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Secularism, interfaith marriages and reengagement with the study of Islam-Christian Relations in Ghana

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to examine how interfaith marriages and other forms of conjugal relations, facilitated by Ghana's 'secular' status, are (re)shaping Muslim-Christian interactions in Zongo communities (Muslim-dominated communities) in Accra. The paper, which deployed ethnographic research approach, argues that instead of casting the relationship between Muslims and Christians in terms of conflict and tension, we need to look at how the evolution of Zongo communities (now religiously and ethnically deeply plural), and the politics of secularisation have contributed to creating an atmosphere of peaceful interactions between Muslims and Christians. The paper also reflects on the future of such interactions and advocates new approaches to the study of Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana and Africa.

Introduction

The focus of the paper is to examine how interfaith marriages and other forms of conjugal relations, in combination with a secular constitution, are reshaping Muslim-Christian interactions in Zongo communities in Accra. In the process, this paper aims to offer new insights into the study of Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana. Interfaith marriages between Muslims and Christians have received extensive attention by scholars.^I In most cases, the discussion on interfaith marriages between these two religions has focused on state interventions in such marriage arrangements.^{II} Among some religious people in Indonesia, interfaith marriages constitute both religious and cultural transgressions.^{III} As a result persons in interfaith marriage experience fraught with reactions from their relatives and friends, often becoming the focus of community concern. They have to confront objections from their community and are also expected to conform to apparently incompatible religious expectations.^{IV}

Historically, there is evidence to show that significant companions of Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam, practiced interfaith marriages, and moreover, there is rarely any evidence showing public resistance from the first-century Muslim ummah. It was only after the changes in the political and social structure of the Muslim community that interfaith marriages were prohibited.^V

^I Islam, Zahidul. 2014. "Interfaith Marriage in Islam and Present Situation." *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research* 2, 1: 36-47; Connolly, Jennifer. 2009. "Forbidden Intimacies: Christian-Muslim Inter-marriage in East Kalimantan, Indonesia." *American Ethnologist* 36, 3: 492-506; Larson, Lyle E. & Munro, Brenda. 1990. "Religious Inter-marriage in Canada in the 1980's." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 21, 2: 239-250; Nakaterogga-Kisekka, Mere. 1975. "Attitudes toward mate selection among Ugandan Moderns." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 5, 1:40-52.

^{II} Seo, Myenkyo. 2013. "Falling in love and changing gods." *Indonesia and Malay World*, 41 (119): 76-96.

^{III} Al-Yusuf, Heather. 2006. "Negotiating faith and identity in Muslim-Christian marriages in Britain." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 17:3: 317-329.

^{IV} Furlong & Ata, 2006; Nolte, Insa & Akinjobi, Tosin. 2017. "Marrying Out: Gender and Religious Mediation in Interfaith Marriages." In Insa Nolte, et al. (eds.), *Beyond Religious Tolerance: Muslims, Christians and Traditionalist Encounters in an African Town*. (New York: James Currey): 207-226.

^V Aini, Noryamin. 2008. "Inter-Religious Marriage from Socio-historical Islamic Perspectives." *BYU L. Rev.* Vol. (2008): 669-705.

Broadly, the Qur'an (5:5) makes it lawful for a Muslim man to marry any woman except an adulteress.^{vi} The Hanafite School has liberally interpreted the text to permit a Muslim to marry Jewish or Christian women. The Shafi'ites, on the other hand, make it virtually insuperable for a Muslim to marry a non-Muslim woman. They base their restriction on the verse of the Qur'an, which forbids a man to "retain a right over misbelieving women" (Qur'an 6:10).^{vii} For Muslim women, they cannot marry non-Muslim men based on Qur'anic injunctions and the patriarchal and the paternalistic social structure of Islam.^{viii} The Qur'an also says that a non-Muslim man may not exercise control over Muslims.^{ix} Since women are primarily the carriers and vanguards of the religious continuity for future generations, allowing them to marry a non-Muslim is seen as a threat to the intergenerational transmission of religion.^x Marital instability, the fear that women may apostatize and the assumption that women who marry non-Muslims exclude themselves from the entitlements of Islam are reasons invoked to proscribe Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men.^{xi}

Leeman problematized interfaith marriages by giving some examples of Muslim practices. He argued that if both spouses were non-Muslims and both simultaneously accept Islam, or if both spouses simultaneously leave Islam, their marriage remains intact. However, if both spouses married as non-Muslims and one later converts to Islam, the conversion may threaten the marriage. If the husband accepts Islam, but the wife remains non-Muslim, the marriage remains intact so long as she is a Christian or Jew. If the wife is not a Christian or Jew, she will be invited to join Islam. If she refuses, the marriage will be annulled. If the wife accepts Islam and the husband remains non-Muslim, he will also be invited to Islam. If he refuses, the marriage will be annulled.^{xii} Another scenario arises when a couple marries as Muslims, but one partner later leaves the faith. Accordingly, following the convention of the majority of the Muslim interpretation, the contract establishing the marriage is declared void, if any of the spouses leaves Islam.^{xiii} If it is only the woman who turns away from Islam, certain traditions alternatively hold that the marriage is unaffected.^{xiv}

The interfaith marriage problems outlined by Leeman are very pronounced in countries where Islam is firmly established and supported by the Sharia. In West Africa, Nigeria represents a country where Muslims in the North of the country have some degree of liberty to implement Islamic family law, particularly the ones that relate to marriage. The experience of Muslims in Ghana is markedly different from Nigeria but shares nearly similar experiences with Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa. Ghanaian Islam did not experience the kind of Islamic religious reform that countries like Nigeria did, and this has undermined every effort to bring the Sharia to the public sphere in Ghana. Furthermore, the Ghanaian state does not determine whom one can marry in a heterogeneous relationship. In this paper, I analyze the many ways in which Muslims and Christians have interacted and engaged with each other in contemporary Ghana. Two main factors have contributed significantly to mediating the engagement between Muslims and Christians – the adoption of a secular constitution and the practice of interfaith marriages.

The adoption of a secular constitution and the practice of interfaith marriages have both created a space for Muslims and Christians to interact in a largely peaceful, harmonious fashion. The study, therefore, argues that there is the need for a new approach to be adopted in studying Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana, which would require a paradigmatic move from one of hostility to one of friendship.

^{vi} Qur'an 5:7.

^{vii} Levy, 1969.

^{viii} Aini, Noryamin. 2008. "Inter-Religious Marriage from Socio-historical Islamic Perspectives." *BYU L. Rev.* Vol. (2008): 669-705.

^{ix} Qur'an 4:141.

^x Clycq, Noel. 2012. "My daughter is a free woman, so she can't marry a Muslim": The Gendering of Ethno-religious boundaries." *European Journal of Women Studies*, 19(2): 157-171; Cila, Jorida & Lalonde, Richard N. 2014. "Personal openness to interfaith dating and marriages among Muslim young adult: The role of religiosity, cultural identity, and family connectedness." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, Vol. 17(3): 357-370.

^{xi} Aini, Noryamin. 2008. "Inter-Religious Marriage from Socio-historical Islamic Perspectives." *BYU L. Rev.* Vol. (2008): 669-705.

^{xii} Leeman, Alex B. 2009. "Interfaith Marriage in Islam: An Examination of the Legal Theory Behind the Traditional and Reformist Positions." *Indiana Law Journal*, Vol. 84, Issue 2: 743-771.

^{xiii} Peters, Rudolph & De Vries, Gert J.J. 1976-1977. "Apostasy in Islam." *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 17, Issue ¼: 1-25.

^{xiv} Leeman, Alex B. 2009. "Interfaith Marriage in Islam: An Examination of the Legal Theory Behind the Traditional and Reformist Positions." *Indiana Law Journal*, Vol. 84, Issue 2: 743-771.

The paper is grouped into three sections. The first section discusses how secularization (which in my study does not mean the vanishing of religion, but its reconfiguration in the setting of postcolonial modernity^{xv}) has contributed in no small way to mediating the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Ghana. The second section of the paper focuses on interfaith marriages between Muslims and Christians. In this section, the paper argues that a few of the youth in urban slums in Accra, based on their own subjectivity, pragmatism, and convenience, have established interfaith marriages and other forms of conjugal relationships. The final section of the paper provides suggestions for academic engagement with Muslim-Christian relations in Africa.

Data for the research was collected from May through to July 2017. I also collected a few more data in 2019. The study focused on religious leaders from Christianity and Islam, as well as young adults from both religions. Twenty-five persons involved in interfaith marriages were interviewed. While Muslim-Christian marriages and other forms of conjugal relationships, from my observation of the three Zongo communities for the study, are on the increase, there was difficulty in getting official statistics on Muslim-Christian marriages, because many of such unions are not registered. Interviews were conducted in English, Hausa, and Twi (languages that are widely spoken in Zongo communities in Accra), which the author speaks fluently. Three Zongo communities – Maamobi, Nima, and Madina Zongo (and Libya Quarters also in Madina) were selected for the study. These communities were selected because they form part of the earliest Muslim settlements in Accra since the end of World War II. Two focus group discussions were held to engage the views of youth Muslim and Christian adults. As a resident of one of the research areas (Maamobi) since 1984, I observed a lot of social activities (marriage, naming ceremonies, conversion rituals, etc) and preaching (sermons for Christians/*waadzi* for Muslims), of both religions.

I also engaged in informal conversations with many of the respondents. The analysis of the data is thickly descriptive. Case studies are provided to tease out the experiences of individuals. I engaged the research with the perspective of an insider (I am a resident of Maamobi community) but I also engaged the analytical tools as a researcher. Zongo is a Hausa word that is used to refer to a camping place for caravan traders or lodging place for travelers.^{xvi} Historically, the British used the term to refer to the section of the town where Muslims lived.^{xvii} In Accra, the term has maintained its socio-geographical designation for communities that are predominantly Muslim. But in contemporary Accra, Zongo communities have increasingly become, ethnically, linguistically and religiously plural. As urban slums, Zongo communities in Accra have challenges including poor sanitation, high crime rate, inadequate supply of water, and occasional flooding.

Colonial engagement with Islam: A prelude to Secularism in Ghana

Unlike Western Europe, where attempts were made to create a territorial space (Christendom) for Christianity, in Africa, the European colonizers had no interest in creating such a territorial space for Christianity, aside from the creation of small enclaves – *Salems* and *Kpodzie* – for African Christian converts.^{xviii} Even so, the idea of creating Christian enclaves only really describes a particular phase of European missionary work in the 19th century. It was adopted by Catholic and Protestant missions concerning displaced freed slaves. But colonial powers were not particularly interested in creating such enclaves (apart from perhaps Kaduna and other Muslim cities in northern Nigeria where there were Christian enclaves), and by the end of the nineteenth-century, even the missions had abandoned this policy.

^{xv} Birgit Meyer (2012), 'Religious and Secular: "Spiritual" and "Physical" in Ghana,' in Courtney Bender & Ann Taves (Eds.), *What matters? Ethnographies of Value in a Not So Secular Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 89.

^{xvi} Abraham, Roy Clive. 1962. *Dictionary of the Hausa Language*. London: University of London Press, p. 967.

^{xvii} Enid Schildkrout (1978). *People of Zongo: The transformation of ethnic identities in Ghana*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 67.

^{xviii} Abraham A Akrong & John Azumah. 2013. "Hermeneutical and Theological Resources in African Traditional Religions for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa." In John Azumah & Lamin Sanneh, (eds.), *The African Christian and Islam*. (Cumbria: Langham Monographs): 65-84., Meyer, B. (1999). *Translating the devil: religion and modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.

When the Methodists came to Ghana or the Anglicans to Yorubaland, they were trying to influence a whole society not create special Christian spaces.^{xix}

While the quest to stop the advancement of Islam was one of the reasons for European incursions into Africa in the fifteenth century, economic motive, which was equally important on the European adventures in Africa in the fifteen century, mediated the relationship between Europeans and Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa.^{xx} This was partly because African Muslim traders, who had preceded the Europeans for about a century in sub-Saharan Africa,^{xxi} served as the middlemen in the trading activities between the Europeans and other Africans. In the same way, since missionary activities in the fifteenth century was not successful, there was not any clearly declared tension between the European Christians and African Muslims. Just like the African Muslims who introduced Islam to West Africa, the early European missionaries, much as they were interested in proselytization, had an economic interest, parallel to other religious interests. In most cases, the missionaries straddled economic and religious activities. The early missionary engagement with trade was motivated by inadequate funds from the metropolitan countries to support missionary activities. Because of this situation, in the early days of European presence in the Gold Coast, Christianity was largely confined to the castles and the forts. This phase, which considers early missionary activity before the nineteenth century, has been referred to as the quarantisation of Christianity.^{xxii}

Another point worth mentioning is that the propagation of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa was largely the work of black Africans themselves, who were motivated principally by economic reasons rather than political motives.^{xxiii} This is not to say that they had genuinely no religious motivation, as the reason people convert or propagate their religion is likely to be highly complex. In the Gold Coast, for example, while the Hausa and Mande Dyula (Wangara) Muslim traders did not directly set out to convert the people of the Gold Coast, their presence led to the gradual spread of Islam.^{xxiv} But, unlike North Africa in the seventh century where the Arabs were motivated by politics – expressed in the quest for Arabization and Islamization, and resulting in violent attacks against Christians and so-called animists,^{xxv} – in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, the initial spread of Islam was peacefully borne by African converts. These African converts' engagement with non-Muslim Africans was more inspired by economic motives than political reasons. In that case, apart from a few areas like Northern Nigeria, where the reformation of Osman dan Fodio resulted in the establishment of a caliphate that made the penetration of Christianity in the region difficult, in the case of most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Islam was spread peacefully through the mediation of trade. In most cases, African Muslims, who were in the minority and also migrants, preferred to live in separate quarters where they could safeguard their religion from adulteration. Not many attempts were made to convert non-Muslim Africans.^{xxvi} This was the case in the twentieth century when northern migrants moved into southern Ghana that was predominantly becoming Christian.

In many instances, other Africans were attracted to Islam to access the powers of the Muslim ritual functionaries, who provided ritual services such as divination, interpretation of dreams, making of amulets, and other such practices.^{xxvii} In the same way, the cultural symmetric relations between the early Muslims and other non-Muslim Africans such as the practice of polygyny and ancestral veneration closed the gap between the Muslims and other Africans and in the process contributed to the crisscrossing of religious boundaries.

^{xix} Personal communication with Dr. Kevin Ward at the University of Leeds on January 2018.

^{xx} Adu A. Boahen (1966). *Topics in West African History*. London: Longman; Agbeti, Kofi J. (1986). *West African Church History: Christian Mission and Church Foundations 1482-1919*. Leiden: Brill.

^{xxi} John Azumah, 'Controversy and restraint in Ghana,' *Transformation* (2000) 17:1, p. 23.

^{xxii} Lamin Sanneh. (1983). *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*. London: Allen & Unwin.

^{xxiii} Ali A. Mazrui 1985. "Religion and Political Culture in Africa," *Journal of American Study of Religion*, Vol. 53, No. 4: 817-839.

^{xxiv} D.E.K. Amenumey (2018). *Ghana: A Concise History from Pre-Colonial Times to the 20th Century*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, p. 100.

^{xxv} Azumah, John Alembillah. (2001). *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa: A Quest for Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Oxford: Oneworld.

^{xxvi} Lapidus, Ira M. (2012). *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

^{xxvii} Owusu-Ansah, David. 1983. "Islamic Influence in the Forest Region: The Role of Protective Amulet in early 19th Century Asante." *Transafrica Journal of History*, Vol. 12: 100-133.

Added to this, it could be argued that the fact that Africans introduced Islam to West Africa made most other Africans see the religion as one of their own, and in the process facilitated the positive attitude the early Muslims had about African cultures. The Muslim traders married local women, and the offspring of such marriages later became the propagators of Islam.^{xxviii} The European colonizers identified the relatively peaceful relationship between African Muslims and other non-Muslim Africans and allowed them to exist side by side without much interference from the colonial state. In many instances, the Europeans prevented the Christian missionaries from extending their mission activities to areas that were largely dominated by Muslims.^{xxix}

The policy of indirect rule, which the British devised to rule the so-called natives, also favored religious and ethnic plurality. This was to the extent that Islamic communities that were well organized, such as the Sokoto Caliphate, founded by Osman dan Fodio, were spared the infiltration of Christian missionaries. There was also another reason why the European colonizers allowed Islam to exist unaffected by Christianity. The colonial administrators assumed that southern Christians were insubordinate to laws, both customary and European rule. Most of them refused to join the security forces.^{xxx} Historically, the British in the Gold Coast largely recruited Hausa Muslims from Nigeria into the police service and later the West African Frontier Force and later Gold Coast Hausa Constabulary.^{xxxi} The Hausa soldiers at the lower rank in the colonial police service were required to communicate in Hausa, which was the main language for commercial and religious communication.^{xxxii} Consequently, the colonial administrators feared that allowing the missionaries into areas that were largely dominated by Muslims would infect the Muslims with the 'spirit' of insubordination.

This is far from saying that the relationship between the colonizers and Muslims was uniform. Weiss has rightly argued that the colonizers were more pragmatic in the relationship with the Muslims.^{xxxiii} In the North and the Asante Kingdom, colonial policies favored Islam.^{xxxiv} Broadly, the European attitudes towards religious plurality in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) were informed by pragmatism rather than any intended motive of promoting or discouraging a particular religion. The colonizers did not discourage the practice of religion.^{xxxv} They were rather interested in determining good and bad religious practices. This was the case when under the Bond of 1844, which marked the beginning of European imperialism in the Gold Coast, the chiefs were ordered to stop human sacrifices and 'barbarous customs.'^{xxxvi}

^{xxviii} Lapidus, Ira M. (2012). *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 58.

^{xxix} Elom Dovlo. 2013. "The African Christian and Islam: Insights from the Colonial Period." In John Azumah & Lamin Sanneh, (eds), *The African Christian and Islam*. (Cumbria: Langham Monographs): 85-102.

^{xxx} Ibid.

^{xxxi} Roger Thomas, 'Military Recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War' (Recrutement militaire en Gold Coast pendant la Première Guerre mondiale), *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 15, Cahier 57 (1975), pp. 57-83; Samuel A. Ntewusu, 'From ex-soldier to traders and transporters: The case of the Gold Coast Hausa Constabulary: 1874-1942,' 5th European Conference on African Studies, *African Dynamics in a Multipolar World*, (Jun., 27-29, 2013), pp. 213-232.

^{xxxii} Anyidoho, Akosua & Dakubu, Kropp M.E. 2008. "Ghana: Indigenous Languages: English, and an Emerging National Identity." In Andrew Simpson (ed.). *Language and National Identity in Africa*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 141-157; In Ghana, most Muslim itinerant preachers deliberately go Nigeria, where Hausa is widely spoken to study and also perfect their competence in speaking the Hausa language. The language is the main language for religious proselytisation in Zongo communities.

^{xxxiii} Weiss, Holger. 2004. "Variations in the Colonial Representation of Islam and Muslims in Northern Ghana, ca. 1900-1930. Working Papers on Ghana: Historical and Contemporary Studies; Weiss, Holger. 2007. *Begging and Almsgiving in Ghana: Muslim Positions Towards Poverty and Distress*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet; Weiss, Holger. (2000). "Germans Images of Islam in West Africa." *Sudanic Africa*, Vol. 11: 53-93.

^{xxxiv} Nehemia, Levtzion 1968. *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: a Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Dumbé, Yunus 2013. *Islamic Revivalism in Contemporary Ghana*.

^{xxxv} Elom Dovlo, 'Religion in the public sphere: Challenges and opportunities in Ghanaian lawmaking, 1989-2004,' *BYU Law Review*, 2005(3), p. 633.

^{xxxvi} Kofi N. Awoonor (1990). *Ghana: A political history*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Ltd., p. 82.

In the heyday of colonialism, the partition of Africa brought together people from different ethnic and religious groups under one European leader. Some of these groups were even hostile to each other. Therefore, at independence, many African leaders inherited nation-states that were pluralistic and heterogeneous on many fronts: language, law, religion, and ethnicity.^{xxxvii} So, while in the case of Ghana, the Anglican priest was responsible for providing religious services at state functions during the colonial days, postcolonial Ghana, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, provided space for the three major religions – African Traditional Religion(s), Islam and Christianity – to be represented. A secular constitution, which had recognition for legal and religious pluralism, was adopted. As early as 1957, the Avoidance of Discrimination Act proscribed the mobilization of people for political activities based on religion. The 1961 Education Act also reversed the colonial legacy, by proscribing the use of education to proselytize.^{xxxviii} These legal instruments were in lieu of the legal pluralism of Ghana. It also reflected Nkrumah's consciencism logic, from which perspective he advocated the synthesis of the three main traditions of Africa – African Traditional Religion(s), Islam, and Christianity.^{xxxix} And to avoid potential conflicts in the application of customary and Islam laws, the constitution of Ghana serves as the final arbiter of all vexatious legal matters. And as a national figure, leading a nascent modern state, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, referred to his religion as a non-denominational Christian and Marxist Socialist.^{xl} This conflation of perceived mutually exclusive traditions should not be read as a symptom of a split identity or cognitive dissonances as it is a creative eclecticism to use religion and humanistic philosophy to forge national unity.

The adoption of a secular constitution did not displace religion from the Ghanaian public sphere: many Ghanaians are deeply religious, with 95 percent claiming a religious affiliation.^{xli} Religious rituals and prayers precede all state functions in Ghana. Before proceedings in parliament, courts, and some public offices, prayers are said. In the same way, during the celebration of national festivals such as Independence Day (March 6), Constitution Day (January 7) and now Founders' Day (September 21), religious leaders from all the major religious groups in Ghana are invited for national programs, which are started only after ritual functionaries of the three major religions have offered prayers.^{xlii} What the secular logic has done for Ghanaians was a recapitulation of what the British colonial administrators sought to do: refraining from privileging one religion over the other or establishing a state religion. This is to the extent that while Christians are overwhelmingly in the majority from the demographic sense the state has avoided the trouble of decentering other religions in favor of Christianity.^{xliii}

The secular constitution has some importance. First, since both Christianity and Islam make claims to be monotheistic in their cosmogony and can be dogmatic about their deeply exclusive teachings, which are deeply exclusive, tensions are likely to loom large in the relationship between these two religions, if nothing mediates their relationship. The exclusivity in theological teaching has an inclusive evangelistic motive of appealing to all people for converts. This is because these religions are hardly defined by ethnicity or race, even though they started as 'tribal' religions (Christians among the Jews and Islam among the Arabs). Their inclusivity is also framed around their construction of a deity who has no geographical limit or boundaries. Both Islam and Christianity see their gods as the creator of the universe, who must command the allegiance of all human beings, regardless of color and geographical location.

^{xxxvii} M.H.A. Bolaji, 'Protest of Discrimination in the Public Schools in Ghana,' *Journal of Religion of Africa* 48 (2018), p. 66.

^{xxxviii} Quashigah, E.K. 1999. "Legislating Religious Liberty: The Ghanaian Experience", *BYU Law Review*, Volume, 1999 Issue 2: 589-606.

^{xxxix} Nkrumah, Kwame. 1970. *Consciencism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

^{xl} Rupe Simms, "I am a non-denominational Christian and a Marxist Socialist:" A Gramscian Analysis of the Convention People's Party and Kwame Nkrumah use of religion,' *Sociology of Religion* 2003, 64:4, 463-477.

^{xli} Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. 2010. *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington: Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life.

^{xlii} The primacy of this practice informed the vexatious debate over the temporary ban on libation during state functions under the leadership of the former and late president of Ghana, John Evans- Atta Mills, when he assumed office in 2009. A cross section of Ghanaians accused him of imposing his Christian faith on all Ghanaians. Some even accused him of converting the Castle (the former seat of government) into a church.

^{xliii} The 2000 Census pegged Christians at 68.8 percent and Muslims at 15.9 percent (2000 Population and Housing Census. Summary Report of Final Report, Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, March 2002. Because Muslims have always contested figures allotted to them, the recent 2010 Census was silent about religious figures.

The shift from the territorial deities of indigenous African religions to a deity that commands a universal submission and loyalty was tipped to upset the social order in areas where Islam and Christianity made an incursion. In the end, the theology of a Supreme God who is intolerable of any other deity and which enjoins the inclusivity of converts also portends danger to peaceful interaction. This is because to convert usually implies that the proselytizers have to discredit the religious background of the potential convert.

Second, since these two religious groups are missionary-oriented and have eschatological teaching that favors their future dominance of the world to come, the likelihood of tension between these two religions is very likely. Islam and Christianity see their eschatology as beyond history rather than temporary domination in this present era. However, such a future eternal dominance is conditioned on what happens in the present world. Entry into the future eternal world is based on how many 'lost souls' a religious devotee can win. In some cases, the quest for this eternal world has led to Jihads and Crusades, which resulted in multitudes of people perishing and resources destroyed. In a civil society, the state mediates the relations between religions with a penchant towards conversion. However, the liberalization of the media in many modern states in Africa, since the 1990s, has made it difficult for the state to regulate some of the incendiary teachings of these religions that are channeled through the print, electronic, and social media.

The secular constitution intervenes by mediating between these two religions in two ways: first, not privileging any religion over and above another; and second, providing interventions on vexatious issues, such as family laws that left to these two religions could spark religious tension.^{XLIV} Second, the secular constitution provides freedom of and from religious affiliation. Individuals are guaranteed the right to belong to any religion of their choice. The state does not intervene to determine the religious affiliation of her citizens since there is no state or official religion in Ghana.^{XLV} Freedom of religious conscience is guaranteed by the secular constitution. Here, persons, who sever relationship with the religion they were born into to enter another religion, are protected from the punishment associated with apostasy, which in some cases would include death and social ostracism in Islam.^{XLVI} Third, the right to education, health, and occupation without any hindrance based on gender, religion, and ethnicity as guaranteed by Ghana's secular constitution have leveled the relationship between Muslims and Christians. Muslims and Christians attend schools and hospitals and work in places that are established by the other religion. Fourth, the constitutional obligation on the part of elected political elites to constitute government that has equal regional representation gives equal opportunities to both Muslims and Christians to be represented in decision-making at the higher levels at all times. This is primarily because some regions in the country are largely dominated by either Muslims or Christians. Related to this, the constitutional requirements for national political parties to have national representation brings Muslims and Christians together under one political umbrella, where unity in politics unites them over some of the divisive tendencies of religion. Holidays on religious festivals and political representation at traditional festivals give Muslims and Christians the opportunity to each with each other.^{XLVII} They share meals and gifts during their respective religious festivals. In the end, the secular constitution emerges as the solution to religious plurality that when left deregulated could cause tension and violence.

The *de facto* practice, which suggests that if the presidential candidate is a Muslim the vice-president candidate must be a Christian, and vice versa, has consolidated the unity between Muslims and Christians. When John Dramani Mahama, the former president of Ghana, admitted two ex-prisoners of Guantanamo Bay, Muhammed Al-Dhuby and Muhammed Bin-Ate into Ghana in January 2016, Ghanaian Muslims and Christians were divided over the issue. Christians in Ghana accused the president of favoring Muslims.

^{XLIV} The implementation of the Intestate Succession Law (PNDC, L111) in 1985 has provided for children who are born to Christian and Muslim parents to claim the right to the property of their parents. More importantly, children born out of wedlock to a Muslim and a Christian, who would have been considered bastards (*dea shege* in Hausa) and denied the right to property of their Muslim parent, are provided for by the law inherit their parents.

^{XLV} Quashigah, E.K. 1999. "Legislating Religious Liberty: The Ghanaian Experience", *BYU Law Review*, Volume, 1999 Issue 2: 589-606.

^{XLVI} Peters, Rudolph & De Vries, Gert J.J. 1976-1977. "Apostasy in Islam." *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 17, Issue ¼: 1-25.

^{XLVII} Until 1995, Muslims did not have national holidays for their festivals. And during my basic school days, Muslims pupils were punished for failing to turn up in school during their festivals. But in 1995, through the intervention of the national chief imam, Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, Muslims had two holidays for two of their festivals.

But later in June 2017, when the Supreme Court of Ghana ruled that the acceptance of the duo in Ghana was unconstitutional, John Dramani Mahama, issued a statement and overruled allegations by some Ghanaians that his decision to accept the two supposed terrorists was partly directed at giving undue favors to Muslims. He said that:

With regard to Gitmo, when I talked about consultation, I talk about consultations on the security levels. *I was not saying that we went and spoke to every pastor and every Imam to ask whether we should bring the Guantanamo Bay detainees.* But we did extensive consultations at the security level to ensure that there was no danger to our safety and security and those consultations were external, they were internal, and that's what I was referring to.^{XLVIII}

The constitutional instrument that saw the formation of the National Peace Council, which has representation from all the major religious groups in Ghana, has contributed to sustaining peace through the appropriation of different religious ways to bring peace in conflict-prone areas or nip potential conflict in the bud. All said, while Ghana's secular regime has not displaced religion from existence or persecuted religious people as happened in other jurisdictions like the Soviet countries where Marxist/Socialist ideology inspired the persecution of religious people or Northern Ireland where Catholics and Protestants have spilled blood over religio-political issues, the secular constitution has provided an equal space for all religions to freely operate. The secular constitution also intervenes to provide non-partisan responses to issues where the two main religions sharply disagree. In summary, Ghana's secular constitution has largely blunted the potential conflict that religious plurality could engender.

Marriage and other forms of conjugal relationship between Muslims and Christians

In the section above, I have discussed how Ghana's constitution, while not undermining religious expression, has contributed to peaceably mediating the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Ghana broadly. In this section, I will particularly focus on interfaith marriages and other forms of conjugal relations in Zongo communities in Accra. As I have elucidated above, Zongo communities are now (more than ever) religiously plural, where Muslims and Christians engage in many social activities with each other. In Accra, Zongo communities which began as Muslim enclaves in the 1830s, when a group of Afro-Brazilians (most of whom were Muslims) arrived in Accra,^{XLIX} has seen the influx of non-Muslim migrants since the colonial government's relocation of the capital of the Gold Coast colony from Cape Coast to Accra in 1877.^L Marriage ceremonies (Muslims freely attend Christian weddings at church, while Christians attend the celebration of Muslim marriage, *awure*, which is usually held in an open space) also bring Christians and Muslims together. Funerals and naming ceremonies also typically witness Christians and Muslims engaging with each other. In the 1990s, when the researcher was growing up in Maamobi, Christmas and *Id Fitr* (celebrated after 29/30 days fasting) and *Id Adhar* (sacrifice in imitation of the faith of Abraham) were graced with Muslims and Christians sharing foods and gifts among themselves. This practice has recently declined, possibly due to economic hardship. But it was necessary for sustaining the cordial relationship between these two religions.

In more recent times, the changing socio-demographic description of Zongo communities and the forces of globalization – particularly western education, which has brought Muslim and Christian youth together and closer in an unprecedented way, has made interfaith marriages and other forms of conjugal relationship a lived-social reality in Zongo. While Muslims and Christians have different conceptual understandings of marriage (in Christianity, marriage is a covenant, while in Islam, it is a contract), both hold marriage in high esteem. In Islam, marriage is considered *ibadah*^{LI}, and it is the preferred social practice for all Muslims, who are capable – materially and psychologically – of entering into marriage. The prominent feature of marriage in Islam makes celibacy the least considered option for many Muslims in Maamobi community.

^{XLVIII} Nathan Gadugah, GITMO 2 ruling: We respect Ghana's judicial process- US gov't, June, 23, 2017. Accessed on January 7, 2018; author's emphasis.

^{XLIX} Alcione M. Amos & Ebenezer Ayesu, "I am Brazilian' History of the Tabon, Afro-Brazilians in Accra, Ghana," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No. 6 (2002), pp. 35-58.

^L Jack Arn, 'Third world urbanization and the creation of a relative surplus population: A history of Accra, Ghana to 1980,' *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Fall, 1996), pp. 413-443.

^{LI} A form of worship. There is a Hadith that says: '[w]hoever has married has completed half of his faith' (Baihaqi).

Christians and Muslims have rules about whom one could marry. In the case of Christianity, following the text in II Corinthians 6:14, the general rule is that a Christian should marry a Christian. But this is made complex when groups that are considered not to be part of mainstream Christianity are brought into the conversation. For example, most Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists in Ghana hermeneutically interpret the text in the Bible to mean an endogamous marriage within their denominations.^{LII} Some Adventists in Ghana appeal to their doctrinal and orthopraxis (particularly in relation to the observation of the Sabbath and dietary laws) to discourage intra-Christian marriages.^{LIII} There are equally Adventists who invoke the common confession of Jesus Christ as the source of salvation among Christians to endorse inter-Christian marriages.^{LIV}

While there are no specific legalistic punitive measures against congregants of these Christian denominations that marry from other religions, there is some form of social ostracism that such members suffer. For example, among Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists, such members will not be given positions of authority in the church, as they are considered not to have set a good example for other members. In Islam, marriage is permitted between a Muslim man and a Christian lady (largely the people of the book, which include the Jews), but not *vis-à-vis*. Just like the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists, the Ahmadiyya Muslims in Ghana do not allow marriage between their members and the Christians. They also hardly allow their members to marry other non-Ahmadiyya Muslims.^{LV}

In spite of the restrictions that both Islam and Christianity place on interfaith marriages and conjugal relations, my Muslim respondents in Zongo stated that their choice of spouse was for convenience and pragmatic reasons, as opposed to 'conservative' theological debates and cross religious boundaries. For example, Adizatu, a Muslim resident of Nima, narrated why she married a Christian young man as follows:

Well, I know my imams always teach that we should not marry Christian men. I also know how my parents used to drum into my ears that marrying a Christian guy will dim the light of Islam in me. But here is the question I asked one of my young imams: what should I do if I find a Christian guy who is more responsible and caring, as well as god-fearing? His answers were not convincing, and so I decided to take my destiny into my own hands. I went ahead and married the Christian guy, Edward, whom I had dated for four years after we met at the University of Cape Coast.^{LVI}

Francisca, a Christian who is married to a Muslim and has two children, gave the reasons for marrying her husband as follows:

I had met a few Christian guys, some of whom I dated. But I felt that most of them were not honest, even though they claim to be Christians. Some would want to have sex with you before they marry you; others are also *players* [slang name for guys who flirt/sleep around with multiple ladies], who want to take you for a ride. I suffered a broken-heart when I caught my ex, who was a Christian with another lady. How would one expect me to have confidence in the other Christians? I met and married my husband, Farouk, and we are doing well. He never demanded sex until we married; he is caring and faithful. Though a soldier, with duties involving traveling outside Ghana for peacekeeping, he always makes sure we keep conversations regular.

^{LII} Interview with Elder Michael Kofi Andoh, the head of the Family Ministries at the Legon SDA Church, 20th May, 2017; Richmond Coleman is an Elder with the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a PhD candid, reading Psychology at the University of Ghana. Interviewed on 7th June, 2017. About two months ago, there was video footage that made the rounds on Facebook about Ps. Dr. Andrew Ewoo, one of the leading evangelists of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, asserting that Adventists have misinterpreted II Corinthians 6:14 to discourage Adventist ladies from marrying non-Adventist Christian men. But his view on the text is not universally shared by other Adventists.

^{LIII} Agana-Nsiire Agana, 'Marrying an unbeliever: Systematics over exegesis of 2 Corinthians 6:14a,' *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry*, Vol. 15, Feb. 2017, pp. 71-85.

^{LIV} Daniel Berchie, 'Marry an 'unbeliever' partner: An exegetical study of 2 Corinthians 6:14,' *Valley View University Journal of Theology*, 3, 2014, pp. 61-71.

^{LV} Interview with Maulvi Bilal Ahmad, the Ahmadiyya missionary in charge of Greater Accra, on 20th August, 2017 at the TI Ahmadiyya School at Ashongman.

^{LVI} Interview with Adizatu, who works at MTN Communication Ltd, and a resident of Nima (aside key respondents, the names of respondents are changed for the sake of anonymity) at Madina Libya Quarters on June 5, 2017.

He does not force me to become a Muslim, even though I am thinking of converting, but not until my father is no more because he accepted my marriage to my husband after I had promised him that I will never leave the Christian faith. Who won't marry such a husband?^{LVII}

Gleaning from the above two examples, it is obvious that for the respondents' reason for crossing religious boundaries to choose their husbands, was not so much about the theological sophistication of their faith. They were motivated by what they sought to get from the 'ideal man'. The 'ideal man', in their understanding, has no religious coloration. This is backed by their reasoning that morality is not the monopoly of one particular religion. For them, moral values are universal and cannot be particularized as the preserve of any single religion. More especially, they argued that the idea of being good is common to both Islam and Christianity, and it is the point of engaging the Muslim or Christian. For these and other respondents, happiness and convenience are preferred to a religious person who could not make them happy. As one of the young ladies said: 'It is about my happiness and comfort. Religion promises eternal happiness, but we must seek that of the earth too.'^{LVIII}

The liberalization of the media, which followed Ghana's re-democratization in the 1990s, has resulted in the mushrooming of many television stations and other media houses, who show romantic soaps that are translated into Twi. Quite often, the 'ideal marriage' in romantic movies, such as the recent famous ones, *Kukumbagya*, *Amaya*, *Dolly Amadosio*, *Gyangee* and *Veera*, which are romantic soap operas from India,^{LIX} place emphasis on values such as fidelity, responsibility, hard work, care, and being 'sexy' as opposed to stringent religious traditions. These shape the views of most of the youth about the 'ideal marriage' or conjugal relationship. In that sense, for most of the respondents, if religion would hinder one from accessing the 'ideal marriage', one can negotiate with one's religion, through one marrying a person from the other religion without becoming a convert of the religion of the spouse. Some religious freelance preachers in the community speak against the explicit romantic expressions in these soap operas. Some Muslim and Christian preachers have also taken advantage of the proliferation of the media to preach against inter-faith marriages. In their ranting against inter-faith marriages, they tend to lampoon and impugn the religion of the *Other*.

In the expression of religious affinity, individuals bring their subjectivity into religion, a phenomenon that also explains the heterogeneous nature of religion. Religion prescribes a pristine way of life, but individuals have their subjectivity and their personal interests. There is a kind of improvisation that individuals devise in their engagement with religion. This improvisation is one of the ways religious adherents contextualize any religion. It helps them adopt and adapt religion to their lived social realities. Interfaith marriages should be seen in this light. This views above were not shared by some of the religious leaders engaged in the study. Sheikh Osman Bari, a leading Ahlu Sunna Wal'Jama'a Muslim scholar, expressed his dissatisfaction with the responses as follows:

Most of the youth today have been spoiled by wrong education. Islam is a complete religion that leaves no space for unnecessary negotiation. In our religion, there is no 'give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.' Islam provides comprehensive guidance to whom a Muslim should marry, and the Qur'an is clear in saying that a Muslim woman should not marry a non-Muslim man. The Qur'an says, "They are not lawful wives for the unbelievers, nor are the unbelievers lawful husbands for them" (Qur'an 60:11). Marriage in Islam is not just a social activity; it is a religious obligation for all those who are capable of marrying. To marry a non-Muslim because of the so-called high moral standing of the person is a total misunderstanding of Islam. Modernity or globalization cannot change the Qur'an. It is the Qur'an that should guide modernity. Muslims should therefore stick to the Qur'an and what it says about marriage. Our ladies must be retaught the Qur'an. A pious Muslim is better than the most righteous non-Muslim.

^{LVII} Interview with Francisca a student of African University College of Communications, Accra, where she is completing her first degree. She resides at Maamobi on May 9, 2019.

^{LVIII} Sadia is a resident of Nima on 12 May, 2019.

^{LIX} In December 2014, the researcher was engaged by the Media Foundation for West Africa to collect data on how the media is impacting on Ghanaians, and he realized most of these soap opera appeal to both to the old and young generation, particularly females. The translation of these operas into Twi has given them a wider audience.

How do you even compare a Muslim with a non-Muslim? Obviously, I am not downplaying the strong moral values of some non-Muslims. My main concern is the supremacy of Islam as the final revelation to man.^{LX} Bishop Ben Sallah, the Bishop who at the time of the research was in charge of the Adenta Branch of Action Chapel International asserted that:

Christians are to stick to marrying from the church. I admit that sometimes the attitude of some Christian guys makes some ladies develop a repulsive attitude towards almost all Christian guys. As a Bishop, I understand the frustration some of my female congregants go through as a result of some morally corrupt Christian guys. But I think that it is erroneous to classify all Christian guys as bad, following the misconduct of some of them. It is a difficult situation for the church. Getting our females to stay and marry in the church is becoming a huge challenge. But that said, I would not encourage a Christian lady to marry a Muslim man. Our ladies must stay in the church. I think that as a religious leader, I have a responsibility towards encouraging young men in the church to live according to the rules of the Bible. The moral standards in the Bible should be the guiding post for our young Christian men. The sexual revolution is gradually watering down and eroding Christian sex ethics. I have had young ladies complaining to me that their Christian boyfriends are demanding sex from them. That frustrates some of them. But in all that, my counsel to them is that they should stay in the church.^{LXI}

The responses of the religious leaders and those of the youth show the tensions and the different religious stance at play in Zongo communities. Most of the respondents engaged in the study were more concerned about pragmatism and convenience, while the religious leaders primarily focused on neat and pristine theology. The responses of the youth reflect the relativization of moral values. Thus, the youth argue that morality is not limited to their respective faith. In relation to marriage and other forms of conjugal ties, they argue that it is possible to find a Muslim or Christian with high moral values. Conclusively, it could be argued that for the youth engaged in the study, the question is not so much about what the religion teaches, as it is about what works. So, the question most of them ask is: 'will I be happy in the marriage?' This pragmatism bridges religious gaps between some Muslim youth in Zongo communities. It allows Muslims and Christians to marry each other without rigidly considering ideal religious teachings. All of this illustrates that religious authorities have limited authority. They can preach against interfaith marriages, but they can hardly stop people from entering into such relationships.

Marriage and Conversion

The study, as part of my effort to analyze interactions between Muslims and Christians, considered conversion to religion with marriage being the means of achieving that end. In the study, it was gathered that the basic reason for one severing the relationship with one's religion to another religion was largely determined by one's perception of the mutuality, inclusivity or exclusivity of Islam and Christianity. As has been stated above, Islam and Christianity are often seen to have religious dogmas that are mutually exclusive. For example, Muslims and Christians differ strongly over the person of Jesus Christ. While Muslims believe Jesus was just one of the prophets, the mainline Christians believe that Jesus is God. While Christians believe in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, mainline Muslims do not believe Jesus died.^{LXII} These theologically nuanced differences are not necessarily understood in the same way by some Muslim youth who have a pragmatic worldview of life. For most of them, such theological debates are best suited for religious leaders. A youth converting to another religion will base his decision partly on seeking the point of convergence between Muslims and Christians. The so-called mutual exclusivity between Muslims and Christians did not appeal to most of the youth engaged in the study.

^{LX} Sheikh Bari is a leading Ahlu Sunna Wal'Jama'a Muslim scholar, who has authored two important volumes on Islam in Ghana: *A Comprehensive History of Muslims and Religion in Ghana* and *A Holistic History of Islam in Western and Central Africa*. He was interviewed on May 20, 2017.

^{LXI} Bishop Ben Sallah was at the time of research the Bishop in charge of the Adenta Branch of Action Chapel International, the first Charismatic Church in Ghana. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Birmingham. He was interviewed on May 19, 2017.

^{LXII} The Ahmadiyya Muslims believe Jesus was crucified, but he survived the cross and died a natural death.

Priscilla, who is a convert of Islam and married to a Muslim man, recounted her conversion narrative as follows:

Growing up, my parents, who are Presbyterians, had pumped into my head that I should not think of converting to Islam for whatever reason. As the case is for most Christian homes, I attended Sunday school as a young girl; prayed, and enjoyed singing Christian hymns. But while in senior high school, I fell in love with my husband. Initially, I resisted him. I feared the consequences if I accepted him. I was too scared, you know. But after courting for about a decade, and reading about Islam, I decided to convert to Islam to marry him. Of course, he never pressured me to convert. But I think his family was interested in me converting. I told my parents about my decision to marry a Muslim. Predictably, their response was one of objection. But my mind was made up. I was of age, so we went to the registrar general's department (in Ghana, marriages are registered with the Registrar General's Department) to have our marriage registered. But the registrar prevailed upon me to involve my parents. So, I went back to them. They were still reluctant. But since my mind was made up, they grudgingly accepted the marriage. We have been married for eight years now with a set of twins and another child. But I must say that the relationship I have with my parents is not encouraging. Since I am their first-born, they feel let down. But I don't see any difference between Islam and Christianity, which is the more reason I felt compelled to convert. We all worship the same God; the difference is the means through which we worship that God. Whether through Mohammed or Jesus, it is the same God.^{LXIII}

Farouk is married to a Christian lady, and he allows his wife and children to go to church, while he goes to the mosque. On festive occasions, he joins his wife and children at church; while his wife and children also join him at Islamic programs on special Muslim ceremonies. He like Priscilla, argues that he does not see any difference between Islam and Christianity. According to him, there is more that unites Christians and Muslims than divides them. He is also not concerned about the insults some of his imams and other Muslims have been hurling at him.

In her discussion on Chrislam, which is an assemblage of Islam and Christianity, Jansen discusses how for most Nigerian youth, religious pragmatism, as opposed to complex theological discussions, is one of the reasons a number of the youth are attracted to the new religious movement. In the face of economic hardship and joblessness, the youth who join Chrislam are motivated by what brings them relief in such economic challenging times.^{LXIV} In the same way, for most of the youth engaged in the study, the complex theological differences between Muslims and Christians were not so important in informing their decision to convert to Islam or not. What mattered for them was how either Islam or Christianity would help them achieve their 'dream marriage'. As one of them said, 'religion must serve us, not we serving religion.'^{LXV} Instrumentalizing religion for the advancement of life goals is a strategy that is evident among the youth discussed in this study. Cross-religious marriage for the youth has social implications. It is about bonding with the person you could easily stay with. It is also about establishing social connections that would enable one to achieve the 'ideals' of life. It also suggests the fact that the youth conceptualize marriage not strictly from the prism of religion, but from a sociological point of view.

The future of interfaith marriages and conjugal relationships and its impact on Muslim-Christian relationship

The study has underscored the fact that interfaith marriages and other forms of conjugal relationships are lived social realities in many Zongo communities. Many socioeconomic factors have sustained this development. Rural-urban migration in Ghana has meant that most of the youth have become economically independent, and usually send remittances home to help their families.^{LXVI} Sociologically, the structure of the rural economy that left bridewealth in the hands of the older generation who used it to control the youth is losing its steam in urban areas. In Accra, most youth after school can secure jobs that help them to mobilize resources for marriage, without necessarily depending on their families.

^{LXIII} Interview with Priscilla on May 2, 2017.

^{LXIV} Janson, Marloes. 2016. "Unity Through Diversity: A Case Study of Chrislam in Lagos", *Africa* 86 (4), 2016: 646-72.

^{LXV} Interview with Zakari a student and resident of Madina on May 10, 2017.

^{LXVI} Adaawen, S. A., & Owusu, B. (December 01, 2013). North-South migration and remittances in Ghana. *African Review of Economics and Finance*, 5, 1, 29-45.

Secondly, youth migration from rural to urban areas gives them some degree of religious control. Quite often, the youth who migrate from the North to the South, easily sever religious affiliations, if doing so has a pragmatic benefit. The fact that most Zongo communities are heterogeneous migrant communities has produced instances where persons freely convert to other religions without the fear of immediate social ostracism from their families. Also, western education has brought Muslims and Christians together and closer than hitherto. All these factors, together with Ghana's secular constitution, have made interfaith marriages and other forms of conjugal relationships between Muslims and Christians a common practice in Zongo communities.

The above notwithstanding, there are some factors, which undermine interfaith marriages and other forms of conjugal relationships between Muslims and Christians. The first is the influx of radical and polemical religious materials in Zongo communities, stemming from both Christian and Muslim religious leaders. Some of the sensational books by the late Ahmed Deedat, such as *Crucifixion or Crucifixion*^{LXVII}, and the *Is the Bible God's Word*^{LXVIII} and some incendiary magazines such as *Trumpet*, published by the Pentecostal Philadelphia Church of God in the USA, are radicalizing some youth Christians and Muslims in Zongo communities. There is also the internationalization of both Christianity and Islam. In the case of Islam, Ahlu Sunna Muslim youths may get scholarships to study in Sunni-related universities in the Arab world. There, they study essentially Islam: history, theology, and the art of scriptural interpretation. Because the condition of their scholarship is that they return to Ghana after their studies, most of them return to work as sheikhs. The challenge, however, is that most of them do not readily fit into the secular economy of Ghana since their training is deeply religious. The effect of this has been conflicting over the control of mosque.^{LXIX} Their reformist teachings have also sometimes brought them into conflict with the Tijaniyya Muslims, whom they accused of having corrupted Islam through *bida* (innovation).^{LXX} And since the 1960s, disputes over mosques and imamship have occasionally led to violent clashes between the Ahlu Sunna Muslims and Tijaniyya Muslims in many communities, including Maamobi and Nima.^{LXXI} The interventions of the police and other security agencies have prevented such violence from exploding and degenerating into regional intra-Islamic tension. Even so, in his recent article, Ousman Murzik Kobo has argued that there is a conciliatory relationship between the Tijaniyya and Ahlu sunna Muslims, while the engagement between these two religious traditions is defined more by dialogue than confrontation.^{LXXII}

Some Charismatic Christian leaders have also made inflammatory comments about Islam. In 2016, Nicholas Duncan-Williams commented on Muslim ritual practices, hinting at the fact that Muslims are superstitious and worship false gods. Later when the offended Muslim community put pressure on him about these remarks, he apologized but added that his comments were misconstrued.^{LXXIII} The apology of Duncan-Williams who is said to be the founder of the Charismatic movement in Ghana served as a good gesture in sustaining the good relationship between Muslims and Christians in Ghana, but other Christians saw his apology as a denial of Christ. Sometime in 2015, Bishop Charles Agyin-Asare, the founder and leader of Perez Chapel (formerly World Miracle Church International) also made a comment about Islam that Muslims in Ghana felt was pejorative of Islam.

^{LXVII} Deedat, A. (1987). *Crucifixion or cruci-fiction?*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: International Islamic Pub. House.

^{LXVIII} Deedat, A. (2007). *Is the Bible God's Word?*. Kuala Lumpur: Saba Islamic Media.

^{LXIX} For the many times, the researcher has visited events in the mosque (especially the establishment of a marriage contract, the researcher has observed that imams are usually given money and gifts to offer prayer and supplicate on behalf of some individuals. Also, the leadership of mosque entitles imams to receive gifts from the larger communities. Thus, while imams may not be on the payroll for their service, the incentive of receiving gifts, in addition to religious obligations, makes imamship quite lucrative.

^{LXX} Samwini, N. (2006). *The Muslim resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*. Berlin: Lit., p. 87.

^{LXXI} Dzodzi, Tsikata & Seini, Wayo (2004). *Identities, Inequalities and Conflicts in Ghana*, Oxford: Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, p. 46.

^{LXXII} Ousman M. Kobo, 'Shifting trajectories of Salafi/Ahl-Sunna reforms in Ghana,' *Islamic Africa*, Vol. 6. No. 1-2 (2015), pp. 60-81.

^{LXXIII} Video: Duncan-Williams apologizes to Muslims, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/religion/Video-Duncan-Williams-apologizes-to-Muslims-427252>, March 31, 2016.

Just like Duncan-Williams, he also apologized, and the looming storm of violence was calmed.^{LXXIV} Similarly, the open-air preaching of some itinerant Muslims could compromise the peaceful relations between Muslims and Christian. These preachers include Sir Jafar Mohammed and Mallam Dawud^{LXXV} who use the Bible alongside the Qur'an to condemn Christian dogmas. Muslims also feel grieved as a result of the general public refusing to allow schoolgirls to wear veils,^{LXXVI} forcing Muslim students in public schools to attend church services,^{LXXVII} prohibiting Muslims from being buried in public cemeteries, the alleged removal of Muslims from voting registries, and the perceived biases in population census that assign low figures to Muslims, and Christian preaching on public conveyances. On the side of Christian grievances, one could point to state sponsorship of the Hajj, the rhetoric around child marriage, and the effects of the campaign of fear associated with the global war on terror.

In terms of guidance for scholarly reengagement with Islam and Christianity in Ghana and the sub-region, this study argues that, contrary to the overwhelming emphasis placed on doctrinal differences defining Muslim-Christian relations, which magnifies the differences between these two religions, research attention should also be focused on the practices and lived social realities that are reshaping Muslim Christian relations in Africa. This article has particularly focused upon inter-marriage between Muslims and Christians. Similarly, studies of secular family law in Ghana and other African countries should be broadened in their scope to account for Muslims and Christians who are involved in 'informal' conjugal relationships. As it stands, the law in Ghana leaves it to the discretion of the courts to determine the fate of persons in 'informal' conjugal relationships, who feel offended by the other partners.^{LXXVIII} In the same vein, while the law of Ghana does not recognize the existence of a bastard child, because the law makes the provision for childcare independent of the circumstances of their birth, children born out of wedlock to a Muslim and a Christian parent are usually excluded from the inheritance of their Muslim parent. They are usually referred to as 'dea shege' (a bastard). Future studies should explore more how the law could be reshaped to enforce the care of such children.

Finally, the existential reality of interfaith marriages between Muslims and Christians in a world that is deeply cosmopolitan has contributed to the re-theologizing of Islamic law by some Muslim scholars, such as Khaled Abou El Fadi, Khaleel Mohammed, and Asma Lamrabet, to not only allow interfaith marriages, but marriages between Muslim women and Christian men. Countries like Tunisia have also lifted the ban against Muslim women from marrying Christian men.^{LXXIX} Islamic scholars in sub-Saharan Africa should also reengage with the Qur'an, reflecting on how its teachings could cohere with contemporary social realities. Here, the observation of scholars like Amina Wadud and Ali Mazrui that the interpreters of the Qur'an are fallible though the Qur'an is not, should guide Muslims scholars to reread the Qur'an with fresh eyes to reflect changing trends in society and more so to address the dynamics between Qur'anic universals and particulars.^{LXXX}

^{LXXIV} 'Islamic Fundamentalists can stop us from being Christians'

<https://www.modernghana.com/news/609378/1/islamic-fundamentalists-cant-stop-u.html> April 6, 2015.

^{LXXV} Mallam Dawud is also popularly known as Mallam *Pamperawa* [popular Hausa term that means, 'say it as it is'], because of his use of explicit and sometimes obscene words.

^{LXXVI} On October 12, 2019, Most Muslims in Ghana embarked on a peaceful protest against the prohibition of the hijab in public institutions. I joined the protest as part of my study of Muslims in Zongo communities (since I am a resident of one of the Zongo communities, Maamobi, Accra); Ibrahim Alhassan (Oct. 13, 2019), "Muslims in Ghana march against the hijab discrimination," <https://africafeeds.com/2019/10/12/muslims-in-ghana-march-against-hijab-discrimination/>; Accessed: November 10, 2019.

^{LXXVII} M.H.A. Bolaji, "Secularism and state neutrality: The 2015 Muslim protest of discrimination in the public schools in Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 48 (2018), pp. 65-104.

^{LXXVIII} Ama F. Hammond, "What man has put together – recognizing property rights of spouses in de facto unions," *Ghana L.J.*, 2008.

^{LXXIX} Tunisia lifts the ban on Muslim women marrying non-Muslims - *Al Jazeera*

www.aljazeera.com/.../tunisia-lifts-ban-muslim-women-marrying-muslims-17091415..., Accessed: December 26, 2017.

^{LXXX} Amina Wadud (1999). *Qur'an and women: Rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. xii; Mazrui, A.A. (2006). *Islam: Between Globalisation and Counterterrorism*. Oxford: James Currey.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed the multilayers of Muslim-Christian interactions in three Zongo communities in Accra. The paper primarily looked at how inter-faith marriages between Muslims and Christians, undergirded by Ghana's secular constitution, are shaping the interactions Muslims are cultivating with Christians. The paper notes that some of the dogmatic teachings of Islam and Christians have the potential to explode into inter or intra-religious conflicts. Thus, tracing from the colonial era, the paper has argued that the colonial administrators' relative non-interference in the religious itineraries of the people of the Gold Coast paved the way for the secularization of the legal status of post-colonial. By secularization, the paper moved away from the simplistic assumption of religion receding as societies modernized. Instead, the paper has argued that the secularity of Ghana has discouraged the adoption of a state religion, which could have stifled the religious freedom of Ghanaians who may stake claim to other religions. Ghana's secular status is not to dismiss religion, but to provide equal space for multiple religious interactions. This is in light of the religious plurality of Ghana, which is one of the spillovers of centuries of interactions with Afro-Muslims and Europeans. The paper argues for new approaches to engaging Islam and Christianity, as the two religions have interacted with each other peacefully through many means, including interfaith marriages. In such an academic enterprise, individual subjectivity, pragmatism, and convenience should be properly analyzed *vis-à-vis* pristine religious teachings. In other words, just like doctrines, research attention should be focused on the lived religious experiences of Muslims and Christians in progressively cosmopolitan world.

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