

TRENDS IN ISLAMIC DA'WAH (PROPAGATION) IN PARTS OF EASTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Islam in Nigeria received a boost during the colonial era to extend its civilization and propagation mission into Eastern Nigeria—peopled by the Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio, Efik, Annang, Ejeagham (Ekoi), along with few smaller ethnic groups, who today occupy Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and River States. While the predominance of Christianity is not in doubt, the growing influence of Islam in the area is a subject of debate amongst scholars. This paper, based on a qualitative research conducted in Abia, Imo, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa States, four of the nine states of Eastern Nigeria, examines the trends and impacts of Islamic propagation in Eastern Nigeria. It also considers the challenges and prospects of implanting Islam in a Christian-dominated environment.

Keywords: Eastern Nigeria; Islam; da'wah; propagation; challenges; prospects

Introduction

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing Eastern Nigeria (or Eastern Region)



Eastern Nigeria was part of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate that encompassed the old Oil Rivers Protectorate, its hinterland, and more. With the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Nigeria Protectorates in 1914, Eastern Nigeria became the official name for the area lying south of the River Benue and east of the River Niger, stretching southwards into the Bight of Biafra and the Atlantic Ocean.¹ The Igbo, Ibibio, Annang, Oro, Efik, Ejeagham, Ijaw, and

¹E. Uchendu, *Dawn for Islam in Eastern Nigeria: A History of the Arrival of Islam in Igboland* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2011), 20-21.

few other smaller ethnic groups, inhabit this territory. States that fall within this region are: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers. In the current geopolitical structure of Nigeria, adopted in 1999, these states of Eastern Nigeria are found in the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones. Two states each were selected for the current study from the two geo-political zones within the Eastern region. These are: Abia and Imo from the South-East; and Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa from the South-South. The main ethnic communities sampled are Igbo, Ibibio, Annang, and Ijaw. This paper examines the trends in the spread of Islam in Abia, Imo, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa States of Eastern Nigeria using mostly data gathered through interviews conducted in the selected states especially in 2016 and 2017 and questionnaires administered widely in the region.

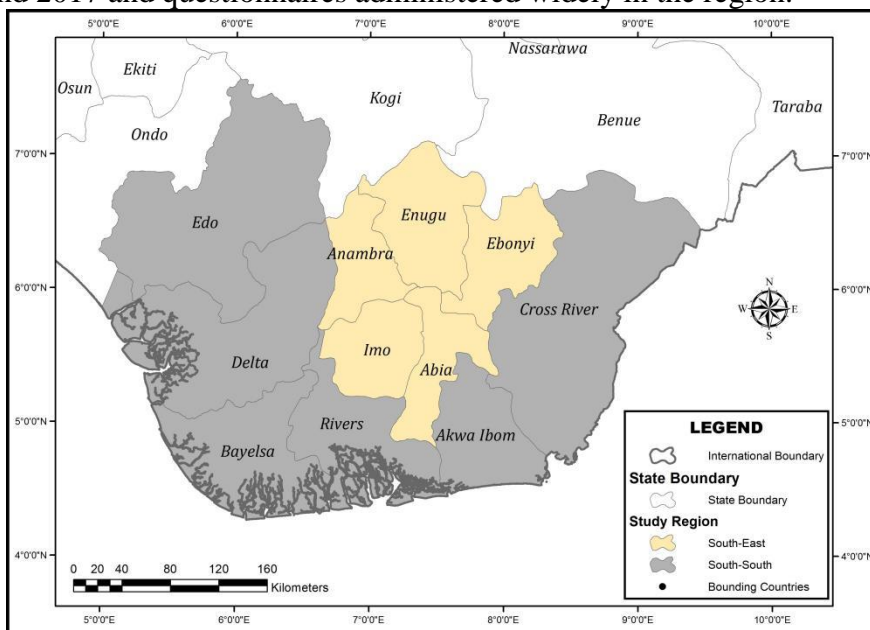


Figure 2: Sectional Map of Nigeria showing the States studied

Contextualizing Da‘wah

The focus of our study is ‘Islamic propagation’. This is captured in Muslim parlance as *da‘wah*. Da‘wah (also *Dawa*; pl. *Da‘awaat*) refers simply to the totality of efforts made by Muslims towards the propagation of Islam. The word, da‘wah, which derives from the root *da‘a* means “to call” or “invite”. Its diverse applications include as an invitation “to the dead to rise from the tomb on the Day of Judgement”, an “invitation to a meal”, “an appeal to God” (in prayer or as a vow). It also signifies a curse, propaganda or lawsuit. Notwithstanding its many applications, its overarching religious usage is as an invitation addressed to men by Allah and the prophets to believe in the religion of Islam.²

Several interviewees explained da‘wah as any attempt by a Muslim to “market” or “advertise” Islam.³ David Bukay, however, identifies da‘wah as one of the three arms that operate the Islamic strategy, together with jihad and hijrah. In his opinion, “Jihad al-Da‘wah” is the least understood, being a “stealth devise” that conceals from non-Muslims the essence of Islam, its operational aims and strategies, by introducing the nice face of Islam as a religion of peace and

²The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* I-XII, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

³Interviews with Jafaru Lawan, 44 years, Calabar, February 2016; Sarikin Hassan Sadauki, 51 years, Uyo, June 2016; Imam Mohammed Adamu, 50 years, Uyo, June 2016; Alhaji Nasir Awhelebe Uhor, 63 years, vice president of Rivers State Islamic Council, Port Harcourt, October 2016.

compassion.⁴ Da‘wah, which is employed for the strengthening and expansion of Islam, can be observed as the spreading of Islam by peaceful propagating means. It is intended to change the non-Muslim’s mind and behavior towards Islam. Bukay argues that “where the jihad works on the body, on the material structure, da‘wah works on the mental–spiritual side as a persuasion means; where jihad operates to terrorize and intimidate, da‘wah aims at confusing and misleading [we would rather say, wooing]; where jihad acts to submit, da‘wah paves the way to Islamize.”⁵ What is of essence here is that efforts at Islamic propagation are actually geared towards Islamization just like Christian missionary efforts lead to Christianization.

The Al-Haram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in *The Spectrum of Islamist Movements* (2007)⁶ provides insight into some Islamists’⁷ understanding, and usage, of da‘wah that agrees with Bukay’s views. For instance, they note: “Jihad and calling people to God’s religion (al-da‘wa) are the most important means of establishing God’s religion and His laws on this earth. Education, instruction, and other methods must serve the jihad, not obstruct it.”⁸ The authors observed that Islamists “used various means to spread the word and proselytize, taking advantage of all fields of life: mosques, the street, schools, institutes, universities, homes, charitable organizations, and professional syndicates.”⁹

From the reports garnered in our study locations, da‘wah is an all-embracing endeavor that incorporates those activities by Muslims that uplift the tenets of Islam in a non-Muslim society. Such activities include simple religious acts like praying, dressing according to Islamic canons, building mosques, and running schools where Islam can be taught. The process was summarized as a mild form of jihad. In this connection, jihad invokes a broader application of the word ‘struggle’, and not merely the narrow reference to aggressive behaviour. Interestingly, however, the current study re-emphasizes the lack of distinction in the minds of Muslims in our study area over the words ‘da‘wah’ and ‘jihad’. Both are understood to underpin the mandatory injunction on Muslims to bring humanity to submit to Allah.

From the Islamic point of view, every Muslim is a potential *daiyah* (meaning “propagator” or “preacher”). He or she is required to call non-Muslims to Islam to the best of his or her ability. The Quran, in *Surah* (chapter) 6:126, explicitly enjoined Muslims thus: “Invite (all) to the way of your Lord... And this is the path of your lord (the Qur’an and Islam) leading straight. We have detailed our revelations for a people who take heed.”¹⁰ It stated further in *Surah* 12:108:

Say (O Muhammad): This is my way; I invite to Allah (i.e. to the Oneness of Allah— Islamic monotheism) with sure knowledge, I and whosoever follows me (also must invite others to Allah ... with sure knowledge). And Glorified and Exalted is Allah (above all that they associate as partners with Him). And I am not of the *Mushrikun*

⁴David Bukay, “Da‘wah, How Muslim Propagators Deceive the Infidels,” https://modern diplomacy.eu/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1234 (accessed October 16, 2017).

⁵Ibid.

⁶Diaa Rashwan (ed.), *The Spectrum of Islamist Movements* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007).

⁷Islamists, as defined by Rashwan et al, refers to people or groups “that take some aspects of Islam or its interpretation as the frame of reference for their existence or objectives. They act in different ways to apply Islam as they see it in their societies and areas in which it is not present.” Rashwan (ed.), *The Spectrum of Islamist Movements*, 15.

⁸Ibid., 57.

⁹Ibid., 138.

¹⁰Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali & Muhammad Mushin Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of The Noble Qur’an in the English Language* (Madinah: King Fahd Glorious Qur’an Printing Complex, ND).

(polytheists, pagans, idolaters and disbelievers in the oneness of Allah; those who worship others along with Allah or set up rivals or partners to Allah).¹¹

In practical terms, Muslims are encouraged to not limit themselves to verbal propagation alone, but to add to it acts of kindness and righteousness and forbidding evil. These together constitute a religious obligation that is vital for Islamization. As reported again in Surah 3:104: “Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good (Islam), enjoining *Al-Ma’ruf* (Islamic monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do) and forbidding *Al-Munkar* (polytheism and disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden). And it is they who are successful.” On the basis of these injunctions, individual Muslims, local and foreign Muslim organizations, centres and societies, make up the main driving force in the propagation of Islam (da‘wah) the world over.

According to Islamic doctrine, the religion of all prophets of Allah is Islam; and each prophet propagated the faith with strict relevance to the time and place of his mission. For Prophet Muhammad, his mission was to renew the call and invitation and perfect what prophets before him did. Hence, it was recorded that he came

as one who has a right to invite all men to repentance or forgiveness of sins; but he does this, not by his own authority, but by the permission and authority given to him by Allah. He also comes as a light to illuminate the whole world.¹²

Further, and going by Muslim world-view, Muhammad’s message was meant for the entire world. In the same way, the responsibility of calling people to Islam was not restricted to him and did not stop with him. To keep the mission permanently alive, Allah gave him an *ummah* (community) constituting all his followers and ordered them to take his truth to other people in the same way he conveyed it to them. This is put forth in the Surah 6:19 as follows: “this Quran has been revealed to me that I may therewith warn you and whomsoever it may reach.” In his farewell message, the prophet, Muhammad, declared that those present should deliver his message to those absent for onward transmission to subsequent generations. The duty of Islamic propagation (da‘wah), therefore, rests squarely with the Muslim *ummah* (see Qur’an 3: 104). It is a collective responsibility which, if they fail to perform, will cause the community to invariably lose its influence, and become no better than any other nation among the numerous nations of the world. This was identified as the reason why Muslims, wherever they find themselves in, struggle to carry out the da‘wah activities to the best of their ability.

The propagation of the Islamic faith involves activities that are both internally and externally oriented. The internally oriented activities are meant exclusively for Muslims and the goal is to strengthen their faith in order to retain them in the fold of Islam. The externally oriented activities are directed to non-Muslims to invite them into Islam. Both aspects of the propagation project are to be pursued with equal vigor and without neglecting one for the other. Popular activities that address both target categories and which were commonly employed in the states under survey include public lectures, Qur’an training programs, open air preaching, outreaches through the media, outreaches in prisons and deployment of humanitarian services in areas of need.¹³

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Mikail Ibrahim Orlu, 43 years, imam of Mobile Police Force, Amuifeke-Orlu, May 2016.

¹³Interviews with Musa Ime, 27 years, Uyo, July 2016; Ismaila Udo Okon, 26 years, Uyo July 2016, Hajia Asmau Akanbi, 43 years, FOMWAN president, Uyo, July 2016, and Barrister Sulaiman Raji, 32 years, Uyo, July 2017.

Islamic Advance into Eastern Nigeria

The jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio from 1804 extended the geographical limits of Islam from its modest confines in Kano to much of North-Western and North-Eastern Nigeria, and beyond into the Camerouns.¹⁴ The jihad, which also triggered the creation of a theocracy, the Sokoto Caliphate, that survived until the British colonization of Northern Nigeria from 1900¹⁵, did not extend beyond the southern fringes of North-Eastern and North-Western Nigeria. Eastern Nigeria, completely unaffected by Fodio's jihad, remained entirely pagan until the 1840s when teams of missionaries arrived in Aboh (1841) and Calabar in (1846) and began Christian evangelistic work. While Simon Jonas, a Sierra Leonean of Igbo parentage, led the team that pioneered the Christianization of Eastern Nigeria from Aboh, Reverend Hope Waddell led the group that commenced from Calabar.¹⁶ Consequently, from Aboh, Calabar, Onitsha, and Opobo, Christianity spread through the length and breadth of Eastern Nigeria. Extensive Christian missionary work was done in the study area to such a degree that in less than a hundred years, it became almost exclusively Christian in orientation and confession. By the time Nigeria became independent in 1960, as Musa Ihejiuto also noted, Eastern Nigeria had transformed "into an entirely Christian area."¹⁷

The first part of Eastern Nigeria to report the presence of Muslims and the practice of Islam is the Nsukka area in northern Igboland. Clear evidence of conversions to Islam in the Nsukka area was reported in the early 1950s. But preceding them was the little-known incident at Calabar in 1937, incidentally involving an indigene of the Nsukka area.¹⁸ In 1958, a group conversion to Islam occurred in Enohia (variously identified as Nnofia¹⁹ and Anohia²⁰) in the Afikpo area in eastern Igboland. A former catechist, Okpani Egwuani, led this public religious realignment that involved about fifty persons as reported by the anthropologist, Simon Ottenberg, who witnessed the event.²¹ Besides these incidents, a handful of individuals from Eastern Nigeria, mostly of Igbo origin, converted to Islam through contacts with Muslims and in response to Islamic propagation. By 1967, on the eve of the Nigerian civil war, the population of Muslims of Eastern Nigeria origin was estimated by one of the early converts at around 200 persons. Concerted efforts towards the Islamization of Eastern Nigeria commenced from the early 1970s, after the civil war.

Personal contacts more than anything facilitated the spread of Islam in Eastern Nigeria. The earliest agents of Islam in the area were Hausa elephant hunters in search of elephant tusks or ivory for merchandise. Four notable hunters that operated in the study area were Mallams Dikko, Bogobiri, Yahaya and Bello. Mallam Dikko settled at Elele near the city of Port Harcourt, Bogobiri moved to Calabar, Yahaya to Owerri, and Bello to Aba.²² Interactions

¹⁴Gilbert L. Taguem Fah, "Negotiating Elitism and Facing Change: Dynamic Idioms of Power and Leadership in Ngaoundere-Cameroon," in Egodi Uchendu, Pat Uche Okpoko and Edlyne Anugwom (eds.), *Perspectives on Leadership in Africa* (Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publishing Co., 2010), 285.

¹⁵N. Levtzion, "Patterns of Islamization in West Africa," in N. Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1979), 215.

¹⁶G. Chuku, "Igbo historiography: Part II," *History Compass*, 2018:e12487, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12487> and Donald M. McFarlan, *Calabar* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946), 4-10.

¹⁷Interview with Musa Ihejiuto, 78 years, Shell Camp-Owerri, May 2016. See also Waheed Azeez, "Islam in Akwa Ibom State" (M.A. thesis, University of Ilorin, 1997), 6.

¹⁸Uchendu, *Dawn for Islam*, 90-1.

¹⁹Abdurrahman I. Doi, *Islam in Nigeria* (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1984), 182-3.

²⁰Simon Ottenberg, "A Moslem Igbo Village," *Cahiers D'Etudes Africaines*, 42 (1971): 240-1.

²¹*Ibid.*, 245.

²²Uchendu, *Dawn for Islam*, 54-9.

between these migrants and their children, on the one hand, and their hosts, on the other, formed one avenue through which Islam made an entry into Eastern Nigeria.²³ Besides the hunters were traders of Yoruba, Hausa and Nupe origins who operated in different parts of the region. Like the hunters, the traders also mixed with the local people, interacted with them and publicly displayed their religious worship while their hosts watched.²⁴ The British colonial government, in the course of its establishment in Eastern Region, made use of Muslim labourers and interpreters. In the Annang town of Ikot Ekpene, then a District Headquarters, Muslims from Northern and Western Nigeria were among the colonial service men and civil servants in the District Office.²⁵

During the Nigerian civil war, between 1967 and 1970, Muslim soldiers and officers of the Nigerian Army deployed to different parts of Eastern Nigeria helped to boost the awareness for Islam in the area. Many soldiers married indigenes as their own method of da'wah. Others settled in their areas of deployment for the purpose of propagating Islam. Several became proficient in the local languages and this aided their da'wah efforts.²⁶ In 1975, Ahmadiyyah Muslim community started their mission in Calabar. From Calabar, where they inherited the oldest mosque built by early Yoruba migrants to the area, they extended their operations to the environs. Port Harcourt and Uyo, in present Rivers and Akwa Ibom States respectively, benefited greatly from Ahmadiyyah missionary activities.²⁷

Having provided a general background to Islamic propagation in Eastern Nigeria, it is necessary at this point to outline specific ways of propagating Islam in Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Imo States, the states closely studied for this paper. The pattern of Islamic propagation in Akwa Ibom was presented as follows:

Committed Muslims exist in virtually all the major parts of Akwa Ibom State and they embark on various activities with the aim of creating Islamic awareness in all the nooks and crannies of the state. To achieve the set objective, various programs have been organized from time to time at various places as a means of inviting all to the way of Allah and expanding His universal will. This is done with wisdom and discretion, meeting people on their own ground and convincing them with illustrations from their own knowledge taking their level of intelligence, exposition, civilization and modernization into consideration. This is in line with the Qur'an [16:125], which says: 'Invite ... to the way of your Lord ... with wisdom and fair preaching'.²⁸

In the Igbo state of Abia, Islamic propagation programs were organized through the South-east *Da'wah* Zonal Committee that was created in 2001. Before its demise in 2005, from lack of funds, the committee was responsible for the coordination of da'wah programmes in different locations in Abia State, the administration and maintenance of existing mosques, the posting and general welfare of imams and other Muslim religious officials within the state. Similarly, the South-South Zonal Committee on Da'wah, with headquarters in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, coordinates the propagation of Islam in both Rivers and Bayelsa States and the

²³Musa Ihejieta, interview cited.

²⁴Interview with Dauda Onyeagocha, 75 years, Owerri, May 2016.

²⁵Azeez, "Islam in Akwa Ibom State," 7. See also, Abdulrazaq O. Kilani, *Minaret in the Delta: Islam in Port Harcourt and Its Environs 1896-2007* (Lagos: Global Dawah Communications, 2008), 65-7.

²⁶Interview with Yusuf Nwoha-Amandugba, 68 years, Owerri, May 2016.

²⁷Interview with Dr. A. H. Bello, Ahmadiyya missionary, Uyo, June 2016.

²⁸Mikail Ibrahim Orulu, interview cited.

appointment of imams for emerging Muslim communities.²⁹ Bayelsa is another location where group conversion occurred in Eastern Nigeria, in this case, in 1996, few weeks after the creation of the state.³⁰

Islamic organizations like Muslim Corpers Association of Nigeria (MCAN)³¹, Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), and *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'aah Wa'iqamatis Sunnah* (JIBWIS—meaning “Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition”), alongside Qur’anic schools (madrasas) established in the region, were all active in propagation.³² Their efforts in this project cannot be over-emphasized. For instance, MCAN has operated in the selected states of Eastern Nigeria since its inauguration there in 1994. State branches serve as the co-coordinating groups for virtually all Muslims in their areas of operation where they create and manage propagation activities. For the past two decades MCAN could be regarded as being in the forefront of da‘wah activities in Eastern Nigeria. It was the main Muslim organization engaging the grassroots through its members, who, over the years, were deployed to all fields of endeavor, including industries, for their compulsory one-year national service. Within the period of national service, MCAN members were posted to farm settlements in different villages and urban centers, to petroleum companies no matter where located, to public and private schools as teachers in all levels of the educational system, to banks and a variety of other companies and establishments.

The proximity of MCAN members to people from all walks of life in their areas of primary assignment provides them with opportunities to create awareness for Islam in different parts of the study area. In fact, in several communities across the states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Imo, the local people were unaware of the religion of Islam and never came into contact with a Muslim until Muslim youth corps members (MCAN members) were posted to serve in their localities.³³

Although MCAN members’ propagation activities give priority to non-Muslims, they also include programs designed to help fellow Muslims to mature in their faith. Among these were classes where adult Muslim converts and their children were trained in the tenets of Islam in order to strengthen their faith and commitment to Allah. Their regular Qur’anic classes and adult literacy programs for converts at various Islamic centers and mosques in Imo and Akwa Ibom States have helped the cause of Islam in Eastern Nigeria. These were besides the manpower they provide for Qur’anic schools and Islamic centers established by other organizations such as the University of Uyo Arabic training program.³⁴ The highlight of MCAN propagation activities in the states under study is the annual MCAN week, which features lectures, symposia, public question-and-answer sessions specifically targeting non-Muslims, outreaches to prisons and hospitals, and visits to prominent Muslim patrons.

²⁹Interviews with Nurudeen Magaji, 39 years, Yenagoa, June 2016; and Ebimobo Ororuwa, 44 years, Ogbogene, June 2016.

³⁰Interview with Salamatu Abdullahi, 42 years, Yenagoa, November 2017.

³¹These are graduates of recognized tertiary institutions mandated to serve the nation in a voluntary capacity for national integration purposes under the National Youth Service Corps (scheme). Nigerian youths undergoing the compulsory national service program are popularly referred to, during the period of service, as ‘youth corpors’. And, wherever they are posted to, for their national service, is their place of ‘primary assignment’.

³²Interview with Mumuni Ibrahim, 54 years, Aba, June 2016.

³³Mikail Orlu, interview cited.

³⁴Hajia Asmau Akanbi, Yusuf Nwoha-Amandugba, and Barrister Sulaiman Raji, interviews cited.

Yoruba migrants built two mosques at Aritelane and Toolda Street in Yenegoa as sites for the dissemination of Islamic teachings in those environs.³⁹ These double as the Islamic centers in those localities.

Islamic da'wah is done as much through the radio and television as through one-on-one contacts and by literature distribution.⁴⁰ Popular radio stations patronized for da'wah in Abia State include Pace-setter FM Umuahia, Magic FM Aba and NTA Channel 6 Aba. In Imo State, the popular station is NTA 12, Owerri, while in Bayelsa it is Niger-Delta television (NDTV). The usual peak season for Islamic propagation has remained the Ramadan. During this period, media-driven propagation is at its peak.

Individual Muslims, migrants and indigenous converts, residents in cities and villages, actively participate in un-organized propagation of Islam in the states closely studied. Quest for employment, desire to get married, and a host of other economic, political, social, personal and public reasons were contributory factors facilitating conversions to Islam in Eastern Nigeria during the period of this study.⁴¹

Undeniably, the efforts expended on da'wah since after the Nigerian civil war have yielded some fruits for Islam as several persons have converted to the religion within this period. From population estimates collected in 2016, indigenous Muslims numbered around 200 in Akwa Ibom State and less than 100 in Bayelsa State.⁴² Specific figures were unavailable for Imo and Abia States, but from the consensus estimate given by Muslim leaders, the entire Eastern Nigeria could have had up to 13,500 indigenous Muslims by 2013.⁴³ Thereafter, with the intensification of the bellicosity by Boko Haram⁴⁴ and Fulani herdsmen on state functionaries, non-Muslims and later Muslims, the population of indigenous converts in Eastern Nigeria began to dwindle, but not drastically as many feared the backlash for recanting.⁴⁵

Challenges to Islamic Propagation in Eastern Nigeria

Despite the extent to which Islam has been preached in the four states of Eastern Nigeria closely studied and the successes already recorded, it must be pointed out that the propagation of Islam in Eastern Nigeria has not been a hitch free exercise. Several problems have militated both against the Muslim proselytizers and advocates, but also against Islam itself. These problems were enumerated to include: financial difficulties, general prejudice, ignorance, lack of acceptability, mobility difficulties, language problems, internal crises within the Muslim community, the unsteady witness of some indigenous converts, the poor performance of Eastern Assembly of Muslim indigenes (an umbrella organization for Muslims in the region), the detached attitude of Muslim settlers, and the hostile attitude of some non-Muslim

³⁹Interview with Nurudeen Magaji, interview cited. Also, interview with Habibata Rozak, Yenegoa, June 2016.

⁴⁰Interview with Hajia Aisha Ibrahim Adamu, 34 years, Uyo, April 2015.^[1]

⁴¹Interview with Adamu Abubakar, 50 years, Yenegoa, June 2016.

⁴²Interview with Mujahid Nya, 51 years, Uyo, June 2016.

⁴³Interview with Ismaila Akpan, 41 years, National President of Islamic Movement for Niger Delta (IMOND), Port Harcourt, December 2013.

⁴⁴Relevant studies on Boko Haram include: Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (ed.), *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014); James B. Kantiok, *Boko Haram, the Government and Peace Negotiation* (Zaria: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2014); Davin O'Regan, "The Geography of Boko Haram: More Deadly but More Remote," <<http://www.isn.ethc.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?Ing=en&id=188153>> (accessed February 16, 2015), and Hakeem Onapajo and Abubakar A. Usman, "Fuelling the Flames: Boko Haram and Deteriorating Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (2015): 5-6, 9-10.

⁴⁵Mujahid Nya and Alhaji Nasir Awhelebe Uhor, interviews cited.

indigenes.⁴⁶ As some interviewees observed, for as long as these challenges remain, no meaningful progress would be made in getting Eastern Nigeria Islamized.

Money was identified to be of essence in pursuing da‘wah in Eastern Nigeria. It is essential for providing transportation into various sections of the communities under study, a good number of which are in riverine areas or in forest locations that are not easily accessible. Access to these locations requires a variety of vehicles, motorcycles, ferries, and even air transport for conveying Muslim preachers and other proselytizers to scheduled destinations for Islamic propagation. The unavailability of funds for these infrastructure has been one deterrent to a smooth propagation agenda for the region.

In Abia State, the foremost challenge to Islamic da‘wah was identified as the cultural and religious affiliations of the indigenous people. This was referred to as “the hostile attitude of some non-Muslim indigenes.”⁴⁷ One of the ways the people displayed this ‘hostility’ was to organize reprisal attacks on Muslims on more than one occasion since 2000, which led to the deaths of some Muslims, in revenge for the continuous killings of Christians in Northern Nigeria.⁴⁸ Not many converts to Islam were comfortable with the regular acts of aggression on non-Muslims by individuals, unorganized groups, and sects like Boko Haram, in Northern Nigeria. Leaders of Muslim communities in Eastern Nigeria agree that this singular incident has in addition caused some converts to abandon Islam.⁴⁹

Closely connected to the reported hostility of non-Muslims are allegations of prejudice against Islam and Muslims in Eastern Nigeria. These are commonly verbalized in assertions that Islam is the religion of the Hausa.⁵⁰ Those who call Islam “Hausa religion” or “Hausa church” appear completely impervious to the fact that their fellow indigenes are in the religion, not to mention that several Nigerian ethnic groups have Muslims. These presumably prejudiced indigenes of Eastern Nigeria regard their neighbors converting to Islam as having denied the conventional religions practiced in the region and assumed a new identity as an Hausa.⁵¹ On occasion, some converts were harassed and shamed for becoming Muslim.⁵²

To very old converts, what feeds this prejudice is ignorance about Islam in the region. The resultant effect, therefore, is the lack of acceptability of the religion and of the converts.⁵³ However, with Muslims having lived in the region since 1890, and after several conversions to Islam, indigenes of Eastern Nigeria cannot be supposed to be ignorant of Islam. What is commonly presented as ignorance, to these authors, is rather a clash of cultures in which committed non-Muslims refused to be won over to Islam. This is supported by our questionnaire survey in which majority of the participants showed strong preference for either Christianity or traditional religion. To them, there should be no third religion in the land. Many participants strongly expressed the sentiment that if at all they get tired of Christianity, they would return to the traditional religion instead of opting for Islam.⁵⁴ This resolve should be

⁴⁶Mikail Orlu and Musa Ihejieta, interviews cited.

⁴⁷Dauda Onyeagocha, interview cited.

⁴⁸Interview with Roland Iroegbu, 81 years, Aba, June 2016.

⁴⁹Mujahid Nya, Hassan Sadauki, and Alhaji Nasir Awhelebe Uhor, interviews cited.

⁵⁰Interview with Chioma Sylla, 30 years, Okole, February 2016. Also Dauda Onyeagocha, interview cited.

⁵¹Dauda Onyeagocha, interview cited. This situation was reported for other parts of Nigeria where conversions to Islam occurred after Nigeria’s independence. See Frank Salamone, “Becoming Hausa: Ethnic identity change and its implications for the study of Ethnic Pluralism and Stratification,” *Africa* 45 (4) 1975: 410-423.

⁵²Mujahid Nya, interview cited.

⁵³Dauda Onyeagocha, interview cited.

⁵⁴Interview with Ogar Sammy, 43 years, Uyo, February 2016.

seen against the sectarian clashes between Muslims and non-Muslims that saw hundreds of non-Muslims killed in the last three decades since the Maitatsine Uprising of the 1980s. On top of this would be the policies of Nigeria's current Muslim President, Muhammadu Buhari, whose government largely excluded Eastern Nigeria from infrastructural development on the grounds that very few of the votes (the "5% vs 97%" divide⁵⁵) that brought him into office came from that region. Next is his government's negation of the constitutionally enshrined principle of 'federal character' in federal appointments to the degree of marginalizing Eastern Nigeria. ("The summary of it" as reported by a journalist in 2017 "is that ... apart from a few cosmetic 'peace offerings' ... Buhari has not really shown a concrete shift in his hostile disposition to the '5%'..."⁵⁶) All these cumulatively strengthened the anger against Islam in the area.⁵⁷

Language difficulty was another factor that undermined Islamic propagation in the selected states of Eastern Nigeria. Although much progress was made since the 1980s as migrants learned their host communities' languages, there still remain some hitches in communities outside the core propagation map some of which only recently were settled by Muslim migrants. Several are located in the riverine areas where communication difficulties have not lessened to allow easy transfer of Islamic religious views to non-Muslims. Moreover, the remoteness of these parts, in the first place, makes them unattractive to trained propagators. This leads us to yet another problem confronting Islamic propagation in Eastern Nigeria, which is the difficulty of getting volunteers to settle in remote villages, a fact confirmed by a 1969 convert from Tombia.⁵⁸

It has become obvious that despite the revelation—"hold fast to the rope of Allah and be not divided" (Quran 3:103)—that enjoins the unity of the Muslim Ummah, rifts, misunderstandings, mutual strife, and mistrust have occasionally overwhelmed several Muslim communities in the states under study.⁵⁹ As one member observed:

Ideological disputations as well as political and economic considerations have intermittently pitched the community against itself to the degree that some regard others as non bonafide members of the same family with them, but rather as rancorous enemies who must be subjugated, suppressed or out rightly destroyed, not minding the fact that the non-Muslims, who form the majority in the area, are watching them with keen interest, seeing them as members of a fragmented community...⁶⁰

When so divided, da'wah sometimes suffers. Also, to this could be added the predilections of some indigenous converts, which other co-religionists regard as counter-productive to the spread of Islam, because rather than attracting non-Muslims to Islam, their ways detract from it. Those in question were in the category believed to have joined Islam from economic,

⁵⁵Reno Omokri, "Buhari caused current division in Nigeria with 5% vs 97% speech," *Vanguard News*, June 17, 2017. See also "Buhari: Constituencies that gave me 97%," (July 23, 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mm_VEkxyiKw (accessed October 26, 2018) and Farooq Kperogi, "How Buhari's low bar is elevating Atiku," October 20, 2018, <https://www.onlinenigeria.com/site/stories/latestnews/642370-how-buharis-low-bar-is-elevating-atiku-farooq-kperogi.html> (accessed October 21, 2018).

⁵⁶Ochereome Nnanna, "Buhari in the land of 5%," *Vanguard News*, November 20, 2017.

⁵⁷Kperogi, "How Buhari's low bar is elevating Atiku."

⁵⁸Interview with Alhaji Suleiman Otaji Dagogo, 78 years, Tombia, November 2017.

⁵⁹Azeez, "Islam in Akwa Ibom," 100-4.

⁶⁰Imam Mikail Orulu, interview cited.

political, and other material considerations, and not out of conviction.⁶¹ To understand the tendencies of this class of converts, a leading Hausa migrant described them as follows:

They are not very sound [in the way of Islam] ... Most converts struggle more for position. The only area where you see them being assertive is where there is something to gain ... where government releases money for Muslims. That is where they are active. Even if today one becomes a Muslim, from that same day, it is [same] issue he will be talking about.⁶²

Projections for the Spread of Islam in Eastern Nigeria

Irrespective of the downside to da'wah in Eastern Nigeria, many Muslims report clear prospects for the spread of Islam in the region. Some hold that the negative, violence-prone mental pictures held of Muslims and Islam can gradually be erased in the minds of the local people as communication deepens between Muslims and non-Muslims. Proponents of Islamization of Eastern Nigeria draw comfort from this fact and hope to build on it to achieve better reception for Islam.

Next is to properly train the personnel engaged in propagation. The first principle for the propagation of Islam is the sincerity of the Da'iyah (the preacher).⁶³ They recommend that Muslim preachers should approach their task from the standpoint of persons who took it upon themselves to solve problems they did not create. Coming from this angle, they should be amenable to incorporate trendy methods of teaching and preaching in their work. By doing so, their undertakings and competencies would be suitable for achieving their goals.⁶⁴ According to Hisham Al-Talib, some persons think of Islam as a bed of flowers that can be planted anywhere. Since this is not so in real life, Muslim preachers should demonstrate the specificity related to local customs, tastes, dress, arts, and culture of the area where they are based.⁶⁵ In addition, they should exploit scientific advancements for their work. What is proposed here is Muslim preachers' general adaptability for, as Amin Ahsan Islahi observed, the dynamism in propagating Islam since the period of the invention of the broadcast media was what has "taken this propaganda and teaching and preaching to great heights".⁶⁶ Drawing from this, a Muslim preacher should adopt a variety of methods as long as they are *halal* (lawful).⁶⁷ Methods that should be agreed upon on the basis of social and cultural considerations should suit the target people's temperaments and circumstances.⁶⁸ The social circumstances to harness in Christian dominated Eastern Nigeria include the growing proximity between Muslims and non-Muslims and the growing propensity towards inter-marriages between migrant Muslims and non-Muslims. As one reported, Muslim settlers have found it easier to marry from the local people than to travel long distances back to their respective homes to get a wife and many deliberately

⁶¹Mujahid Nya, interview cited.

⁶²Hassan Sadauki, interview cited.

⁶³Interview with Abubakar Udofa, 40, Uruk Ata, July 2016.

⁶⁴Taofiq Miqdad Gidado, "New Trends among Muslim Youths in Nigeria: The Muslim Students Society of Nigeria as a Case Study (1980-1996)" (M. A. project, University of Ilorin, 1997), 46.

⁶⁵Hisham Altalib, *Training Guide for Islamic Workers* (Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1999). <http://www.readbag.com/library-depaul-collections-spcapdf-islam-in-america/bib> (accessed March 31, 2018).

⁶⁶Amin Ahsan Islahi, "Errors in the Current Mode of Preaching," <http://www.al-mawrid.org/index.php/articles/view/errors-in-the-current-mode-of-preaching> (accessed October 22, 2018).

⁶⁷Altalib, *Training Guide for Islamic Workers*, 19.

⁶⁸Islahi, "Errors in the Current Mode of Preaching."

married non-Muslims as their own method of da‘wah.⁶⁹ The propagation-potential in this practice is well known to Muslims.

Lastly, Muslim preachers must abstain from using methods that are inimical to their message. An example would be: insisting by any means on compelling those who would not want to listen to their message or resorting to polemics.⁷⁰ Preaching by compulsion would be detrimental to the dignity of da‘wah work and to the personal prestige of the preacher, besides reinforcing stereotyped image of Islam and Muslims. Rather, for propagation to be effectual, the Muslim preacher should display two important skills—a sound knowledge of Islam and deep faith in the religion that “does not accept any discussion, debate, doubt, review, or second thoughts.”⁷¹ If the above is adhered to, as many interviewees believe, the intransigence of the peoples of Eastern Nigeria to Islam may be overcome.

Conclusion

The many trends employed in the Islamization project of Eastern Nigeria since the 1900s cannot be exhausted in this short piece. That intense and committed da‘wah have been in vogue

⁶⁹Interview with Mrs. Saadatu Gambo, 40 years, Uyo, July 2016. Jafaru Lawan and Hassan Sadauki, interviews cited.

⁷⁰Gidado, “New Trends Among Muslim youths in Nigeria,” 106.

⁷¹Yahya Ibraheem Yero “Da‘awah Islaamiyyah (Islamic Proselytisation) and Its Essential Components,” *Sociology Study*, 5, 4 (2015): 314-322.

for decades are all too clear. The outcomes change with the political and economic realities of the people. Whether the region will concede much ground to Islam in the future would depend on both the coordinators of the propagation project and the impressions of the people about the religion of Islam.

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