of the novel rules of administration that the British imposed in the district. Despite claims that colonial administrative policies were derived from local Islamic traditions, a careful reading of Guy's file reveals that Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers were not always knowledgeable about the rules inscribed as Islamic law on taxation. For example, the difficulty in implementing jangali tax (cattle tax) in Katagum communities was a reflection of the imposition of uniform jangali tax practices on the diverse communities in the district. When local district heads and village heads recorded significant jangali tax deficits, Guy reprimanded them, threatened to cut their salaries, and persecuted them for criminal neglect. With regard to the application of Islamic law to the reformed judicial system, Guy notes in his memorandum that it would be "useless to imagine or expect them [district heads and village heads] to be paragons of efficiency in Malinka Law." Indeed, the degree to which Guy went to instruct local leaders on how to administer this colonial interpretation of Islamic law would indicate the extent of the novelty of these rules in Katagum communities.⁷⁵

The dynamics of local administration in the Northern Nigerian Provinces were shaped by power configurations of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers and the complicated communal identities in local communities. Again, in Sokoto Province, the implication of this problem was apparent in the contradiction between colonial taxation and prevailing communal conditions in the earlier decades of colonial rule. Although British administrators made some gains in implementing the new colonial policy, the elimination of some precolonial tax practices discouraged effective tax assessment and collection. Old *gaisu* taxes and other taxes between major and tributary communities persisted, complicating the implementation of British policies. In addition, British administrators failed to establish an effective strategy of tax collection among nomadic Fulani herders. And as emirs and their local agents reconciled themselves to

British colonial expectations in tax collection, many of these leaders found their new positions at variance to those of the local communities. This problem was manifested in the changing patterns of the use of jakadas⁷⁶ for the collection of taxes. In contrast to their precolonial functions where they served multiple roles as intermediaries between Muslim rulers and local communities, emirs now employed the services of the jakadas largely for tax collection. This reflected the patterns of violent appropriation of resources that occurred prior to colonial rule, exacerbating tension between Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers and local communities, especially those designated as “traditional” tributary communities.⁷⁷

The nature of local administration meant that local rulers and communities responded to the colonial government depending on their ethnic and religious identities within newly drawn colonial jurisdictions. In the Kuta Division of Niger Province, the way native authority subsumed hierarchical relations among diverse ethnic groups under imposed administrative jurisdiction also complicated social relations that had been fluid during the precolonial period. Kuta Division, like most areas in the Northern Provinces, was religiously and culturally diverse. Some groups were still functioning under the precolonial tributary Kofa system, where local people sought the patronage of the emir through his leading men, usually a member of the emir’s council.⁷⁸

The British adoption of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rule also reified the ethnic and religious practices that the Fulani had established after the conquest of the Hausa city-states, especially with regard to tax collection and assessment in the early twentieth century. In Agaie-Lapai Division, British colonial reforms enhanced the status of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers as gatekeepers of the indirect rule system, cementing the marginalization of non-Hausa-Fulani local communities. This division—which included Lapai Emirate, an amalgamation of Guara, Gulu, Gupa, Edzu, and Sakka districts; Agaie Emirate; and Baro, a third-class township—contained many so-called pagans (Gana-Gana, Gupachi people, and Hausa and Gwari farmers), while Lapai was inhabited principally by ex-slaves of the ruling families. According to Assistant District Officer Matthews’s 1919 notes, emirs, district heads, and village heads only had limited success with this motley collection of religious and “tribal” groups. Many of these groups evaded tax collection and the native administrative structure. But not all non-Hausa-Fulani Muslims resisted the new native authority. In Kuta Division, for example, some Gwari headmen manipulated the new indirect rule system under the domination of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim aristocracy as a source of power and influence.⁷⁹ Taxation and legal practices before colonization in Northern Nigeria were immensely complex, and they had strong ethnic, religious, political, and martial significance. Indeed, taxation and

Muslim legal practices under the indirect rule system were woven into prevailing but contingent networks of power and status. When British colonial rulers attempted to mold the indirect rule system into such interlocking religious, social, and political networks, they experienced mixed results.

This ambivalence between local leaders and their subjects was most profoundly reflected in the political domination of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim ruler over the so-called pagan tribes in the Northern Provinces. As early as the late 1920s, senior colonial administrators in Kaduna and Lagos, drawing on extensive intelligence reports and memoranda of district officers and residents from the Northern Provinces, were well aware that communal and religious divisions posed major problems to local administration throughout the region. E. P. T. Crampton notes:

One of the problems that faced Lugard was the administration of the “pagans” of the North. The non-Muslim animistic peoples were usually referred to as “pagans,” but the word is less used now [1970s] as most of these people who are in contact with the outside world would claim to be Muslim or Christians. There were “pagans” in every province, but especially in hilly, or thickly forested or remote areas. In some parts the conquest by the Fulani was virtually complete and the “pagans” were subdued and living under the control of their own petty village or hamlet heads under the suzerainty of Fulani District Heads. In other parts the conquest was far from complete and the “pagan” was in continual rebellion. In yet other parts, no real attempt had been made to subdue them and they were independent. What Lugard did in these different cases was to be of great importance in their subsequent social and religious history. . . . It can hardly be doubted that the practice of placing large number of “pagans” under Fulani [Muslim] District Head and supporting the authority of these by the powers of the Government when and where necessary led to the expansion of Islam.⁸⁰

In Adamawa Province from 1905 to 1921, for example, the imposition of Hausa-Fulani Muslims as “natural” rulers of Yunguru “pagans” would lead to tragic consequences. When Yunguru resistance against Hausa-Fulani tax collectors led to the killing of the British-imposed Hausa ruler, his associate, and Hausa settlers, a British-led punitive force massacred Yunguru villagers.⁸¹ And in Idoma in the lower Benue region of the Northern Protectorate, District Officer T. E. Letchworth recorded strong resistance of local people to the Hausa-Fulani Muslim hierarchy, noting that a stranger to the area was “likely to have his head taken off,” especially if he was Hausa.⁸²

Sir Hugh Clifford, governor of Nigeria from 1919 to 1925, convinced about the serious problems ethnic and religious tensions posed to local administration, tried to introduce reforms that were sensitive to religious and communal diversity, as well as the changing demographic transformation of the Northern Provinces. Such recognition of the region's complicated demographic character by Clifford was at variance with the orthodoxy of old-guard Lugardians in the Northern Nigerian colonial service whom the governor distrusted. Clifford was clear from the onset that religious and ethnic differences throughout the region had a significant bearing on the legitimacy of the native authority system. On examining the "pagan tribes" of the Bauchi Plain, the governor found that masses of local people had opposed taxation because of their age-old antagonism and animosity. To local "tribes" in the Bauchi Plains, British colonial taxation was seen as an offshoot of the slave raids of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers after the Sokoto Jihad of the previous century. Despite British administrators' claims that a significant portion of taxes would be used to provide essential social services in local communities, the leaders of the Plain "tribes" contended that the only difference between the extractive practices of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers of the caliphate era and Britain's colonial taxes lay in the irritating regularity with which British administrators insisted on the payment of taxes. To rectify this problem, Clifford called for the creation of new administrative units that would promote the aspirations of non-Hausa-Fulani communities. For Muslim immigrants of the Bauchi Plains, Clifford called for the establishment of a special judicial system composed of alkali courts to only adjudicate Muslim legal matters. With regard to the relation between Hausa-Fulani Muslims and numerous non-Hausa-Fulani Muslim groups in the Bauchi Plains, Clifford concluded:

The pagan tribes of the Bauchi Plateau succeeded in maintaining their independence and end up having succeeded in repelling successive Mohammedan invasions. The Plateau therefore is not and never has been Mohammedan country, and the Hausa and other Muslim settlers, who have established themselves there since our advent, have no more claim or right to exercise administrative authority over any part of it, or over any of its indigenous inhabitants, than has any other section of the immigrant community. Moreover, experience gained in other parts of the Mohammedan world has made me profoundly distrustful of the use which Muslims are accustomed to make of any power which they may seek here over a primitive, non-Mohammedan peoples.⁸³

Clifford's executive order signaled an important break from Lugard's policy of indirect rule, which vested the authority of the colonial administrative system in Hausa-Fulani emirate rulers that emerged from the Sokoto Jihad. In Bauchi Province, the theory of indirect rule that had established its traditional claims on the hierarchy of culturally superior Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers over inferior "pagans" was flawed even at its conception. Yet it would be incorrect to suggest that Clifford's declaration in the Bauchi Plains amounted to a wholesale repudiation of the indirect rule system.

The implementation of British colonial policy thus varied greatly across the Northern Nigerian Provinces, resulting in protracted debates among colonial officials. For Clifford, local confidence in indirect rule required "order" and "justice," and only after gaining the confidence of local communities would colonial taxation be justified, especially to those who did not fall neatly under the authority of the Sokoto Caliphate. Interestingly, the acting secretary under Clifford, S. M. Grier, had a view that resembled Clifford's, but his perception of "pagan" communities appears to differ. Like Clifford, Grier's memoranda reflected the idea that people in "pagan" communities lived under moral and social conditions that were inferior to those of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers. But instead of characterizing the extraction of tax from "pagans" as coercive, Grier claimed that pagan communities did not expect or hope for any better condition. Where Clifford leaves open the possibility that "pagan" communities wanted but could not attain less coercive forms of taxation, Grier claims that "pagans" could not conceive of a different state. For Grier, then, indirect rule had more to do with compelling the "pagan tribes" to embrace a higher moral order and a superior form of life.⁸⁴

The response of G. J. Lethem, as district officer of Dikwa District, to these imperial discussions on the implementation of indirect rule is instructive because it offers a way one British administrator interpreted the complexities of religious and communal identity in local communities under his jurisdiction. The files reveal that although certain practices on taxation were discouraged by Clifford's administration, Lethem felt compelled to allow them to continue in remote areas of Dikwa District. In response to Grier and Clifford, Lethem contended that effective adjudication of legal codes had to take specific local conditions into account. Unlike his superiors in Lagos and Kaduna, Lethem contends that legal rules had significant social functions that continue to mediate social relations. Rather than intervene when he toured so-called pagan communities, Lethem claimed that he used the shehu's name (the name of the Muslim ruler in the district), thereby aligning himself with prevailing networks of power. Lethem's interpretation of colonial rule, then, recognized the role of

British collection of taxes, but also believed that preexisting practices did not need to be unduly altered by British colonial reforms.⁸⁵

Assistant District Officer (and later Resident of Bornu Province) T. E. Letchworth's colonial files in Nasarawa Division further reveal the tension between the theory of indirect rule and the reality of local administration among the diverse religious and ethnic groups that constituted Britain's colonial provinces in Northern Nigeria. Like most junior colonial administrators in the Northern Provinces in the 1920s and '30s, Letchworth was not naive about indirect rule's limitations, although only close engagement with the realities "on the ground" gave him a fuller understanding of the extent of the social, political, and religious complexities in Nasarawa Emirate. In Nasarawa, multiple identities were rooted in extensive religious and communal diversity, under the tenuous rule of the emir, district heads, village heads, and Muslim clerics. Lugardian indirect rule had brought these diverse communal groupings under a simplified system that obscured the intricate workings of the emirate's political, religious, and social life. Moreover, the Lugardian system assumed a hierarchy of communities wherein Hausa-Fulani Muslim aristocrats governed as natural rulers over Hausa and Fulani Muslim *talakawa* and "pagan" tribes. However, these religious and communal identities were far more mutable than indirect rule's simple social stratification would like to admit. By imposing a simplified binary between Islamic aristocratic rulers and the masses of "pagans" in non-Muslim areas of the Northern Protectorate, British administrators not only consolidated the power of emirate rulers, but also accentuated a major politico-religious fault line between the Muslim emirates and communities that adhered to indigenous religious beliefs, many of whom would gradually come under the influence of mission Christianity by the late colonial period in the 1950s. Letchworth would later recall a jarring incident during one of his tours of rural communities under his jurisdiction:

I had to do the Gade who were mostly in Guada-Guada District I think it was, where three village areas overlap into the home district of the Nasarawa Emirate, which was under a Fulani district head who subsequently became emir, and very early on it became an obvious fact they would have to be lumped into the new Gade District that was to be created for the Gade. . . . But one illuminating thing happened one day, I was going to one of these villages and we were sitting on the sample saddle of a range of hills. . . . And I very distinctly heard him [Letchworth's Hausa attendant] say, as the pagans were trekking up the passing, *Ga su shanun mu* (translation: there they go our cattle). And I thought to myself, this was rather different from what we were taught.⁸⁶

In the simple utterance of the Hausa attendant, Letchworth was immediately aware that the attendant's words did not reflect a central assumption of indirect rule: that Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers will treat "pagan" tribes as subjects, not, as the metaphor suggests, a means of profit. It is reasonable to assume from Letchworth's statement that his Hausa Muslim attendant did not regard the "pagans" as subjects, at least not as British administrators would have assumed, but rather as a group that was fundamentally different from Hausa-Fulani Muslims, who were deemed natural rulers of the Nasarawa Emirate. Ochonu's conceptualization of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rule over non-Muslims in the Middle Belt is instructive in the rationalization of the indirect rule among the diverse peoples of the Northern Nigerian Protectorate. He notes: "I traced the imperial activities of the defunct Sokoto Caliphates' Hausa-Fulani Muslim agents [of British colonial rulers] in the Middle Belt as they morphed from conducting slave raids and exacting tributes in the mid-nineteenth century . . . to enforcing subcolonial preparatory rule under the British in the twentieth century."⁸⁷

While British authorities scaled back the more rigid form of the indirect rule system and installed discrete administrative units that recognized the region's communal and religious diversity, the complicated local administrative system persisted throughout the Northern Protectorate even before the outbreak of World War II. For example, in Tangale District in Gombe Division, District Officer J. A. E. Morley's records of tax collection suggest that antagonistic relationships continued to characterize tax assessment and enforcement. The pace of tax collection varied significantly across the district. In some, tax was collected quickly. But in many others, collection was a drawn-out affair that dragged on for many months. When census lines were drawn, British officers knew the more affluent from the poorer areas and had a fair amount of knowledge about the seasonal variants that would affect communities' abilities to pay, as well as when and where crops had done well or failed. It is unlikely, then, that the delays stemmed mainly from mistaken census lines. Instead, the records suggest that the delays occurred because leaders either were unwilling to vigorously enforce the collection of colonial taxes, were simply unable to collect taxes, or embezzled funds collected from taxes.⁸⁸

The proposed reorganization of Waja Native Authority in Gombe Division, based on a secret intelligence report by Assistant District Officer D. T. M. Birks in September 1945, provides vivid insight into the fluid demography of the people who shaped the social landscape of Northern Nigeria. The appropriation, distortion, and manipulation of this history under British colonial rule would continue to influence the processes of decolonization after World

War II. In this account, the creation of local colonial administrative structures reflected the narratives of the highly contentious communal conditions in the early twentieth century, when British colonial rule was imposed, as well as the uncertainties of the early years of colonial rule that were shaped by indirect rule.

Birks's confidential report suggests that colonial rule intensified the process of politico-religious tensions in the area. In the Waja region of the Gombe emirate, indirect rule in the early twentieth century solidified Fulani Muslim domination by formalizing the local administrative structure. In the Plains Waja area, the hegemony of two Fulani Muslim clans led to a growth in religious and political identity, shaping the framework for colonial local administration. According to Birks's report, immediately after the Fulani Jihad, two Fulani clans (Yola and Kukawa) settled in Kunde, near Gombe, an area adjacent to the Waja region. Under the reign of Baba Yero, the Kunde Fulani raided several Plains Waja "tribes," gained political control over them, and eventually achieved a fiefdom over the area. The Kunde Fulani used harsh tactics to subordinate these Waja tribes, burning the resistant Gelengu tribe's village to the ground. However, the Kunde Fulani were unable to gain control over the Hill Waja because their horsemen, although decisive in their subjugation of Plains Waja "tribes," were not effective on the steep hillside of Dogiri.

What followed from the uneven control of Fulani Muslim was a gradual hybridization of the various groups, even as they retained consciously distinct identities. Fulani Muslim rulers in the Waja area more closely identified with the Waja when Emir Kwoiranga married a Waja girl, who became the mother of a later district head of the Waja, Musa Sarkin Yaki (under British colonial rule). Many of the Plains Waja adopted some notable Fulani religious and cultural practices, such as the Waja Tsafi festival called Giwiyendi (or Doki in Hausa). Although several of these groups began to share cultural, religious, political, and lineage ties, they retained distinct identities that characterized a social hierarchy in the region. Despite these ties, Plains Waja "tribes" still paid tributes and homage to their Fulani Muslim rulers, although Fulani control of the area was only a form of suzerainty.

In the case of the Hill Waja, when the British colonized the area in 1906 under the direction of Resident Howard, Birks's intelligence report noted, Waja communities of Reme and Dogiri (what would become the Hill Waja) mounted strong resistance, but British forces ultimately subdued them. Before Howard's departure from the area, he appointed Tukur Sarkin Yaki, a Fulani Muslim ruler from the Gombe royal court, as district head. Resident Howard's actions effectively extended the power of the local Fulani Muslim rulers over

the Hill Waja, as Sarkin Yaki's appointment established the first Fulani headship over the Hill and Plains Waja. In 1908, the Waja District was incorporated into the Tangale-Waja independent districts, leading to the appointment of Musa Sarkin Yaki as district head after the request of the people in the area. Sarkin Musa was deposed by the British for "administrative incompetence" in 1926 and was replaced by his son Kwoiranga II.

After Kwoiranga's death in 1936, the Waja people resisted Fulani Muslim rule. In keeping with the trend to reform indirect rule, British administrators subdivided the district into smaller administrative units with independent leadership structures. In 1945, British colonial officers continued to recognize the autonomy of communities in the Waja region, enabling them to solidify their identities. Following Birks's recommendation, British authorities divided the Waja Village head council into two, reflecting the communal differences between Hill and Plains Waja. Birks accumulated interviews with both colonial administrators and Waja elders so that he could piece together a representative (though still somewhat patchy) description of the various Waja communities' histories. A significant portion of his decision appears to be founded on the oral histories of various Waja "tribes" that emphasized cultural, religious, social, and historical differences as a justification for their autonomy.⁸⁹

The limitations of indirect rule were also evident in many other divisions in the Northern Provinces. In the Katagum Division of Kano Province, many local communities resisted the policies of the native authority. In 1915, for example, in his annual report to Resident Temple, Assistant District Officer H. M. Brice-Smith reported widespread disorder in the division, including strong opposition against the authority of the emir, communal violence among Fulani groups, and charges of duplicity against the emir in the implementation of colonial law. In the Chana Fika District, Sarkin Chana Jaju, a subordinate of the emir of Fika, rebelled against the emir's authority and asserted his own authority by marshaling disparate communities, including the Shadi, Fassakande, and Madigongo, against colonial authorities. Brice-Smith expressed dismay at the inability of the emir of Dambam to compel "Kerikeri pagans," along with their allies, the Ngizimawa and Beddawa, to conform to colonial laws. Instead of confronting indirect rule's serious structural problems, colonial authorities criminalized local resistance to colonial policy. Although Brice-Smith recognized the conflict's historical antecedent, describing "the slave raiding of the Fulani groups as an old habit," the district officer, with the support of District Officer Elder from Bornu and District Officer Carlyle, as well as local rulers, mounted armed police opposition against the uprising.⁹⁰

The Consolidation of Hausa-Fulani Muslim Rule

As we have seen in previous cases, perspectives of the governor as the representative of the British crown and the chief executive in charge of colonial jurisdictions often portend the general trend in administrative priorities throughout Britain's Nigerian Provinces. Consequently, as governors changed with the times, so too did official perspectives on general statements of colonial administration in Lagos and the regional headquarters. We recall that Lugard, as the high commissioner of the Northern Nigerian Protectorate from 1900 to 1906, governor of the Northern Nigerian Protectorate from 1912 to 1913, and governor-general of Nigeria from 1913 to 1918, had firmly entrenched a rigid indirect rule system of local administration. In the intervening years between Lugard's two tenures in Nigeria, when Sir William Wallace served as high commissioner of the Northern Nigerian Protectorate, and Henry Hesketh Bell as governor of the Northern Protectorate from 1909 to 1912, indirect rule was consistently affirmed as the governing principle in colonial Nigeria. Thus, during the critical first two decades of British rule, Lugard's rigid conception of indirect rule dominated the nature and form of local administration in Northern Nigeria and beyond.

Hugh Clifford's tenure as governor marked a slight shift in colonial administrative priorities in Nigeria. During his tenure as governor from 1919 to 1925, Clifford sought to encourage a more efficient method of local administration by exploring new strategies to expand the scope of the native authority system, especially in the Northern Provinces. We will recall how Clifford expanded the concept of indirect rule so that the diverse communal groups, especially adherents of indigenous religious beliefs, would have more control over their local affairs. When Clifford left, Graeme Thompson, governor of Nigeria from 1929 to 1931, gave British officers considerable leeway to innovate as colonial administrators within their various jurisdictions. This gave the lieutenant governor of the Northern Nigerian Provinces, Palmer, the ability to reassert a Northern-centered administrative system that further reified the authority of the Fulani emirs, district heads, village heads, and Muslim clerics in native authority structures. It would be left to Donald Cameron, governor of Nigeria from 1931 to 1935, to implement a far-reaching reform of the indirect rule system of colonial administration.

In 1931, Cameron arrived fresh from service in Tanganyika, becoming the new governor and commander in chief of Nigeria. Raised in the British empire-making tradition, Cameron was enmeshed in the colonial project.⁹¹ Arriving at a time when the native authority system had proven inadequate to address

Nigeria's changing society, Cameron felt compelled to institute comprehensive reforms.⁹² He imposed austerity measures as a response to the Great Depression and moved to improve security throughout colonial Nigeria. Cameron called for reform of the native authority system, especially in the Northern Provinces. James Harford, a district officer with many years of service in Northern Nigeria, recalled Cameron's "profound mistrust" of indirect rule, on which the Northern Nigerian native authority system was so firmly based. During this critical era before the outbreak of World War II, two competing visions of colonial rule created a "fundamental divergence" between the reform-minded Cameron and his subordinates in the Northern Nigerian colonial service, who favored a slow pace of political evolution under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor H. R. Palmer.⁹³ Cameron's strident reforms thus drew the ire of Northern Nigeria's colonial administrators, many of whom turned against Cameron for his perceived "vindictiveness and arrogance."

Commander Carrow, who had served for more than two decades as district officer and resident in Kano and Sokoto Provinces, recalled in the 1960s that because of Cameron's uncompromising style of administration, colonial progress was restricted by infighting between British administrators in the Northern Provinces and British officers in Lagos, who were generally loyal to Cameron. From Carrow's perspective, Cameron and his supporters gave little time to the practical considerations peculiar to this vast region and were only concerned with abstract notions of colonial progress. By contrast, his subordinate with extensive experience in Northern Nigeria—Palmer—believed that ideas of colonial progress should reflect the region's peculiar religious, social, and political context, placing these considerations over theories of colonial reforms.

Carrow cites two examples that illuminate the intense disagreement between Cameron and Palmer. The first open conflict occurred at a conference of chiefs in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria's regional capital, in which Cameron was in a "very critical mood." Carrow contends that Cameron's "violent and rude attacks provoked a stupid and equally exaggerated defense from Palmer." A second moment of open disagreement occurred when the two men argued about whether to unchain native administration prisoners. Cameron was staunchly against the practice, while Palmer felt such matters should be left to the discretion of Northern Nigerian native authorities. As conflict between these two senior officers intensified, Carrow observed that their subordinates often were confused about acceptable colonial policy.⁹⁴

At the national level, Cameron reinstated the Supreme Court, weakened the native courts, abolished the residents' provincial courts, created magistrate courts as appellate bodies, and established a high court staffed by professional

judges. The legal hierarchy was thus reorganized into native courts, magistrate courts, the high court, and the Supreme Court. “The essential importance of the 1933 Cameron legal ordinances,” Rene Larémont argues, “was that they restored the authority of Muslim jurists in civil cases while still mitigating their authority in capital cases.”⁹⁵ Notably, this development curtailed the role of British administrators in the day-to-day governance of the region, as described by Resident Letchworth of Bornu Province. Before Cameron’s reforms, the Resident’s duties had included providing leadership for school administration, provincial institutions, and the Native Authority Council; administering tax policy, budgets, and public works projects; relaying the details of homicide cases to the Executive Council; and serving as registrar for marriages. As Cameron’s reforms consolidated the functions of native authorities, however, powers of British administrators such as those held by the Resident were transferred to a native administrative council.⁹⁶ To provide requisite educational institution for local administrators, the government opened the Kano Law School on the model of Gordon College (later the University of Khartoum).⁹⁷ With Arabic as the language of instruction and a curriculum designed to train elite Muslim jurists, the colonial administration attempted to reform the Islamic legal system.

Ironically, this crucial period of indirect rule undermined non-Muslim autonomy in the Northern Nigerian Provinces. Overlapping colorations of religious, ethnic, and other communal forms of identities had evolved under the aegis of a reformed indirect rule, starting during the governorship of Hugh Clifford. With Cameron’s reform came a formalization of the native administrative structures in the Northern Provinces and further sedimentation of emirate societies. Naturally, the growing influence of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers, precipitated by Cameron’s policy, was resisted by non-Muslim communities. In response, Muslim rulers attempted to fold such dissent into the political hierarchy, reasserting their hegemony as natural rulers of the region’s diverse peoples. While divisions were also evident in intra-Muslim relations in the region, the fault lines between Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers and groups British authorities considered “pagan tribes” widened following the implementation of Cameron’s reform policy. As the gap grew wider, and proselytizing by Christian missions intensified in these non-Muslim communities from the 1930s to the 1950s,⁹⁸ the universal language of Christianity steadily served as a powerful medium of politico-religious mobilization against Hausa-Fulani Muslim hegemony by the time of decolonization in the 1950s. This development established the foundation for major fault lines that would dominate the processes of collective political action in the Northern Provinces in the late colonial period,

and ultimately in the postcolonial era, with its fissures of entrenched ethno-religious identity.

Institutional contestation was central to elite formation in this rapidly changing environment; these efforts essentially amounted to the first deliberate policy that moved Nigeria toward the regionalization of state power. As outlined above, legal formalization required that colonial administrators devolve their authority to the dominant Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers, yet it also required them to retain some control over the judicial system. Power thus flowed downward from the colonial authorities in Lagos (the national capital) and Kaduna (the Northern regional capital) to the power brokers of the Sokoto Caliphate; the reforms were not transmitted upward from local communities to a Hausa-Fulani Muslim aristocracy. They also set the stage for the consolidation of an ethno-regional power structure vested in the educationally advanced Southern Nigerian Christian elite and Northern Muslim rulers. By the end of World War II, religious and ethnic identities had been consolidated, reflecting the entrenched Hausa-Fulani identity embedded in the region's long and complicated engagement with Islam and the impact of Christian missions on the non-Muslim areas of the Northern Protectorate. Though this pattern was complicated by mass migrations of Southern Christians to the Northern Provinces and the migration of Hausa-Fulani Muslims to the Middle Belt region, Muslim and Christian identities assumed greater meaning in the region (the Middle Belt), especially during the decolonization process.