

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Titel:	Nigeria: Treatment of people who enter interfaith marriages in Lagos State, including a Christian woman who marries a Muslim man, who subsequently converts to Christianity; cases of couples who were traced through word of mouth within the Muslim community when they resettled in cities such as Port Harcourt or Ibadan (2015-March 2022)
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IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Nigeria: Treatment of people who enter interfaith marriages in Lagos State, including a Christian woman who marries a Muslim man, who subsequently converts to Christianity; cases of couples who were traced through word of mouth within the Muslim community when they resettled in cities such as Port Harcourt or Ibadan (2015–March 2022) [NGA200982.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Legislation

The Constitution of Nigeria provides the following:

15. Political objectives

1. The motto of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress.
2. Accordingly, national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited.
3. For the purpose of promoting national integration, it shall be the duty of the State to-
 1. provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of people, goods and services throughout the Federation;
 2. secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation;
 3. encourage inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious, ethnic or linguistic association or ties; and
 4. promote or encourage the formation of associations that cut across ethnic, linguistic, religious and or other sectional barriers.

... (Nigeria 1999)

2. Interfaith Marriage in Nigeria

2.1 Prevalence

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of religious studies at the University of Ibadan stated that interfaith marriage in Nigeria is "common practice" (Professor 8 Mar. 2022). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, following an interview, Insa Nolte, a reader in the Department of African Studies and Anthropology at the University of Birmingham, whose work focuses on interfaith relations between Muslims and Christians in Yorubaland [South-West Nigeria], stated that besides the survey that she conducted on Muslim-Christian marriage in Yorubaland in 2012–2013 and the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey [1], which "focuses on a limited age range," there is "very little recent data" on religion for Nigeria as a whole (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022). Nolte further stated that there is "some evidence" that interfaith marriage has declined and become "more difficult" in the past four decades, especially in regions with "religious conflict," but it remains "relatively prevalent" in some areas, including in Lagos State (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022). Nolte's 2012–2013 survey on the "experiences of, and attitudes towards, inter-religious encounters in family life and everyday social life," conducted in Yorubaland with 2,819 respondents, found that Yorubaland had a "relatively high level of inter-religious marriage," with 9 percent of respondents indicating that they were married to someone of a different religion; the figure increases to 24.9 percent when including respondents who married someone who had a different religion before one of the spouses changed religions (Nolte, et al. 2018, 28, 29–30, 46).

2.2 Societal Attitudes and Treatment

In an article published in *Islam and Civilisational Renewal (ICR)*, a peer-reviewed journal promoting "advanced research on the contribution of Muslims to science and culture" (ICR n.d.), Ibrahim Imam, a senior lecturer of public law at the University of Ilorin, notes that friendships between individuals of different religions are "tolerated" in Nigeria but romantic relationships are not (Imam 15 Oct. 2016, 496, 504). In contrast, other sources indicated that acceptance of interfaith marriage depends on the family and the region (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022; Professor 8 Mar. 2022). Nolte noted that despite an "overall acceptance," there are "some" minority Muslim and Christian groups that are "quite opposed to interfaith marriage"; in "some" areas where the "majority" of the established families are either Christian or Muslim, interfaith marriage is perceived as "something that challenges the order" (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022). According to an article by Nolte, while interfaith marriages are "relatively frequent," they are also viewed with "reservations" by both Muslims and Christians (Nolte 21 Apr. 2020, 2). The article further notes that in the survey conducted by Nolte, 47.9 percent of Yoruba speakers recommend interfaith marriage while 42.5 percent advise against it (Nolte 21 Apr. 2020, 6). Similarly, according to the Professor, there are varied perspectives on interfaith marriage with some Christian and Muslim families disowning their children or withdrawing support for education, and others having more of a "permissive" attitude (Professor 8 Mar. 2022). The Professor further noted that there are cases of interfaith couples facing "violence and discrimination" as well as "maltreatment [and] oppression," with some parents threatening the lives of their children if they stay in an interfaith relationship (Professor 8 Mar. 2022).

According to an article from the *Christian Science Monitor*, an international newspaper published by the First Church of Christ, Scientist (*The Christian Science Monitor* n.d.), a Muslim woman and Christian man that married in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno State, received the blessing of the woman's family and the man stated that, "'the community had always treated [him] as one of its own'" (*The Christian Science Monitor* 18 May 2018). The Professor noted that some parties are permissive of interfaith relationships (Professor 8 Mar. 2022). Nolte indicated that there is a "general level of sociability" in which interfaith marriage is not viewed as a problem, and that there are "several influential" Yoruba Muslim politicians whose career benefited from their marriages with Christian women, since the relationship diminished fears of exclusivity or discrimination (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022).

The Professor noted that individuals in interfaith relationships are "not really marginalized" in cities in the South of Nigeria, such as Port Harcourt, while interfaith couples in the North face "much risk" (Professor 8 Mar. 2022). According to the same source, in the city of Lagos, interfaith couples "live together in harmony" and while there "may be persecution" from family, it is not a "societal problem" (Professor 8 Mar. 2022). Similarly, Nolte stated that "many" communities in the north-western Yoruba regions are "predominantly" Muslim, while Christianity "dominates" in the south-eastern Yoruba regions; interfaith marriage is "easier" in central Yoruba regions, where there are "significant numbers" of members of both religions (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022).

2.3 Treatment by Authorities

The Professor noted that an interfaith couple who receives a threat can report it to the police, who will follow due process; the case will be referred to the courts if a life is threatened (Professor 8 Mar. 2022). The Professor further stated that "at times" religious leaders or their representatives can be invited to a peace meeting to help restore order for the affected parties (Professor 8 Mar. 2022). When asked whether interfaith couples are treated differently by the police, Nolte responded that she was not aware of this in South-West Nigeria (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022).

3. Conversion to Christianity

According to the Professor, conversion "is not consider[ed] a societal matter of dispute" and is "very common" (Professor 8 Mar. 2022). In contrast, a report from Open Doors, an organization that "serv[es] persecuted Christians" in more than 70 countries and provides Bibles and training materials, among other forms of support (Open Doors n.d.), states that Christians who have a "Muslim background" can be rejected by their families, pressured to renounce Christianity, or face physical violence (Open Doors Jan. 2022, 7). While Nolte noted that many Muslim parents remain close to their children who have converted, she also stated that conversion to Christianity can cause "significant difficulties for Muslim men" who can be denied access to commonly held resources of the extended family, such as agricultural land, family business or inheritance (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022). Nolte further stated that converts from "very old extended Muslim families in Lagos state" would also face "problems" with their extended family (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022). The same source added that since Lagos State includes many "smaller" towns as well as the city of Lagos, Muslim-to-Christian converts may face criticism from Muslims depending on where they live (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022).

Nolte noted that she is not aware of any state support for individuals that convert but indicated that they would turn to their church (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Ability of the Muslim Community to Trace a Couple

Information on couples who were traced by the Muslim community after relocation was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Nolte, individuals who are no longer Muslim can avoid contact with their extended family "for significant amounts of time" by relocating, especially to "a predominantly Christian town" (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022). The same source also indicated that except for excluding the non-Muslim child from inheritance, she is not aware of any cases of parents "punish[ing]" or "harm[ing]" their children for converting (Nolte 30 Mar. 2022).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] Statistics on interfaith marriages could not be found in the report on the most recent Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), conducted from August to December 2018 by the National Population Commission (NPC) of Nigeria and ICF, the organization responsible for the Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) Program of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) (NPC of Nigeria and ICF Oct. 2019, 1).

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[Open Doors](#). N.d. "[Our History](#)." [Accessed 7 Mar. 2022]

Professor, University of Ibadan. 8 March 2022. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: associate professor of African studies at an American university whose research focuses on Christianity in Nigeria; Christian Association of Nigeria; Christian Council of Nigeria; Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) – The Diocese of Lagos; coordinator of the religious studies department at a Nigerian university; head of the department of religious and cultural studies at a Nigerian university; head of the department of religious studies at a Nigerian university; Nigeria-Inter Religious Council; professor of religion at a Nigerian university (2); researcher of religions in Africa at a Nigerian university; senior lecturer in religious studies at a Nigerian university.

Internet sites, including: Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; Australia – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Belgium – Commissariat général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides; Bertelsmann Stiftung; Center for Strategic and International Studies; *The Christian Century*; *Christianity Today*; CSW; ecoi.net; EU – EU Agency for Asylum; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; Freedom House; Germany – Federal Office for Migration and Refugees; *The Guardian* [Nigeria]; Hudson Institute – Center for Religious Freedom; Human Rights Watch; Independent Catholic News; International Christian Concern; International Rescue Committee; Minority Rights Group International; *The Nation* [Nigeria]; *National Catholic Reporter*; Netherlands – Ministry of Foreign Affairs; The New Humanitarian; News Agency of Nigeria; Nigeria – *Marriage Act*; Norway – Landinfo; Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre; *The Punch*; *The Sun* [Nigeria]; UK – All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, Home Office; University of Ibadan – Faculty of Education, Department of Guidance and Counseling; UN – Refworld, UNHCR, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; US – CIA, US Commission on International Religious Freedom; *Vanguard*; *The Washington Post*; World Council of Churches.

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