

NEW DAWN FOR ISLAM IN NIGERIA:

A Study of the arrival of Islam and ensuing contestations in Igboland

egodi uchendu



Basic Facts about Nigeria

- ◆ Location
- ◆ Ethnic composition
- ◆ Colonial experience



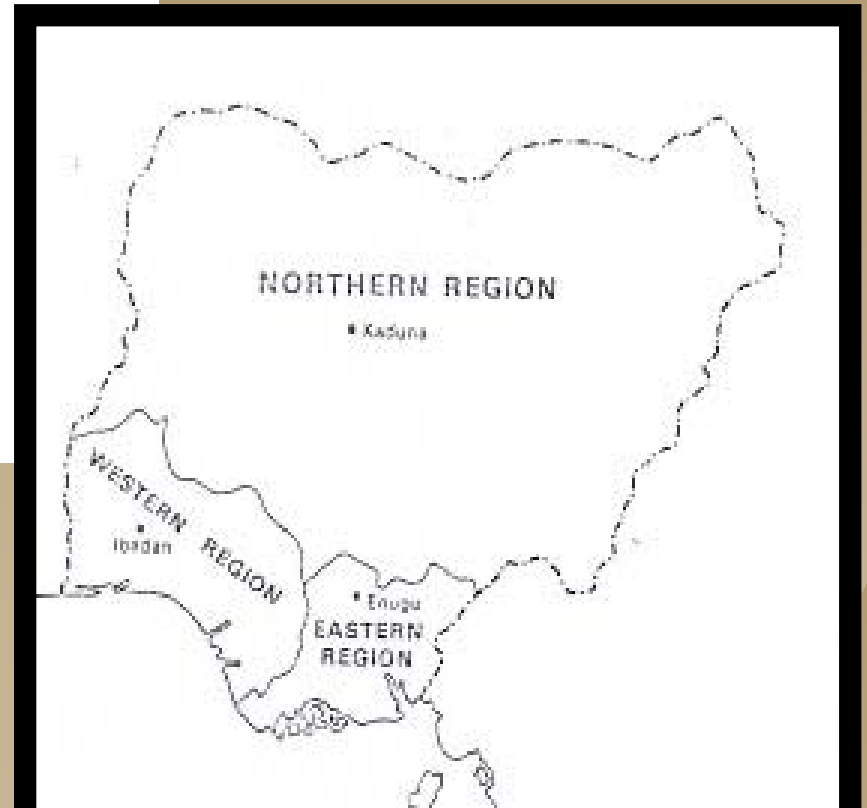
Colonial artefacts, 1900-1914



Governor's emblem Protectorate of Southern Nigeria



Nigeria amalgamated, 1914



Independence, 1960

- ◆ The new state retained its colonial name rendered as follows:

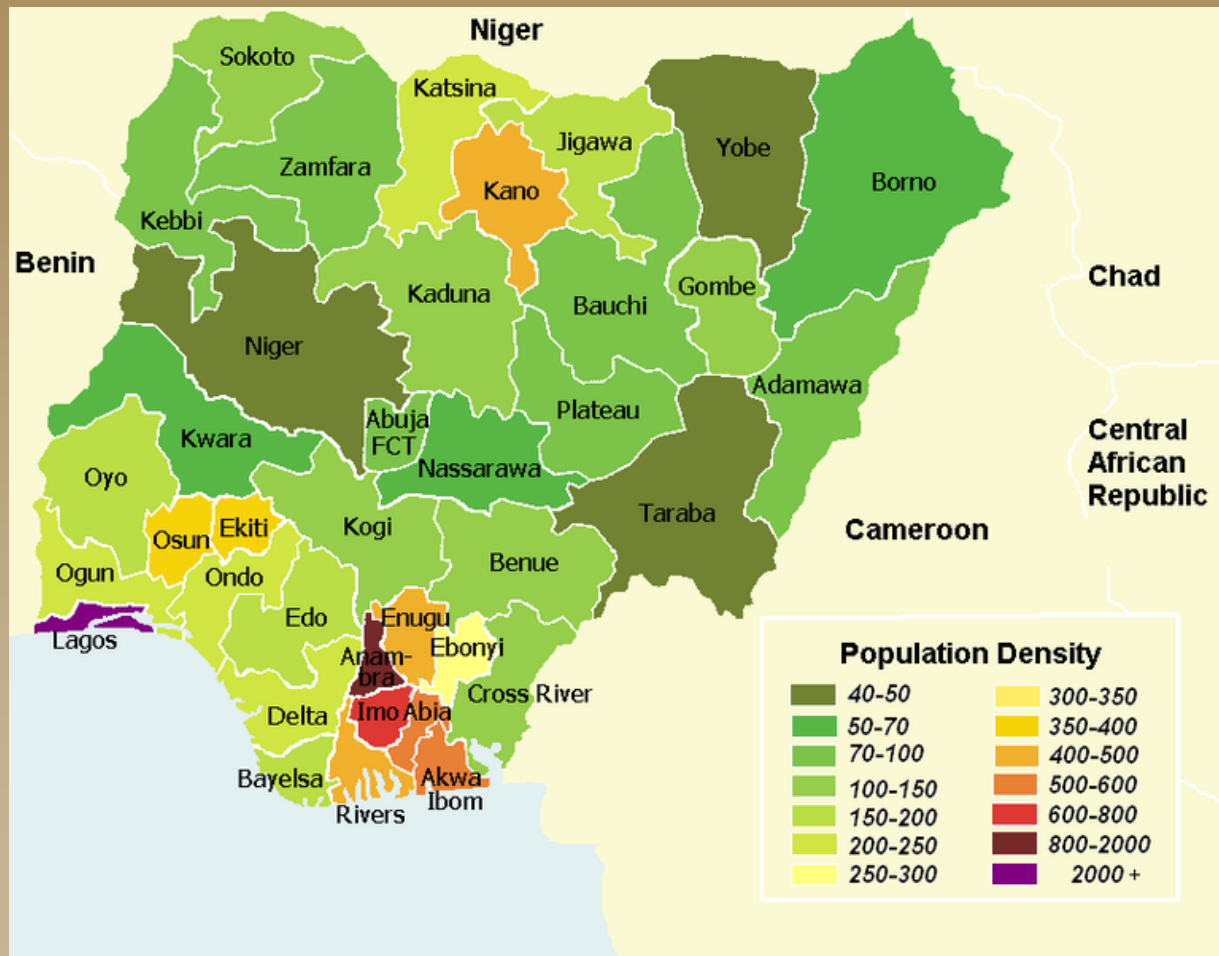
Federal Republic of Nigeria
Orílẹ̀-èdè Olómìnira Àpapọ̀ Naijíríà
Republik Nijeriya
نيجيريا جمهورية
Republic ndi Naigeria



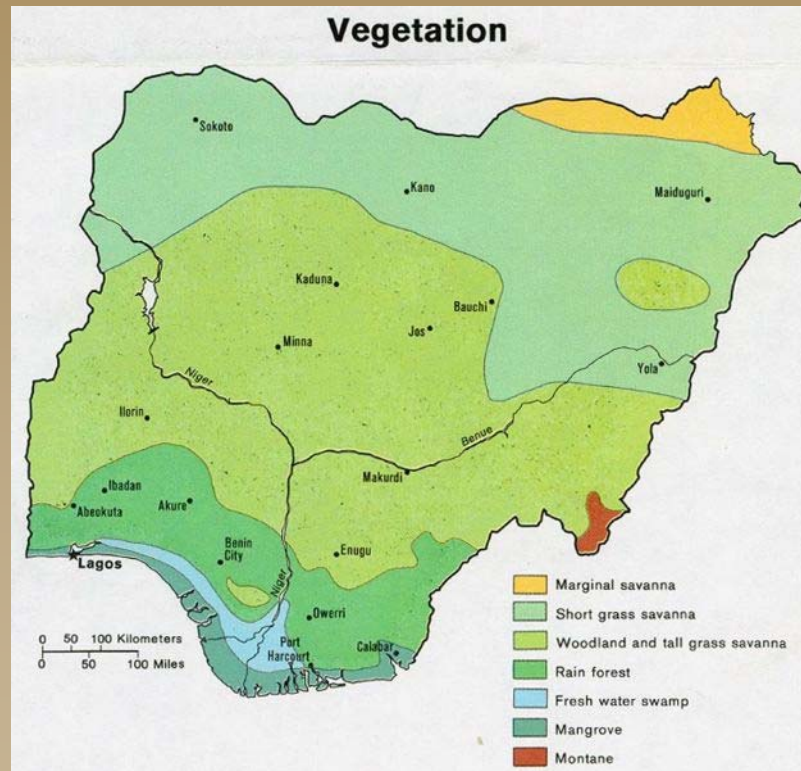
Focus on the major ethnic & linguistic groups



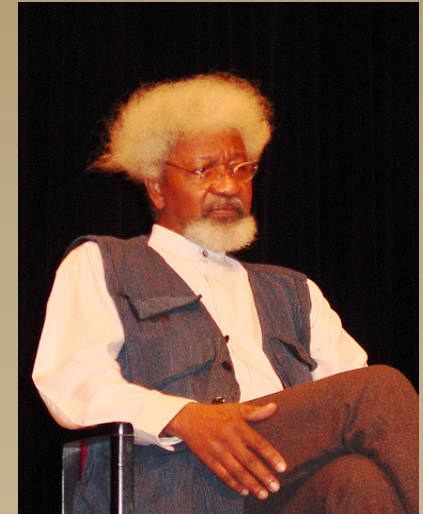
Population distribution



Vegetation



Nigerian peoples



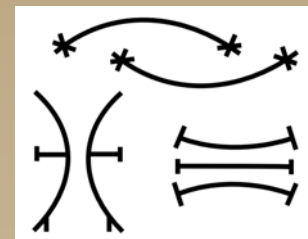
Nature of government since Independence

- ◆ First Republic (democratic rule), Oct 1960-Jan 1966 (5 years)
- ◆ 5 terms of military rule, Jan 1966-Oct 1979 (13 years)
- ◆ Second Republic, Oct 1979-Dec 1983 (4 years)
- ◆ 4 terms of military rule, Dec 1983-May 1999 (16 years)
- ◆ Third Republic, May 1999-May 2007 – President, former Military leader
May 2007 – Thorough civilian President

Seat of government

Lagos, 1914 to 1990

Abuja, 1991-



A view of Lagos

- ◆ Lagos Island seen from the Victoria harbour



Gateway to Abuja, Zuma rock



Aso Rock



Religious composition

- ◆ The three main religions are Islam, Christianity, and indigenous religions.
- ◆ Other minority religious and spiritual groups include Hinduism, Judaism, the Bahá'í Faith, and Chrislam.
- ◆ Nigeria is also the African hub for the Grail Movement, the Rosicrucian order (AMORC), and the Hare Krishnas.



New dawn for Islam in Nigeria:

A Study of the arrival of Islam and ensuing contestations in Igboland

- Regional Focus:

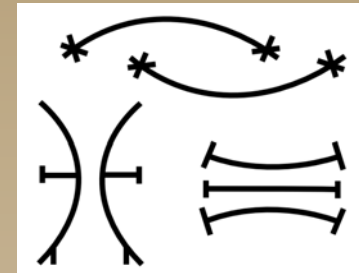
- Southeast Nigeria- the dominant Christian region and homeland of Christianity in Nigeria
- Ethnic composition – Igbo, Efik, Ibibio, Ijaw, Ekoi
- Igbo long in denial of Islam in its territory (#1)
- Few previous studies
 - Ottenberg (1971)
 - .Treated isolated areas: Enohia, Nsukka, Kano
 - Doi (1984)
 - .Incomprehensive but very useful
 - Anthony (2000)

- Themes:

- The advance of Islam into Southeast Nigeria and Igboland
- Contestations over conversions to Islam in Igbo homeland

- Methodology:

- Qualitative – Sources: Interviews, FGD, Archival Reports, Others

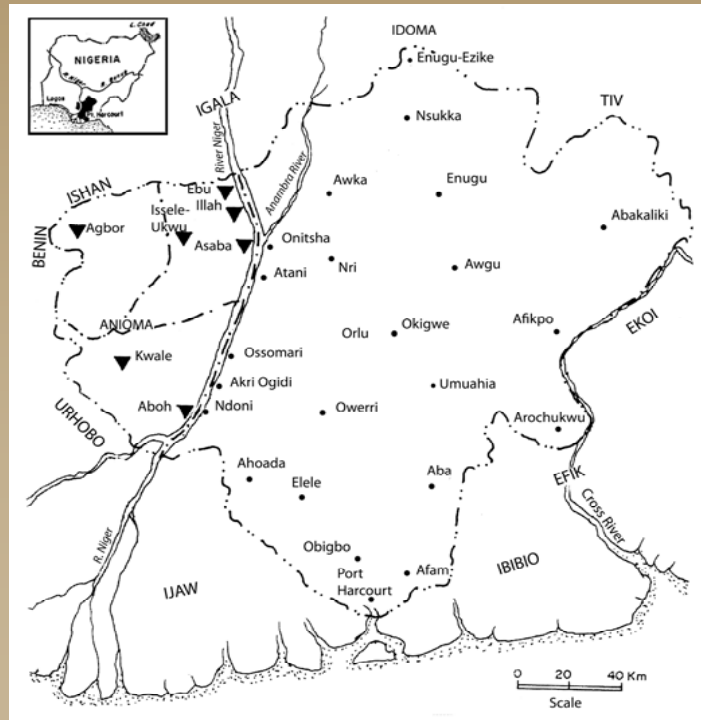




Igboland

“All history begins with the necessary and inescapable observation of change around us. Writing the history of anything involves finding out the nature, extent and pace of that change and trying to explain it.”

John Edwards (2006).



Study Objectives

- ◆ To examine the factors that made possible the advance of Islam into the research area, taking note of the contemptuous attitude of the Igbo to Muslims and Islam up till and after the Nigeria-Biafra war, 1967-1970; and identifying the gender group most attracted to Islam.
- ◆ To assess Islam's rate of growth in the study area and examine the various ramifications of conversion to Islam—gauge the degree of social and cultural changes deriving from a religious angle—alongside identifying trans-national dimensions of the growth process.
- ◆ To examine the multifarious effects on the country of the advance of Islam into the area of study, being the country's predominantly Christian region.
- ◆ To assess the influence of substantial Muslim populations in the major Igbo cities; the adaptation of Muslim converts to the tenets of their faith and inter-religious relations in the study area.
- ◆ To identify the degree to which the extant culture of the study area as well as its social environment affected Muslim converts or is affected by the introduction of Islam. (Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria, represented by the Yan Izala, necessitates an understanding of the thought patterns of Muslims and an evaluation of the practice of Islam in local environments. With respect to Southeast Nigeria there is the concern whether a fundamentalist form of Islam will develop or exist in Igboland, perhaps influenced by the Yan Izala, or will such a development be mediated through the presence of a considerable population of Christians.)
- ◆ To fill a gap caused by the absence of any significant and comprehensive study on Islam in Southeast Nigeria beginning with Igboland its most dominant ethnic group.

Arrival of Islam and its Mediators 1

Before Colonization

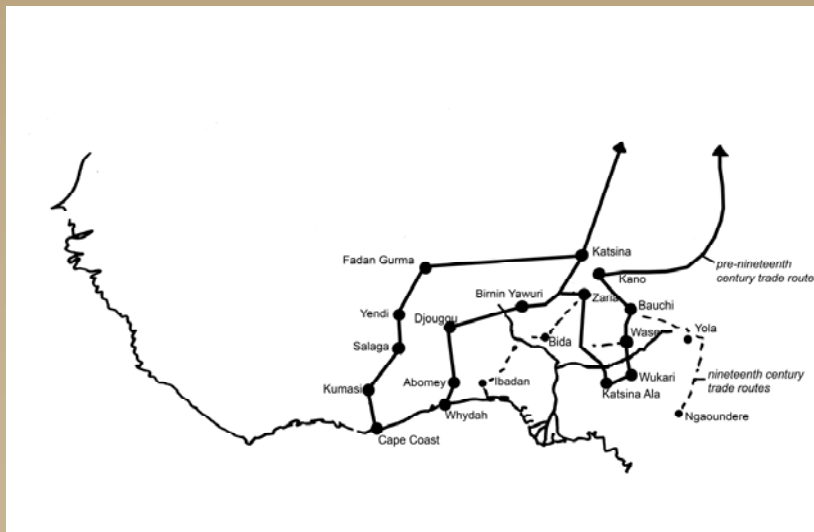
- Peoples of Southeast had almost no contact with Muslim groups in the far north - the Hausa-Fi and the Nupe
- No direct trade contacts
- Nature of inter-ethnic relations defined by the slave trade - gross insecurity
- Chasm created by the „*pagan*“ nations of North Central Nigeria
- Economic activities of Southeast groups
 - Agriculture, fishing (trade)
 - needs minimal and satisfied within their environment (Globalisation no imp. ideology)
 - Little need to go 700 miles to relate with another group

Rex Steven's on Nigeria (1910) "You are born in a village, there you stayed and had your being. There was no question of travel; wandering a mere two miles from your village square might easily result in death."

Arrival of Islam and its Mediators 2

Focus on the Hausa

- ◆ Islam long the religious identity of this group - named original worshippers of Allah in the Western Sudan
- ◆ Economic activities defined by ecological calendar – Farming; Distant Trading; Transhumance
- ◆ Adamu: Hausa commercial activities in 18th and 19th centuries skirted Southeast Nigeria
- ◆ Oral Data (2003): First northern migrants were elephant hunters
- ◆ Archival Data (1890): Hausa soldiers were in the Oil Rivers Protectorate



Arrival of Islam and its Mediators 3

On the Trail of the Elephant Hunter-traders

Extract from Macgregor Laird's diary (#2)

- ◆ Ivory trade on in 1830 Switch from Slave trade to Legitimate trade
- ◆ Hunting sites: "Pagan" Igala, Idoma, Tiv, and Jukun forests
- ◆ c. 1875 & 1899 Southeast Nigeria and parts of Igboland became hunting grounds
- ◆ Forest location on a line running through Onitsha, Afikpo, Abakaliki, and Ogoja down to the Atlantic
- ◆ Hunting pattern: Indigenes hunted in their forests.
Towards the end, Nupe and Hausa migrant hunters collaborated with them
In 1911 at Abakaliki hunters invited to clear elephants damaging crops
By 1920 the elephants were gone

Resulting developments

- Earliest settlement by elephant hunters founded in 1891 @ Elele.
- Hunters returned home Few came back to exploit the colonial situation
- Returnees switched to other jobs: Guides for colonial expeditions
Colonial soldiers - British agency: civilize natives, invitations to hunt
assistance securing settlements

Nature of early interactions

Divided by traditional worldviews
 Frictions over fishing in rivers sacred to the Igbo
 Colonial segregation policies



Arrival of Islam and its Mediators 4

When the elephants were gone, 1910-1960

Horse trade (early 20thc)

Supply sites: Abakaliki, Enugu, Awgu, Enugu Ezike

- ◆ **Aduku, 1909-31** selection as Warrant chief Naturalization, 1918-9
-Attracted Nupe Muslims Marriage to c. 60 women Muslim pop in E-Ezike in 1931= 71
- ◆ Palm oil and Rubber trade (1918) by Yoruba and Hausa traders Settlements in Ibagwa, Ogrute
- ◆ Infrastructural developments: Fortune seekers to build roads and railroads from 1910.
- ◆ Cattle business (1914) Important commodity in Nkalagu, Abakaliki Division
- ◆ Hausa soldiers' agency: Informed kinsmen of the potentials of the S E e.g. Abakaliki'
Influx increased from the 30s (Natural disaster of 1936)

Fruits

- ◆ Oldest Igbo convert in 1937 – Papa Oheme (2003) following a health challenge
- ◆ Alh Mutalib on Ibagwa-N = 'Indigenes started to embrace Islam in 1937-8 not before then.'
- ◆ Conversion of a stranger Igbo living at Abakpa-Abakaliki by 1960
- ◆ Women as agents of spread: Zainab of Alor agu wife of Chief Momoh

Arrival of Islam and its Mediators 5

Turning the Tide in favor of Islam

◆ Enohia awakening (Afikpo), 1958

- Afikpo a familiar terrain to Hausa migrants because of government station
- Okpani Egwuani (Sheikh I. Nwagui)
 - Early years: Christian education
 - Employment Record: Calabar, Fernando Po, Lagos- Nigerian Army 1944-46
 - Conversion details: Dream (Lagos); Conversion and training (Senegal), 1946-1957
 - Return to Afikpo and proselytization 1957-8
 - Oppositions, sectional conversion of the village, Frictions
 - Social revolution: Women and young men freed of traditional taboos
 - Reversal of Enohia's marginal status among Afikpo villages

◆ Opinion

„Nwagui and his aggressive propagation informs the Igbo that Islam Merits consideration beyond the narrow confines as the Hausa man's religion.“ Doi, 1984

Contestations over Islam 1

Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-70 - „the struggle against Muslim expansionism“

- ◆ Provided an outlet for a region-wide policy against Islam
 - ◆ - 400 Muslims vs 14+ million non-Muslims
 - ◆ 1969 Declaration

“The Biafran struggle is, on another plane, a resistance to the Arab-Muslim expansionism which has menaced and ravaged the African continent for twelve centuries...Our Biafran ancestors remained immune from the Islamic contagion. From the middle years of the last century Christianity was established in our land. In this way we came to be a predominantly Christian people. We came to stand out as a non-Muslim island in a raging Islamic sea... [Since 1960] the Muslims hoped to infiltrate Biafra by peaceful means and quiet propaganda, but failed. The crises which agitated the so-called independent Nigeria from 1962 gave these aggressive proselytisers the chance to try converting us by force. ... ”

◆ General Ojukwu

Contestations over Islam 2

Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-70 - „the struggle against Muslim expansionism“

- ◆ War-time trauma of Igbo Muslims
 - Began in 1966 after assassination of General Ironsi, an Igbo
 - Demand to drop Islamic and Hausa names
 - Order to recant & be reabsorbed through Elders' councils
 - Destruction of Islamic edifices
 - Suspected of sabotage
 - Allegations of harassment from civil defense & police

Were there perhaps reasons heightening persecution of Igbo Muslims?

The case of Mallam G

Reactions: More accusation of sabotage

Counter-killings over maltreatment of Muslims

- ◆ **Strategies for survival**
 - Playing down all religious markers & destroying all artefacts
 - Sought protection from Federal/Nigerian soldiers
 - Non-participation in Biafra war effort
 - Relocations outside Biafra

Some ambiguities

- ◆ At a crossroads between rival armies to which they were ethnically or religiously linked
 - ◆ Federal army victimized Muslims outside Nsukka Division
 - ◆ Isolated cases of conversions because of starvation and insecurity
 - ◆ Muslim parents lost children sent to Northern Nigeria for safety

Contestations over Islam 3

The Reconstruction Years, 1970-1976

- ◆ **Target:** to ease the plight of war victims and to manage their restoration to peace-time
- ◆ **Hypothesis:** The war induced a „*hijra*“ at the end of which a „*jihad*“ was unleashed on Igboland

- ◆ **The Mbaise affair: „an experiment in spiritual rehabilitation“**

- Mediators: Hausa soldiers, Saudi Arabian missionaries, an indigene, Nigerian Muslim headquarters
- Interlocutor's report:

“Islam came through Mallam Usman Iwuala when Hausa soldiers came here after the war. They allied with Mallam Iwuala to start Islam in Mbaise. Through gifts and preaching, they gathered together some twenty-two members made up of Igbo and Hausa. I was one of them.”

- Local ruler's report:

“We had a series of cabinet meetings when they came especially when they asked to buy land in our community so soon after the war. We realized that they were only interested in religion and we welcomed them. Their chief agent was Mallam Iwuala. They came soon after the war with much money. Seeing that hunger was thriving due to the just concluded war, people easily gave in but later withdrew when there was much consequences and death.” (2006)

Outcomes

- ◆ Initial response aimed at satisfying individual needs after a gruesome war (#3)
- ◆ Dishonesty and appropriation of resources for propagation
- ◆ Backlashes – deaths, mysterious happenings, massive desertions
- ◆ Outcry

Huge investments in da'wa, 1980-

- ◆ Mediators: Migrants
- ◆ The Nigerian State: indirect participation
- ◆ Arab world
- ◆ Expatriate missionaries
- ◆ Igbo Muslims

Contestations over Islam 4

Interrogating conversions

“ I have told you that if you join the Hausa to become Muslim nothing will happen to you. You will be making steady progress all the time.” *(Mallam Ibrahim, 2003)*

Why are they converting?

- ◆ Genuine spiritual quest and conviction that Islam is the appropriate way to God
- ◆ Perceived divine influence through dreams and revelations
- ◆ Dissatisfaction with former religious group
- ◆ Admiration for Muslim modesty (simplicity) and munificence
- ◆ Intermarriages
- ◆ Right to choose amidst alternatives
- ◆ Similarities between some Christian sects and Islam
- ◆ Curiosity
- ◆ Results of habituation
- ◆ Political and economic marginalization of Igbo since the Nigeria-Biafra war
- ◆ Desire for integration within established Muslim financial and political networks
- ◆ Muslim proselytization among Igbo whose other goal is bringing about political unity in the country
- ◆ The pull of financial and other inducements

Rambo 1993

indigenous cultures that are in crisis will have more potential converts than stable societies; except in cases of coercion, converts choose a new option on the basis of perceived advantages to themselves.

Reasons women marry and convert

Contestations over Islam 5

“IT IS MY FAITH IT BELONGS TO ME”

Further reactions to conversions to Islam

Non-Muslim arguments

Igbo land to remain completely Christian

It will mark the fulfillment of the 19thc jihad strategy of Islamizing non-Islamic communities

Unwillingness to lose members (and traditional values) to another ethno-religious group

Lingering bitterness from the role of the Hausa during the Nigeria-Biafra war

Religious balkanization will endanger Igbo socio-political interests

The global association of Muslims (Islam) with violence

Muslim Igbo rejoinder

„I have the right to choose my religion.“

„It is my faith it belongs to me!“

Integration

Still a matter of concern

Conclusion

- ◆ Notwithstanding all arguments, Islam has found a home in Southeast Nigeria and among the Igbo ethnic community.
- ◆ A lot of issues were not touched but perhaps we would treat a few more during Q & A.
- ◆ Thankyou for listening.