

# Shaping of the Sharia courts: British policies on transforming the kadhi courts in colonial Zanzibar

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## **Abstract:**

Administration of Islamic law in colonial Zanzibar should be seen within the context of the cordial relationship between the sultans and the British colonial authorities. Mutual interests were negotiated between the two imperial powers. Britain needed the sultans to secure British economic interests, whereas the sultans appealed for British protection over the Omani–Zanzibar Sultanate. When Britain established a protectorate over Zanzibar in 1890, they accommodated kadhis and their courts in the colonial establishment through the indirect rule policy. After gaining control over the Zanzibar Sultanate, the British colonial authorities embarked on a process of transforming the kadhi courts. The ultimate objective of the transformation process was to incorporate the courts into the colonial enterprise and gradually reform them. The reform process was marked with transformative contradictions that seemed to be a hallmark of British colonial policy in their territories. The British colonial authorities in Zanzibar embarked on a series of reforms towards transforming the mode of operation of the kadhi courts. Within a span of seven decades of their colonial rule, the British colonial enterprise managed to incorporate the kadhi courts in the colonial judicial system and transform their mode of operation.