

Dawn for Islam in Eastern Nigeria: A History of the Arrival of Islam in Igboland by
Egodi Uchendu. Klaus Schwarz Publishers, 2011, 284 pages. ISBN: 978-3879973835,
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Egodi Uchendu's *Dawn for Islam in Eastern Nigeria: A History of the Arrival of Islam in Igboland* attempts to account for the arrival of Islam in Igboland (Nigeria's 'Christian heartland') at the beginning of the twentieth century, and its survival and modest growth from that time onwards. As Uchendu writes, she wants to know how and why a region known to be opposed to Islam has accommodated Islam for a century (p.15).

Uchendu has had to overcome a number of considerable obstacles. First, there is the availability of sources. Uchendu acknowledges that there are limited sources concerning Islam's arrival in Igboland even from the British colonial era. As a result she has had to rely on a substantial number of interviews or oral histories. Uchendu is aware that people's memories are not always objective, however she has no other serious alternative (p.13). The problems are only compounded for Uchendu as at times the interviews involved three or four languages.

A second obstacle is the criticism that the research project is not worthwhile. Uchendu writes that during a preliminary discussion of her work at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, she was questioned as to the small ratio of Igbo Muslims to Igbo non-Muslims in eastern Nigeria, with some figures counting one Igbo Muslim for every one thousand Igbo non-Muslims. Uchendu points out that the limited number of Igbo Muslims is not a disqualification for the research (p.38). She is right in thinking this as there would be innumerable scholarly works in anthropology for example, which focussed on even smaller social groups.

Uchendu is able to create a history of Islam's arrival in Igboland prior to 1950 by integrating the few existing records from the British colonial era with oral evidence from some of the oldest Muslims in Igboland. This information is then contrasted to the earlier work of Abdurrahman Doi, with Uchendu exposing serious flaws in Doi's history of Islam and the Igbo.

Uchendu's pioneering use of oral history enables her to paint a portrait of both the great difficulties undergone and successes achieved by Igbo Muslims. In addition, she draws insights into the contributing factors to a number of religious riots in Nigeria in the 2000s. Uchendu shows that the religious and ethnic fabric in Nigeria can be immensely complex at times.

In the second half of the book, Uchendu changes focus slightly and explores the reasons people gave for their conversion to Islam (Uchendu addresses the conversion-reversion debate early on in the book, as well as explaining Igbo social structure and beliefs). Such reasons vary from marrying a Muslim to attempting to find employment or gain a promotion, since society is divided into religious groupings which tend to hire or promote from within the same group an individual belongs to.

There are some criticisms that can be made concerning Uchendu's book. It seems as if the book is written more for a Nigerian audience since someone with a limited understanding of Nigeria can expect some frustrations. The first of these is that few of the maps in the book have a legend or a key. As a result, the reader does not know how far one location is from another.

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When various locations are mentioned in the text, the same problem arises. Better maps would overcome this problem.

A brief explanation of Igbo society at the beginning of the book would have also been useful. This could then have been expanded (as it is indeed explained at greater length) in the second half of the book. One interesting oversight of the book was that there was no explanation of the traditional Igbo religion. This is strange considering that the book is about the arrival of Islam in Nigeria's 'Christian heartland', yet Uchendu acknowledges that there is still a considerable portion of the population that hold on to traditional Igbo beliefs. What are these beliefs in short? Presumably they are animist in nature, like most other traditional African belief systems.

One part of the conclusion seems odd. In suggesting possibilities for peace considering Islam's presence in Igboland and Igbo claims that it threatens Christianity, Uchendu posits the idea that the free market principle should be allowed to work so that all groups may showcase their beliefs and people be free to choose among them (p.261). While a good idea in theory, there seems to be little hope of it seeing fruition in Nigeria, especially when the previous chapter detailed (partially) religiously motivated conflicts in the north of the country. Perhaps it should be recognised that Nigeria is not fertile ground for the free market of religions.

These criticisms of Uchendu's book should not distract from her achievement nor the worthwhile nature of the project. The book is to be recommended for those researching religion in Nigeria but also ethnic conflicts, not only in Nigeria or Africa, but anywhere since the case of the Igbo Muslims provides an excellent case study.