RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND MODES OF COEXISTENCE IN URBAN WEST AFRICA

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Conceptual Reflections on Approaches to Religious Diversity and Modes of Coexistence in Urban West Africa[*]

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Abstract
This article introduces the research of MIASA's IFG 7 project titled "Religious Diversity in Urban West Africa: Exploring Modes of Coexistence for Sustainable Governance". It conceptualises the methodological approach of the group by identifying three main thematic axes that emerged from the overlapping individual approaches to the study of religious diversity in urban centres, namely 1) migration, mobilities, entrepreneurship, and trans-nationalism; (2) territoriality, power, and configurations of religious minorities and majorities; and (3) urban infrastructure(s).

Keywords: West Africa, religious diversity, coexistence, urban infrastructure

Résumé
Le présent article présente la recherche du projet de l'IFG 7 du MIASA intitulé "Diversité religieuse dans les villes d'Afrique de l'Ouest: Exploration des modes de coexistence pour une gouvernance durable". Il conceptualise l'approche méthodologique du groupe en identifiant trois axes thématiques principaux qui ont émergé des approches individuelles chevauchantes de l'étude de la diversité religieuse dans les centres urbains, notamment 1) la migration, les mobilités, l'entreprenariat et le transnationalisme ; 2) la territorialité, le pouvoir et les configurations des minorités et des majorités religieuses et; 3) l(es) infrastructure(s) urbaine(s).

Mots-clés: Afrique de l'Ouest, diversité religieuse, coexistence, infrastructure urbaine

This working paper presents some of the research results of MIASA's IFG 7 project titled "Religious Diversity in Urban West Africa: Exploring Modes of Coexistence for Sustainable Governance". The project started with the broader objective of examining how religions are forged by and affect the urban settings in which they are practiced as well as to explore empirically grounded modes of sustainable religious coexistence. As a group of researchers working on religious encounters in different West African cities, we then began to compare

field notes and preliminary findings from our individual projects, in which we deployed different research methodologies (anthropological, historical, and phenomenological). As we reflected on our various, partly overlapping individual approaches, several empirical entry points to study religious diversity in urban centres emerged. Thus, we identified three main thematic axes that have guided us to our individual findings about modes of coexistence and that, bundled together, characterize our specific interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional methodological approach. These are 1) migration, mobilities, entrepreneurship, and trans-nationalism; (2) territoriality, power, and configurations of religious minorities and majorities; and (3) urban infrastructure(s).

Before discussing these thematic axes, we would like to first address the concept of diversity, particularly how religious diversity relates to the focus of our project on urban West Africa. We conclude our conceptual reflections with an outlook on the relevance of education (religious as well as secular) in shaping various dimensions of religious diversity, which becomes apparent in our research. Finally, we present the research projects of our group members in a synopsis of the concrete topics addressed in the individual contributions assembled in this working paper. Since some of the field research carried out within the framework of IFG 7 was still ongoing while writing our contributions for the present publication, what we are presenting here is work in progress.

Religious diversity in urban settings

Religious diversity is an ever-present and increasingly visible reality in cities across the world (Stringer 2013). Globalization processes and intensified mobility of capital, techno-logies, information, ideas and various categories of people (Appadurai 1990) have made scholars reflect more deeply on diversity or even "superdiversity" (Vertovec 2021) and, more specifically, on religious diversity in urban contexts. In West Africa, extraordinarily rapid urbanization is currently taking place against the background of a long history of urban settlements (Heinrigs 2020; Werthmann 2023). These contexts provide particularly productive laboratories for research on complex transformation processes and the entanglements and overlapping of various dimensions of diversity (social, cultural, ethnic, and religious). The complex settings of West African cities teach us that religious diversity should not just be considered in terms of religious differences, but should reflect the many ways of accommodating differences in belief and practice – what we refer to here as 'diversity within diversity' – not only in religious terms but also in terms of intersecting differences of socio-economic and political positionings of the actors involved.

In the context of the study of religion in Africa, Janson and Meyer (2016) argue that scholars have long focused on either Islam or Christianity, depending on their expertise. Soares (2006) also observes that until recently, where these religions are studied in combination across

space and time in Africa, scholars have often looked at what they have tended to call 'Christian-Muslim relations' (see, for example, Rasmussen 1993; Hock 2004; Hafkens 1995; Haroon 2007). Soares further highlights the analytical limitation of this method by pointing out that "such an approach assumes, often implicitly, that Christians and Muslims are identifiable and distinct groups with relatively neat boundaries, whose relations or interactions as groups or even blocs can be studied in various contexts" (2006: 1–2). He argues that it is surely a mistake to treat Muslims and Christians as large homogenous communities that interact as blocs. Highlighting these analytical limitations, Soares (2016) contends that religious interactions in Africa must be understood in their full complexity and suggests that focusing on "encounters" rather than "relations" would reveal such complexities. In other words, religious encounters provide broader analytical perspectives of understanding "religious pluralism – that is, the existence of different religious traditions in one space, but also the multiplicity of practices of pluralism, including the personal pluralism of individuals and groups who might engage with different religions or religious practices" (Soares 2016: 673). In contrast to their relations in other places in the world, boundaries between Christians, Muslims, and adherents of Traditional Religions in Africa have not always been rigid, fixed, or unchanging. Hence, understanding the complex dynamics of religious diversity has become critical in research on urban Africa. In addition to West African urban centres being spaces of religious encounters, they are also sites where religion influences almost all aspects of people's life, covering a range of different social, economic, and gender backgrounds (see, for example, Janson 2021; Nolte, Ogen, and Jones 2017; Boeck 2013).

Our IFG 7 project on religious diversity in urban Africa finds encounters as an entry point to understanding religious diversity helpful. Several of our individual findings show how and why followers of different religions in urban Africa, including African Traditional Religions which are often neglected, live side by side and share so much to an extent that they convert to each other's religions, as well as learn, appropriate, and borrow from each other. In a general manner, our project is interested in all aspects of religious encounters that highlight the trajectories of diversity in the sense that we do not especially focus on groups of religious experts but on religiosities in the everyday life of different fringes of the urban population, including pious ones. Moreover, our approach to religious diversity includes intersectionality as a cross-cutting perspective of analysis, which provides important guidelines for empirical research in the 'field' as well as for the analysis of various intersecting relations of difference such as gender, ethnicity, class, and religious identifications at later stages of data processing (Kerner 2017).

As a result of our different disciplinary backgrounds, individual research trajectories, and the respective empirical foci of our fieldwork, we have come to concentrate on different but strongly interrelated dimensions of religious diversity which have emerged from our empirical points of entry through the abovementioned thematic axes. In the following, we will present the three main axes and how they interrelate to each other.

Migration, mobilities, entrepreneurship, and transnationalism

Human migration continuously influences cultural, social, and religious formations in given societies. Importantly, when talking about migration, we are referring to its broader meanings in terms of mobilities and circulations of both ideas and people as well as goods, cultural forms, and various (material and immaterial) elements of aesthetic formations (Meyer 2009). Migration and urbanization are intimately intertwined through processes of rural-urban as well as urban-urban, transnational, and transcontinental flows of people, things and ideas (Appadurai 1990). Since urban populations and cultures are constantly changing due to migration, one body of literature that speaks to our IFG project is that which engages the question of how migration has become a key reference not only in the emergence of African cities but in influencing their diversity and the complex interweaving of religious and non-religious layers of their social fabric. Research on migration and mobilities also sheds light on (more or less) temporal modes of coexistence and their sustainability or precariousness in terms of livelihood opportunities provided by the urban environment.

The concept of infrastructure, which will be treated in more detail below, marks a conjuncture of different strands of literature when it comes to addressing the religious dimensions of these migration and migration-driven processes. Biao Xiang and Johan Lindquist (2014) as well as Tilmann Heil (2021) offer useful perspectives on migration as infrastructure. Heil's approach emphasizes how migrants are contributing to city-making by interweaving, in their daily activities, the various cultural forms, practices and socio-material components that make up the fabric of urban life. Xiang and Lindquist (2014) suggest focusing not only on the ways in which migrants move and create new infrastructures by themselves but also on how they are moved by others. This is shaped in terms of how migrations are framed by brokers, bureaucrats, transport companies, state policies, etc., as well as how the systematically interlinked technologies and institutions, including states and non-state actors, facilitate and condition mobility (Kleist and Bjarnesen 2019). Thus, it is important to emphasize that diversity is also dependent on how states or private agencies organize it, and hence on how religious practices and institutions are regulated by both state and non-state actors.

These different categories of actors indicate that migrations and mobilities are strongly intertwined with entrepreneurship and the fact that urban infrastructures are attracting people within as well as across national borders in terms of the educational, social, political, and economic opportunities they offer both translocally (see Zaami's contribution) and transnationally (see Binate's contribution). Such opportunities, however, can also become sites of conflict and contestation over legitimate access to and control over resources. This aspect can be linked with the rather conflictive and controversial dimensions of religious diversity and coexistence that arise when mobility turns into the issue of control over space (see Dumbe's contribution). In this regard, mobility and migration can be related to power struggles concerning territoriality and configurations of religious majorities and minorities.

Territoriality, power, and configurations of religious minority & majority settings

Territoriality refers to the attempt to affect, influence, or control actions, interactions, or access by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a specific space (Sack 1983). Hence, territoriality involves spatial strategies associated with maintaining or challenging political, economic, and cultural power dynamics (Peleman 2003).[1]

However, the link between territoriality and religious diversity is not only articulated through struggles for control over physical space; place-making and the occupation or claiming of territory can also be part of struggles for authority and leadership in the religious realm. Moreover, controlling urban space through secular institutions of governance can be counteracted by sacred authority enacted in the religious sphere. For instance, a state may use secularity as a way to regulate religious co-existence, not privileging one above the other, but the question of how religious actors react and relate to secular state power would remain. It may be the case that legally, politically or culturally a certain religion is privileged over other religions, as is the case in many African countries. In both instances, different secular-religious arrangements impact how religious groups use urban space and coexist in it in various settings regarding religious minority and majority constellations. Such constellations are often fraught with tensions, sometimes articulated in the dichotomy between autochthone and allochthone groups of population (see Dumbe's contribution). Religious diversity is not neutral in this respect – religious majority and minority settings are more often than not associated with meanings that set one religion against another in terms of 'us' and 'them', or 'authentic' local culture vs. 'foreign', 'imported' and culturally 'alien' elements.

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[1] A slightly different meaning is associated with the French term "terroir", which focuses less on the aspect of power and rather connotes the specificity of a geographically determined space with its cultural uses (such as in agriculture), linking human and natural/material/physical aspects of a particular space.

Against this background, we pay attention to diversity within diversity in terms of temporal (sub-)group formations, shifting alliances and affiliations, and regarding the multiple, more or less conscious layers of religious experiences and embodied practices. Even after one form of religious pluralism is distinguished from other sorts, a variety of positions could still be considered within each as versions of religious pluralism. The question here is how various forms of religious affiliations, as well as qualities and degrees of belongings, can be taken into consideration, how they contribute to the multiplicity of ideals and aspirations, and how much influence they have on the formation of religious subgroups.

Some of the studies in this collection, such as Zaami's and Ibrahim's contributions, deal with these ambivalences while approaching religious diversity through minority-majority en-counters. In using this approach, we are referring to ways in which popular practices involving majority and minority groups may disrupt hegemony or (re)configure the religious sphere in ways that promote pluralism. An example of this is offered in Ibrahim's contribution, which shows how 'Jesus *mawlid*' and street processions practiced by a combination of Shia Muslims and Christians are marking the presence of religious minorities at a time when Sunni Muslims in northern Nigeria were consolidating their hegemony through sharia reimplementation.

In their discussion of reconfiguring religious minorities and majorities in Nigeria, Ibrahim and Katz (2022) argue that there is no watertight boundary between those who belong to the majority and those who are in the minority. For example, while focusing on predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria, they show how Muslims find themselves simul-taneously in one majority *and* in another minority (see Ibrahim's contribution). The same applies elsewhere. For instance, while Ghana remains a Christian-majority country, Muslims are a dominant group within some neighbourhoods, mostly those called *zongos* (see Zaami's contribution). In other words, since *zongos* are not exclusively Muslim quarters, Christians formed a minority there though they are the majority on a national scale. Yet Christians might still see the Muslims who are the majority in a neighbourhood such as Madina, a suburb in Accra, as a threat, and 'indigenous' Ga Muslims, who are the minority within the broader Accra Muslim population, might see non-Ga Muslims as migrants from northern Ghana and neigh-bouring countries who do not really belong, as shown by Dumbe's contribution.

This majority-minority reconfiguration shows how religious groups and their evolving cultures are eluding some of the typical categorizations scholars have often assigned to them. Ibrahim and Katz (2022) call for careful historical grounding of specific terms used, such as 'majority' and 'minority', which also serve as analytical categories. They also show how focusing on multiple minorities (including interfaith minorities) reveals minority groups' creative approaches to not just remain but to also grow and carve out space for themselves within the

wider religious geography of urban spaces (Ibrahim and Katz 2022). Moreover, this differentiation of minority-majority constellations points to the aspect of scale, encompassing national, inter- and intra-urban levels.

Urban infrastructure(s) – including material, immaterial and/or human infrastructure

As compared to the other two axes, the dimension of urban infrastructure can be seen as the most comprehensive methodological pathway regarding the inclusion of materiality into the study of religious diversity. As an abstract conceptual framework, it allows us to analyse the interweaving of material, physical as well as nonphysical, and human infrastructure. We can speak of 'socio-material' infrastructures, shaping the lived experiences of religious diversity and coexistence in urban space. Religious practice is often about both controlling space and enchanting space (de Witte 2008), as well as (re-)creating community through the embodiment of "sensational forms" and the performative enactment of "aesthetic formations" (Meyer 2009; 2016). These perspectives reinforce the idea of "iconic religion" and the tangible presence of religions through religious buildings, sites, and artefacts in urban spaces (Knott, Krech, and Meyer 2016).

Approaching the study of religion through infrastructure as an analytical concept has been productive in the post-secular era. Postsecularism, as popularized by Habermas (2008), refers to various theories regarding the continued presence or revival of religious beliefs and practices in the present. It challenges the secularisation theories that predicted the decline or complete disappearance of religion as it conflicted with the concept of modernity. According to the secularisation theory of modernity, religion was supposed to be confined to the private sphere, as it was considered to be an internal and personal matter. However, present-day societies prove otherwise, as religion remains a crucial aspect of human life, and its visibility in the public sphere has increased, taking on various forms. This has led to the emergence of "post-secular" perspectives that seek to understand religion with a turn to its materiality and/or its external manifestations (Keane 2008; Meyer 2008). These perspectives have also led to a turn towards infrastructures.

The concept of "religious infrastructure" was initially described as an arrangement of assets (particularly buildings and facilities) that enable and support the activities of a religious organization or community (infrastructure for religion). However, scholars have recently proposed conceiving of religion itself as infrastructure (Hoelzchen and Kirby 2020: 2). Whereas the latter conceptual approach is still rather tentative, we find it inspirational because it allows conceiving of religion as infrastructure enabling activities and social formations that might be non-religious. The two understandings are not mutually exclusive and are also open for a third perspective, which focuses on the ways in which infrastructures are symbolically marked as religious. These approaches simultaneously invoke material and non-material infrastructures

in addressing the question of how religion interfaces with other aspects of the social and physical environments in shaping human lives (see Ibrahim's contribution). In the same vein, Hoelzchen and Kirby (2020) point out that research on the interrelations between religion and infrastructure share at least two common interests. First, they draw attention to the hybrid and relational composition of religious and infrastructural formations. Second, they are interested in their agentive effects – their capacity to shape distinctive kinds of actors and interactions.

Yet, although the temporality of infrastructure has not been ignored in the recent "infrastructural turn" in anthropology (Anand, Gupta and Appel 2018), the common under-standing of infrastructure tends to highlight its spatiality and the way it creates a stable order in physical space. Moreover, the focus on "agentive effects" leaves inherent sociable qualities and ascribed values of religious practices and encounters rather out of sight. By contrast, we suggest that the dimension of urban infrastructure can be productively linked with an analysis of the specific forms and practices of sociability that are enabled by specific (material and immaterial) infrastructures (see Sieveking's contribution).

Some of our individual field studies (Sieveking and Zaami) clearly show that (and how) access to urban infrastructure is gendered. Adopting an intersectional perspective, it becomes clear that social class/ social positioning also plays a role. Hence, some of our projects are particularly attentive to the relations between religion/ religiosity and social class. This research perspective has recently been given special attention with regards to Muslim societies (Samson and LeBlanc 2022) but has also been addressed by research on Christian populations (Pauli 2019).

With questions regarding the link between religiosity and social class positioning, the aspect of education also comes to the fore. Some case studies of our individual research projects explicitly deal with the dimension of religious and/ or secular education (Binate, Zaami and Sieveking). Moreover, education can be considered under the lens of territoriality and power, which points to the different historical trajectories of Christian and Islamic education on the continent (see Dumbe's contribution; see also Launay 2016).

It must be highlighted that in urban West Africa, anglo- or francophone education constitutes a colonial legacy that associates Christianity with models of modern Western education, even if the state might have adopted the idea of secular public education, following a French model. Whereas Islamic educational institutions also encompass modern pedagogical models (Brenner 2007; Tayob et al. 2011), they have a different historical trajectory and other meanings in postcolonial Africa and are often (wrongly) opposed to notions of modern education in a generalising manner. While this stereotypical opposition reappears in many conflictual settings of religious diversity on the continent, such as in the case of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, we suggest focusing on how education interconnects not only with religious infra-structures, but also with religion as infrastructure.

Individual contributions by IFG 7-members

The five contributors in this collection of working papers engage in conversation about religious diversity and modes of co-existence in urban Africa from the three thematic axes outlined. However, they are not directly policy-oriented and do not pretend to give any blueprint for sustainable peaceful coexistence, but rather call for a careful and differentiated analysis of the categories in which we perceive and discuss religious diversity. The empirical case studies presented illustrate the relevance of religious diversity for sustainable convivial coexistence in Africa in various ways. Dumbe's contribution examines Intra-Muslim conflict between groups of Muslim 'migrants' from northern Ghana and other countries of the subregion and indigenous Ga 'converts' in Accra, which manifests through leadership contests and leads to religious territorialisation in the same city. Binate's contribution examines the multi-layered encounter between Turkey and Côte d'Ivoire, which started with the state-driven "diplomatic offensive" towards the African continent by Turkey in the late 1990s. Binate highlights how "soft power" deployed by the Turkish government goes along with activities of various Turkish transnational religious entrepreneurs who are reconfiguring Ivoirian Muslim communities by making them more plural and diverse. Based on contrastive case studies in Dakar, Sieveking analyses the interrelatedness of religious diversity and social heterogeneity in Senegalese cities. She discusses how diverse Muslim sociabilities encompass performative and aesthetic elements and indicates embodied forms of sociability that can be analysed as modes of religious distinction. These three papers allow us to appreciate how intra-religious diversity is equally important for small groups and individuals.

From the perspectives of inter-faith diversity, Zaami's paper examines religious pluralism in Madina (Accra by examining the life trajectories of migrants from northern Ghana. Whereas these migrants contributed and are still contributing to shaping Madina as one of the most diverse neighbourhoods in Accra, the same space also shapes individual migrants' religious worldviews. Her case studies demonstrate how individual religiosity contributes to understanding diversity or lack of it in an urban setting. Approaching religious diversity through the concept of infrastructure as "socio-material," Ibrahim's paper shows how religious activities, including those by transnational religious movements, not only shaped religiosity in urban space but also disclosed how that raised questions about diversity through cultural discourse among urban dwellers in northern Nigeria.

In sum, while speaking to each other, the papers combined show that the multiple realities of religious diversity constitute a project – not only in terms of analytical approaches. Peaceful and sustainable modes of coexistence are not something ready-made or something that can be definitively achieved – they might be lost and recreated anew, reflecting the rapidly transforming life-worlds of urban dwellers on the African continent.

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The Question of Religious Authority: Ga Converts and Non-Indigenes in Muslim Identity Politics in Postcolonial Accra

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Abstract

This contribution to the working paper focuses on the religious conversion to Islam of some Ga ethnic people, their role in the Islamic revival and their impact on founding Muslim communities in postcolonial Accra. Ga converts have considered themselves as relevant to assuming religious authority positions in Accra, which was already dominated by Muslims of migrant descent. The issues of representation and integration have been a challenge for Muslims of diverse backgrounds in the Islamic sphere in Accra. The study demonstrates that while the Ga converts have highlighted their unique background in secular education as well as being the indigenes of Accra, the Muslims of migrant origin have questioned the place of converts in religious proselytization.

Key words: Islam, Ga ethnic group, Accra, Ghana, migrant, religious authority

Résumé

La présente contribution à ce document de travail porte sur la conversion à l'Islam de certains membres de l'ethnie Ga, leur rôle dans le renouveau islamique et leur impact sur la création de communautés musulmanes à Accra durant la période postcoloniale. Les convertis Ga se considéraient comme aptes à assumer des fonctions d'autorité religieuse à Accra, qui était déjà dominée par des musulmans issus de l'immigration. La question de la représentation et de l'intégration a été un défi pour les musulmans d'origines diverses dans la sphère islamique d'Accra. L'étude montre que si les convertis Ga mettent en avant leur expérience unique en matière d'éducation laïque et le fait qu'ils sont originaires d'Accra, les musulmans issus de l'immigration remettent en question la place des convertis dans le prosélytisme religieux.

Mots-clés: Islam, ethnie Ga, Accra, Ghana, migrants, autorité religieuse

This study explores religious diversity in the city of Accra, focusing on the struggles for religious authority among the heterogeneous Muslim community. Thereby it provides an account of diversity within diversity which sheds a particular light on its political aspects. Conceptually, my analyses of disputes over religious authority involving Ga converts and non-indigenous Muslims in Accra are guided by a focus on migration and territoriality dynamics. As Ibrahim and Sieveking point out in the introduction of this issue, migrants are significantly contributing to the development of the diverse religious landscape and the heterogeneous social tissue of African cities. They are blending different cultural forms, practices, and socio-material components into their daily lives and form shifting minority and majority constellations through their coexistence with the native population in a given urban space. However, disagreements over authority can still arise and result in conflict, as observed between groups of Muslim 'migrants' from northern Ghana and other countries of the subregion and indigenous Ga 'converts' in

Accra, which manifests through Muslim leadership contests and leads to religious territo-rialisation in the same city. As I show in the course of the paper, the strategies of the groups involved in these spatial and political struggles are encompassing Muslim organisations as important elements of religious infrastructure.

The Muslim community in Accra since the early twentieth century was composed of Muslims of migrant origin on one hand and the indigenous Ga population on the other hand. The interplay between these two groups was characterized by tension over the question of religious authority, resulting in the politicization of Muslim identities. The implications of this development on religious co-existence and integration of Muslims of diverse backgrounds has not been the subject of academic discourse. Accra is the capital city of Ghana and serves as a model of cosmopolitanism where diverse people including religious communities encounter each other and co-exist. While the majority of its inhabitants are Christians, the Muslim community represents the second largest religious group, which includes the Ga Muslims. The Muslim demography in Accra further illustrates its global character with some Lebanese, Syrians and Middle Eastern and Asian nationals who socialize and inspire Islamic revival. This heterogeneous demographic composition indicates that the majority of the Muslim popular-tion in Accra are people of migrant origin (both from northern territories and neighbouring sub-regions), while the Ga Muslims represent the indigenous population of Accra. The Ga Muslims, however, are averse to people of migrant origin monopolising religious authority in the land over which they are the traditional custodians. The ensuing milieu saw the politici-sation of identities from both backgrounds in a bid to discredit their opponents.

Analysing the origin of Islam in Accra illustrates the pioneering roles played by migrant Muslims in its proselytization. While the religious activities of these migrant Muslims led to the conversion of some Ga natives, the former still monopolised the authority of Muslim leadership. This development has generated considerable tension among the Muslim community of diverse backgrounds. Despite their late embrace of the Islamic faith, Ga Muslims criticised the extent of their marginalisation in Muslim councils in Accra. While this raises questions about the place of ethnicity in the representation of Muslim leadership, it demonstrates the significance of religious authority to Muslims of diverse backgrounds.

The seeming dominance of Muslims of migrant origin in religious authority in Accra has degenerated into heightened intra-Muslim differences, resulting in the politicization of identi-ties. Dissatisfied with the monopolization of religious authority by Muslims of migrant back-ground, the indigenous Ga started to oppose the former by labelling them in a discrediting manner as migrants, while the latter equally responded by identifying their opponents as con-verts. These pejorative labels, which provided the yardstick for opposing groups to contest religious authority, offer a useful basis for analysing intra-Muslim power struggles in Accra. I argue that the power struggles and differences between Muslims of migrant background and

the indigenous Ga Muslims has undermined intra-Muslim co-existence and affected the search for sustainable governance among Muslims in Accra.

This study draws attention to Ga Muslim converts by analysing their interaction with Muslims of migrant origin in Accra. The paper further analyses the struggles that Ga Muslim converts experience in creating their own Islamic community in Accra. This illustrates the crucial roles that the indigenous Ga Muslims played in promoting religious infrastructures and negotiating religious, social and political influences in Accra. The paper thus contributes to the issue of migration and mobility, but from the perspective of those who receive the newcomers. Thereby it also sheds light on the shifting nature and the highly political dynamics of majority-minority constellations concerning relations between as well as within religious groups. By highlighting the religious diversity among Muslims in Accra, the paper demonstrates how this interaction has generated power struggles over religious authority and the ensuing politicization of identities.

Beginning in 1900, some natives of Accra, for diverse reasons, embraced the Islamic faith through the religious activities of migrant Muslim traders in Accra. While the conversions of these Ga people have reconfigured the religious demography with respect to other natives of Accra, their engagement with the larger Muslim community offers a useful basis to analyse Muslims' quest for sustainable governance through the Islamic councils and the challenges of intra-Muslim integration it has generated.

By the first half of 20th century, the Muslim community in Accra was shaped by the encounters between indigenous converts and immigrant Muslims whose backgrounds were shaped by contrasting social profiles and demographic dynamics. While the immigrants were steeped in traditional Madrasah as well as being merchants and traders, the indigenous converts were Western-educated and familiar with the secular political milieu. These contrasting backgrounds of the Muslim groups have influenced their different aspirations for Islamic reform and representation of Muslims in the public.

Moreover, Ga Muslim converts not only contested Muslims of migrant origin on religious authority on account of being non-natives of Accra, but they differed with their opponents on the focus of Islamic reform and representation of Islam in public. This raises the question of whether people's social profiles and forms of education may have a bearing on how Islamic reform could be realised or not, a topic which has attracted scholarly debates, as analysed below.

Converts and contestation of religious authority

Contemporary scholarly works have been analysing the status of converts in religious traditions that they have embraced and the roles that they can play in religious authority. The unending nature of this debate points to the relevance of the question of whether converts can play roles in religious authority (Jensen 2006; Hervieu-Leger 2000). What is, however, obvious is that converts are newcomers in religion and may not be acquainted with its traditions. This notwithstanding, the existing literature on converts and religious conversion highlights two paradigms in shaping the debate: conversion narratives and the challenges that converts encounter in their new faiths (Lahmar 2018; Hamid 2011). Interestingly, recent scholarly interest has shifted from analysing the conversion narrative to examining how converts are coping with challenges in the new religious tradition that they embrace. Some studies have gone further to demonstrate how some Muslims have doubted the authenticity of religiosity of some converts (Roald 2012).

Cedric Jourde (2017) was, however, right when he argued that converts play marginal roles in the religious tradition that they chose. This is because they face the challenges of social construction, as they are viewed as newcomers and thus accorded followership status relative to those who have embraced and propagated the religious tradition in a given community. While this underlines an inbuilt hierarchy based on the chronological order in which people convert to a particular religion, it raises questions about the place of newcomers who learn and master the religious resources for achieving authority. In another study, Frank Peter (2006) argues that converts also face the crisis of socialization in the religious environment including severing of ties, isolation and ex-communication from families and relatives.

While previous scholarly works have focused their analyses on the challenges that converts cope with, they overlook how converts can not only play roles but contest religious authority. Based on archival sources and interviews conducted during fieldwork in Accra from 2017–2022, I analyse in the following the religious activities of Ga converts who contested the over-whelming representation of Islam by non-natives in the Muslim sphere in Accra on the question of religious authority. My analysis focuses on the transition from the late colonial period to the first few decades of Ghana's independence.

Beginning from the early postcolonial period of the late 1950s, the Muslim community was characterized by the formation of Muslim councils ostensibly designed by one regime or the other to win the hearts and minds of Muslims in their quest for political mobilization. However, the overwhelming demography of Muslims in Accra being of migrant origin has enabled them to represent the majority of Muslims in these councils. Interestingly, the early postcolonial period was not only characterized by a series of coup d'états in Ghana, but also saw the politicization of the identities of Muslims of migrant origin by the successive regimes (1950s–1970s). In particular, the repressive policies of Kwame Nkrumah (1957–1966) of selec-

tively labelling his political opponents as aliens to justify their deportation were followed by mass deportations instituted by Kofi Abrefa Busia (1969–1972) on account of Ghana's economic crisis. This included large numbers of Muslims, many of whom had immigrated to Ghana from the subregion. Undoubtedly, these policies have popularized labelling Muslims as "others" and offered a basis for power contestation in postcolonial Ghana. Consequently, the Ga Muslim converts exploited these politicized labels to fight against non-natives on the Islamic councils. Additionally, my research aims to examine the motivations and aspirations of the contending Muslim groups on Islamic reform and representation of Islam in the public sphere. This study thus analyses the struggles of Ga Muslims engaged in Muslim politics as well as their quest for representation in Muslim councils in the context of their aspiration of Islamic reform in Accra.

Conversion to Islam and intra-Ga Muslim societies

While the Muslim community emerged in Accra after the nineteenth century through groups of Afro-Brazilians and Donko slaves who had been re-deported from the Americas back to Ghana (Anquandah 2006; Amos and Ayensu 2002), Islamisation occurred among the Ga people in the early twentieth century. Islamisation peaked among the Ga natives in Accra by the end of the colonial period, though it was interlinked with the British colonial policies in two ways. In particular, the British policies of recruiting Muslims from northern Nigeria as its security forces as well as a labour economy based on cocoa farming attracted migrants from neighbour-ring French West African countries into the Gold Coast. Undoubtedly, these policies provided the catalyst for the growth of Islam in Accra in the colonial period. While the background of Kwashi Solomon is sketchy in both the literature and oral narratives, he was known to be the first Ga to have converted to Islam in Accra in 1900. This was followed by numerous other Ga natives embracing the Islamic religion, converting from either Christianity or indigenous traditional religions.

Individual conversion stories, which I collected during my fieldwork, show how some of the converts abandoned Christianity because they lacked understanding of its tenets, while others had mysterious personal experiences compelling them to convert to Islam. An elderly convert, whose conversion was in the 1940s, narrated, "Whenever I attended the church services, I experienced discomfort and felt hot" (Interview, Ahmed Mensah, 2019). By the 1930s there were significant numbers of Ga natives who had converted to Islam but experienced challenges with their families. Some of these converts were evicted from family homes, while others were intimidated and harassed. Abas Sowah, who had converted in the early 1950s, for example, was evicted from his family house by his stepmother because he adopted the Islamic religion (Interview, Abas Sowah, 2020). The conversion story of Nii Ato Adama, who converted in the late 1930s, is also telling. He narrated how he was virtually rejected by his entire family,

who were traditionalists. He depended on menial jobs in Accra City for survival (Interview, Nii Adama, 2019). Nii Adama is now the chief of Agbon, a community around Amasaman in Accra.

Realising their weakness in terms of family ties, these converts devised measures to protect their newfound religion by founding Muslim societies, formally constituted and officially registered by the state. The earliest of these societies was the Review of Light of the Islamic Mission, founded in 1924, which metamorphosed into Ga Aborigine Muslims Association in 1936 and subsequently transformed into Iti-had Islamiyya in 1946. The latter change of name was to appease the Lebanese Muslim community, who resented being part of a society called "Aborigine". The inclusion of the Lebanese in the Iti-had underscores how material motives with regard to employment and financial support by wealthy business people among the Lebanese population of Accra also bolstered the Islamic revival among the Ga people. Despite the good will that Iti-had Islamiyya initially enjoyed, splinter groups emerged which challenged its authority. The lack of cohesion that Iti-had encountered compelled some Ga Muslim elders led by Mahama Markwei, with the help from a Saudi philanthropist, to found Jam'iyat Islamiyya in 1954. Like Iti-had, Jam'iyat faced challenges in membership mobilisation in Accra because of splinter groups such as Jam'iyat Shuban in 1956 and Muhammadan Institute in 1956, which undermined its aim to promote cohesion (interview, Laryea Markwei, 2022).

The division in intra-Ga Muslim politics became a concern to some elders such as Yakubu Ammah and Yushau Laryea, among others. Consequently, they advocated for the founding of Ghana Muslim Mission (GMM) in November 1957, a few months after Ghana's political independence, to bring all the breakaway groups together and to provide a sense of unity among the converts. At the same time, the united Ga Muslim society started to engage in partisan politics of the newly independent nation.

As natives of Accra, the converts equally founded Muslim cities in order to promote their version of Islamic reform. The earliest of such Ga Muslim settlements was Mabruk (blessing in Arabic), founded by Iti-had Islamiyya in 1935. In the view of Yusuf Okine, "non-Muslims were neither allowed to settle in this community nor trade in things that Islam prohibited" (Interview, Yusuf Okine, 2019). This community is located around the south-western part of Accra and shares boundaries with Soko in the east and Banana Inn in the south. Coincidentally, its northern and western boundaries are surrounded by the Muslim communities of Shukura and Zabarma Line, respectively. Originally, the Zabarma Line was an extension of Mabruk and founded by migrant Muslims from Niger. The early Ga Muslim settlers of Mabruk had encouraged the migrant Zabarma Muslims to settle with them over religious consideration. However, as they grew in numbers and self-awareness, the Zabarma community declared their settlement independent from Mabruk Ga Muslim leadership.

Like Mabruk, Tuba was founded by Ga-adagme converts whose ancestors had migrated from Ningo, a town in the eastern part of Greater Accra in 1942. The word Tuba, meaning 'convert', is both Arabic and Hausa. It is a label that was imposed on these Ga-Adagme Muslims by the Hausa and was accepted. Tuba is located in the extreme southwestern part of Greater Accra and closer to Kasoa, which serves as the starting boundary of the central region. Tuba is bordered to the north by Machigani and to the west by Kasoa. It further shares boundaries to the east with Kakraba and to the south Kokrobite. Imam Bunyamin Nowarty Boboji, intimated in an interview that "our elders thought of establishing a pure Islamic community where non-Muslims are not welcome, including the ban on alcoholic drinking spots". Dar-Islam (the Land of Islam, in Arabic) was founded in 1958 by Mahama Markwei, the leader of Jam'iyat Islamiyya. However, in the perspective of Laryea Markwei, Dar-Islam has become a shadow of its past, as most of the converts have either become "lapsed Muslims" or reverted back to Christianity (interview, Laryea Markwei, 2019).

Politicisations of Muslim identities in intra-Muslim organisations (1950s–1990s)

While the colonial period of the 1900s–1950s was characterized by conversion of Ga natives and their struggles to establish religious societies and communities, the subsequent decades beginning in the 1950s represented a moment of politicisation of identities. Central to the identity politics in this transition period from colonization to independence was the question whether people of migrant background or converts could lead Islamic organizations. The label of converts was conveniently deployed to denote newcomers in religion, who were depicted as "ignorant of its precepts", while the term migrant was used by the Ga natives to depict their rivals as settlers and aliens in the struggles for religious leadership. Both terms were deployed in a pejorative sense with the aim of undermining their opponents. Beneath the apparent differences in terms of origin of the rivalling groups are questions on representation of Muslims in the public sphere as well as the dimension of Islamic reform. This brings to question the pattern of Islamic reform and Muslim representation prior to the founding of the GMM in 1957.

While the formation of Muslim societies prior to the 1950s demonstrated progressive engagement with the Ghanaian political system through partisan politics since 1934, the leadership of most Muslim institutions were Ulama, who lacked understanding the dynamics of the secular system. The consolidation of the Ga Muslim leadership under the umbrella of the GMM offered new perspectives on Islamic reform and debates on representation of Muslims in the political sphere. This is because the GMM first contested the overwhelming representation of Muslims of migrant descent claiming religious authority. However, since the early 1950s these struggles over religious leadership became entangled with struggles over political constituencies that became apparent with Kwame Nkrumah's decision to disband the Muslim Association Party (MAP), founded in 1934, and instead establish the Ghana Muslim Council

(GMC) in 1958. The MAP had won municipal elections in 1954 and therefore attracted the attention of Kwame Nkrumah and the CPP, who were concerned about the political implication of its activities, potentially undermining Nkrumah's electoral fortunes. Exploiting the political climate of the time, the GMM therefore questioned whether independence was intended to free Ghanaians from all foreign domination including religious organisations (Schildkrout 1974).

On the surface, identity politics during these early days of independence were manifested under the banner of "unity in diversity", and the struggle over representation was fought along the lines of whether converts or persons of migrant descent were qualified to lead religious organizations. Furthermore, beneath this was the question of the quality of leadership, over which the converts differed with the groups they labelled as migrants. Converts asserted their entitlement to leadership on the basis of their privileged access to secular education, which they intended to bring to bear in the leadership structures and the representation of Islam in public.

In the following decades, conflicting identity politics became manifest when the Ghana Muslim Representative Council (GMRC) was founded in 1973 as an umbrella organization for the diverse Muslim councils. Initially, the GMRC was formed to unify the splinter Islamic groupings such as GMM, Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) and the Ghana Muslim Community (GMC). To provide a sense of inclusiveness in this new organization, the leadership of the GMRC was to rotate among these component bodies. However, with the exception of the GMM, most of these groupings were composed of traditional Ulama, who were at the same time representatives of people of migrant descent. But the perception that GMM would have its turn in the rotational formula was, however, challenged by their opponent on account of the fact that they were converts.

When Dauda Otoo from the GMM was elected as the President of the GMRC in 1977, the migrant-led organization of the GMC withdrew from the organisation, arguing that he was a convert. Since Dauda Otoo was at that time the leader of the GMM, he also represented the aspiration of Ga converts in national Muslim organizations. Migrant-led organizations questioned his qualification to be a leader in an Islamic organisation. In the view of an anonymous member of the GMC, to be a leader for the Muslim community one must possess extensive knowledge of Islamic sciences to enable the person to drive rulings according to Islamic Shari'ah. In an interview, he asked, "Without the prerequisite knowledge how can someone lead?" in response to my question concerning legitimate leadership (Interview, anonymous, 2018). But leadership qualification in Islam in a secular state like Ghana goes beyond religious credentials – a condition which the migrant leaders overlooked. By contrast, a member of the GMM who wanted to remain anonymous argued that the "migrant Muslims" always view the converts as inferior in spite of their understanding of the secular milieu in Ghana (Interview, anonymous, 2019). He stressed that Dauda Otoo was a director at Ghana's

Custom, now Ghana Revenue Authority, and that Otoo's understanding of Ghana's political system could not be discounted. These controversies suggest that the religious diversity among Muslims, which could be harnessed for empowerment, de facto also questioned Muslims' quest for sustainable governance, as becomes clearer in the following section.

The impact of educational credential on Muslim identity politics

The converts equally question the credentials of immigrants to represent Muslim councils on account of being Madrasah-educated and not understanding Ghana's secular system. This became apparent when the GMC withdrew from GMRC, as mentioned above. In 1984, it founded the United Ghana Muslim Representative Council (UGMRC), under the leadership of Imam Abas Muktari, which highlights the central role traditional Ulama play in Muslim identity politics. However, the question raised by a member of the GMM was how can he [Muktari] represent Muslims in a secular milieu where he lacks the understanding of the system? (Interview, Abdullah Markwie, 2019). As the contestation over religious authority was unending, the GMM appealed to all indigenous Ghanaians to rally behind the leadership of Dauda Otoo (Daily Graphic 1984).

This conflict raises the question of whether the contending groups appreciate how their diversity could be a source of empowerment. Like the Western-educated members of the GMM, immigrant Muslims who possess traditional Islamic education in religious sciences can be useful to Muslim councils if their expertise is harnessed well. The polarization among Muslims on the question of leadership reached its crescendo when youth from the *zongos* demonstrated in support of Imam Abas Muktari, which highlights how the traditionally educated Muslim elites may influence the masses to buy their agenda (Daily Graphic 1977).

Muslims' integration within the Islamic sphere has been a puzzle for lack of common understanding. Since 1985, attempts were made to harmonise the leadership of the GMRC and UGMRC through an accord which birthed the National Islamic Secretariat (NIS) in 1985 as the mother body of all Muslim organizations (Mumuni 1996). However, this did not result in the integration of all Muslims in its leadership structures, partly because of external interferences. The Libyan interference in Islamic organisations is particularly telling. In its bid to draw Muslim councils to its foreign policy agenda, the Libyan government advocated the NIS to be transformed into Federation of Muslim Council (FMC) in 1987. Curiously, Dauda Otoo emerged as the first national coordinator of the newly formed council. However, when Dauda Otoo's health failed, Shomi Williams of the GMRC and GMM became acting coordinator from 1989 to the present. The failure to renew the mandate every three years underscores how the Muslim councils have been appropriated by the Ga converts at the expense of the larger Muslim community. Despite the fact the that Muslim community in Accra outlines its uniqueness of being

composed of people of migrant background and indigenous converts, the community experienced challenges with integration and co-existence due to the struggle for religious authority.

Conclusion

In this study I analysed Ga Muslim converts in the founding of Muslim societies and their struggle for representation in the Islamic sphere and the ensuing politicisation of Muslim identities. I highlighted the struggle between the indigenous Ga Muslims and Muslims of migrant origin over religious authority. This generated a debate as to whether Muslims of migrant origin or converts are more qualified to lead the religious community. My study demonstrates that Ga Muslim converts have negotiated their presence in different directions. As Ga they are part of Accra's original population, but they are a minority among Ga because they have converted to Islam. They are also a minority among Muslims in Accra, because the majority of the Muslim community has a first-, second-, or third generation migrant background, either from other regions in Ghana, mainly the North, or from other countries in the subregion. While Muslims with migrant background have been suspicious regarding how deep the Islamic knowledge of converts can be, Ga Muslim converts have capitalised their expertise based on secular education in order to increase their influence on Muslim organisations, which requires interaction with public administration.

This paper brought to the fore the question of representation and integration of Muslims of diverse backgrounds in the Muslim community in Accra. Muslim organisations as elements of religious infrastructures that are particularly prone to politicisation have thus been an important factor in playing out religious diversity, not only between different religious groups but also among Muslims. In this respect, my study also addresses the complex dynamics of shifting majority and minority constellations within as well as between religious groups and communities. This aspect, which is related to the processes of migration and (physical and social) mobility, is further complicated by the use in local discourses of pejorative labels which aim at minimizing the social status and legitimacy of the respective opponent group. I demonstrate, however, that Muslims' struggles for religious authority have in fact undermined the potential to harness their diversity for the common good of the society. The power struggles among Muslims have equally affected their quest for sustainable governance in establishing a united Muslim council in Accra. Thus, co-existence among Muslims in Accra is quite challenging to achieve.

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Turkey and Côte d'Ivoire Encounter: Dynamics, Actors, and Practices in the Field of Islam

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Abstract

This text focuses on Turkey's religious diplomacy in Côte d'Ivoire, a West African country where Islam has experienced significant growth in recent decades. Through the prism of a Soft Power, this cooperation opened Ivorian Islam – dominated by the Maliki and Salafi currents – to the religious tradition of Turkey. This process was marked by the transfers of practices as well as of religious objects, materials for the construction of mosques and support for socio-economic development initiatives. This study is mainly based on fieldwork carried out in Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan, Bouaké and Korhogo) and Turkey (Istanbul). In addition, a digital ethnography conducted from social networks, in particular Facebook, was used.

Keywords: Ivory Coast, Turkey, Islam, Soft Power, religious infrastructure

Résumé

La présente étude porte sur la diplomatie religieuse de la Turquie en Côte d'Ivoire, un pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest où l'islam a connu une croissance significative au cours des dernières décennies. À travers le prisme du Soft Power, cette coopération a ouvert l'Islam ivoirien – dominé par les courants malékites et salafistes – à la tradition religieuse de la Turquie. Ce processus a été marqué par des transferts de pratiques mais aussi d'objets religieux, de matériaux pour la construction de mosquées et d'appuis à des initiatives de développement socio-économique. Cette étude repose essentiellement sur un travail de terrain réalisé en Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan, Bouaké et Korhogo) et en Turquie (Istanbul). Elle s'appuie également sur une ethnographie numérique réalisée à partir des réseaux sociaux, en particulier Facebook.

Mots-clés: Côte d'Ivoire, Turquie, Islam, Soft Power, infrastructures religieuses

Côte d'Ivoire is a West African coastal country known as an important member of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). Its population is more than 25 million. According to the 2014 official population census, Muslims represented 42%, Christians 34% and other 24%. Starting from a politically marginal position during the colonial period[2] compared to Christianity, which was supported by French administrators, Islam has experienced rapid growth mainly due to the democratization of the political sphere,[3] which allowed an Islamic revival (training, conversion, construction of mosques, etc.) and the immigration of

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[2] Islam represented 10% in 1945 and didn't play an important role in the political field. The first president, Felix Houphouet-Boigny, and a large number of his government members were Christians.

[3] Since 1990, the democratization of the political sphere has put an end to the one-party system and contributed to the liberalization of public space. It was an opportunity for Islam to emerge from its marginal situation and open up to secular questions. This period saw the emergence of important Islamic associations (such as the National Islamic Council [CNI]) which would participate in public debates.

populations from countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal.[4] In recent decades, with the support of local Islamic organizations and schools from Arab-Muslim countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, Islam has occupied an increasingly important place in the religious sphere.

 With its diplomatic activities towards Africa launched in 1998, Turkey began to take a political and economic interest in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as influencing the Ivoirian religious sphere. Although quite recent, the cooperation between Côte d'Ivoire and Turkey has seen the circulation of socio-economic entrepreneurs and students between these two countries for various purposes. This mobility of people has also led to the introduction of Turkish religious practices through the construction of new places of worship and the implementation of religious training programs in Abidjan and other Ivoirian cities. Based on fieldwork (in Abidjan, Bouaké, Korhogo, and Istanbul) and digital ethnography since 2016, this article analyses the many facets of the Turkish-Ivoirian encounter through the prism of Islam.

 This article presents a multi-layered approach to the study of religious diversity in urban Côte d'Ivoire. On a broader scale, it considers the context of transnational mobility and entrepreneurship while focusing, at the same time, on two concrete manifestations of religious infrastructures, i.e., Muslim organizations, which have served as facilitators for Turkish-Ivoirian Muslim encounters, and mosques built in Ivoirian cities with Turkish funding. Moreover, it provides an example of religious diversity and coexistence not only between Muslims, Christians, and others but also within Islam and Muslim encounters in Côte d'Ivoire. In addition, the article sheds light on the complexities of specific configurations of religious minorities in a field dominated by Sunni and Maleki Muslims.

Islamic humanitarianism in the context of religious diversity in Côte d'Ivoire

Islam in Côte d'Ivoire has manifested remarkable growth during the last three decades (Savadogo 2005; Miran 2006). Although the practice of Islam was limited during the colonial period, its relevance changed over the years following the country's independence. This is observable in several secular areas, particularly in the humanitarian field, where Muslims haven't been active. This welfare-oriented approach is part of a revival of Islam which aims to reconcile religious practices and Muslims' well-being. It relies on a charity marketing strategy mobilizing local actors and sponsors from Arab-Muslim countries around issues of public interest.

 Muslims' investment in the humanitarian field in sub-Saharan Africa is prompted by two major factors: one endogenous, linked to the socio-economic crisis caused by the drought in the early 1980s in the Sahel regions, and the other exogenous, related to the oil boom in Arab-Muslim countries. These contexts have led to a surge of pan-Islamic NGOs coming to the aid of

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[4] In Burkina Faso, Muslim populations are around 60% and more than 90% in Mali, Niger and Senegal.

their co-religionists in many African countries (Mattes 1993; Bellion-Jourdain 2001; Rabiatu 2007; Kaag 2008). Based on the values of solidarity advocated by Islam through the institution of Zakat and Sadaqa (Weiss 2000), this mobilisation has taken place in many countries. Not only the populations of African countries with a Muslim majority (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, Chad, etc.), but also countries with Muslim minorities (South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, etc.) have benefited from this aid. In the context of Côte d'Ivoire, it was in the 2000s that the country welcomed the opening of the Saudi Arabian embassy and accepted its membership in institutions such as the Islamic Development Bank, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, etc. (Binaté 2019). Before that, Muslims had to rely only internally on themselves, especially when Cote d'Ivoire experienced a socio-political crisis in the early 2000s.

The peculiarity of Côte d'Ivoire is linked to the evolution of Islam in this country, in particular, to the relations that the postcolonial governments have maintained with Arab-Muslim countries. Indeed, the involvement of these countries in the conflict between Palestine and Israel was decisive in the foreign policy of the government of Félix Houphouet-Boigny, the first president of Côte d'Ivoire. Following the Muslim policy of the colonial administration, this president had developed a distrust towards Islam, to the point that he wanted to keep Côte d'Ivoire away from the hotbeds of ideological tensions in the Arab countries of North Africa and the Middle East. This initial distrust notwithstanding, relations between Ivoirian Muslims and pan-Islamic organizations have evolved gradually through intermediaries and a series of activities limited to financial support for the construction of mosques and *medersas* (Islamic schools), and the granting of scholarships for students. At the turn of the 1990s, the end of the single-party regime opened the Ivoirian public space to more citizen engagement, with the creation of associations that promoted the establishment of pan-Islamic organizations and institutions. In 1995, the Islamic Development Bank signed a grant agreement to finance an Islamic school in Abidjan. Since 2000, the country has become a member of this institution, as well as of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA). For Turkey, the opening of this new era offered opportunities, after having successfully invested in Central Asia (Balcı 2003; Balcı and Motika 2007) and seeking to extend its sphere of influence in Africa.

Côte d'Ivoire and Turkey encounter: contexts and actors

In the literature addressing the Turkish presence in Africa, few works have focused on the religious dimension of the soft power deployed by Turkey. Gabriella Angey (2009), Toguslu Erkan (2015), and Hamilton Shinn (2015), precursors in this field of research, have focused on the questions of Turkish international policy, the mobility of its social actors, and the economic sectors invested. These fields, which have enabled Turkey to gain social visibility and occupy an important place among the foreign powers present on the continent, have also served as a

framework for analysis by Kristina Dohrn (2013), who worked on Islam as conveyed by the Gülen movement in Tanzanian schools. The links between the ideologies underlying the Gülen teachings and local religious dynamics in Burkinabe and Ivoirian contexts have been analysed by Maud Saint-Lary (2019) and Binaté (2019; 2022).

In fact, Turkey's presence in Côte d'Ivoire is part of a vast project to internationalize the ambitions of this Eurasian country under the heading of "Opening up to Africa". This project has resulted in a series of missions on the continent led by the Turkish government, as well as by businessmen, humanitarians, and religious actors, who all came with the same objective: to make Turkey an important player on the international scene. In most cases, businessmen, humanitarians and religious actors have played pioneering roles with significant interventions in socio-economic areas. They have invested in the fields of construction, transport of industrial products, etc., through many internationally operating companies such as Beko, Dekoset, Inci, Fergen, Kaydan, and Limak Africa.

Being mired in a military and political conflict since 2002, Côte d'Ivoire experienced Turkish soft power through humanitarian assistance and education projects. This concept, developed by Joseph Nye (1990) and adapted in American international relations in the context of the Cold War, is at the heart of Turkish foreign policy. Although economic relations based on exchanges of industrial products already existed between the two countries since the 1990s, the implementation of this policy has extended this bilateral cooperation to other areas, including education, with the opening of the Safak School Group in 2006 and the Centre Ishane for the training and education of young people (CIFEJ). With their social activities linked to Islam, these two establishments have created multiple links and exchange opportunities between Turkish and Ivoirian Muslims.

Muslim organizations in Côte d'Ivoire

The way Islam is organized in Côte d'Ivoire is interesting to analyse. Unlike in Mali or Burkina Faso, where Islam is managed by a federal structure, in Côte d'Ivoire, this religion is not determined by the authority of a clergy but rather shaped by Muslim umbrella organizations represented by the Supreme Council of Imams (COSIM) and the Council of Sunni Imams (CODIS). However, while these organizations serve as interfaces between Muslims and public authorities, they differ in terms of religious ideologies. COSIM is Maliki, while CODIS is Hanbali. Its doctrinal position has brought COSIM closer to Turkey, where the Islamic tradition is dominated by Hanafism, which is less contradictory to Sufi practices.

The Turkish organizations involved in this religious cooperation bear the mark of state institutions – including Diyanet – and private religious foundations, in particular, the Gülen movement and Aziz Mahmud HüdayiVakfi, respectively responsible for the Safak School Group and the NGO Ishane Association for Development and Education (AIDE). At the Safak School

Group, teaching is focused on the national Ivoirian educational program, with some time dedicated to the Turkish language. For instance, each class had around five hours per week for Turkish learning. The religious component, however, is limited to sharing social values linked to Islam and Turkish culture transmitted by the school staff through their know-how and life skills in terms of forms of everyday sociability, sense of sharing, prohibition of cigarettes and alcohol, etc. This discreet proselytism that characterizes the Gülen movement differs from that supported by Diyanet and developed by the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation, which also owns the CIJEF. In this confessional establishment, Islam (*tawhid, sira, nahw, safu*, etc.), Arabic and Turkish are subjects of the curriculum. This openness to the world of education has brought the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation closer to the Muslim student youth, in particular the Association of Muslim Students and Students of Côte d'Ivoire (AEEMCI), as well as to certain Sufi organizations. Through these relations, the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation has established itself in the Ivoirian Islamic public space (Binaté 2019). In particular, AEEMCI and COSIM played a crucial role in facilitating Turkish influence on Muslim organizations and practices in Côte d'Ivoire.

Turkish organizations in the Islamic religious sphere: transfer of religious infrastructures and practices

Islam in Côte d'Ivoire has presented itself as a moderate religion ("du juste milieu"), largely influenced by a Malekite tradition and supported by the umbrella organization COSIM. The Ivoirian Muslim community opens up to several Islamic currents, including different ways of practicing Turkish Islam. The crossing of diverse religious practices linked to Islam coming from various contexts constitutes what I call the "meeting of Islams" in Côte d'Ivoire.

In this "meeting," Turkey has come to play a major role. In fact, during the visit of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in February 2016 to Côte d'Ivoire, he promised to construct an Islamic complex for COSIM, including the headquarters for this organization and a mosque to be built following the architectural model of places of worship of the Ottomans. This project – which is still awaiting its realization – bears the mark of Turkey's implantation strategy through the material occupation of space by religious infrastructures (Hoelzchen and Kirby 2020). It should also be noted that all the official ceremonies carried out by the Turkish institutions – embassy, Diyanet, NGOs or foundations – take place in spaces decorated with the emblems of the country: the flag of Turkey, posters of the institutions involved, religious messages from Turkish sheikhs, etc. On the occasion of festivities at the Safak School Group in 2006, the national anthem of Turkey and artistic performances (sketches) were presented by students in the Turkish language. Experienced since the opening of this school, this strategy of visibly marking space has been carried over to the religious field.

The meeting of Turkish and Ivoirian Islams was accompanied by transfers of religious infrastructures and religious practices. This observation is not new insofar as Muslims have maintained religious cooperation with Arab-Muslim countries in similar ways, as can be exemplified by the funding of many mosques both in Abidjan and in other cities of the country. While Turkey has continued this tradition of supporting building infrastructural projects, what is different in the Turkish case is that the works bear visible marks of the donors in terms of the physical aspects of the infrastructures. For example, the mosques offered to the Muslim communities of Adjamé and Yopougon were not only built according to Turkish architecture, but their interiors were decorated with equipment (carpet, clock, etc.) imported from Turkey.

This logic of transferring materials has been transposed into the practices and aesthetics of worship, which is reflected in the layout of the interior space of the mosques: The *mimbars* (pulpits) are arranged according to the Turkish model and the frescoes on the walls are inspired by the tradition of the Ottomans. At the Turkish mosque of Adjamé, the Qur'anic training delivered to women is based on educational materials published by Erkam, the publisher of the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation. At the beginning of the 2020s, a preacher was sent from Turkey to teach students the techniques of memorizing the Koran. At the mosque of the Al Fourqane community in the commune of Koumassi, a teaching program was initiated around the thought of Turkish Sufi sheikhs such as Saïd Nursî (1878–1960), the ideologue of the Gülen movement.

Figure 1: A screenshot of the Al-Farouq Community page inviting the public to one of its activities. Photo credit: Issouf Binaté

Many Muslim communities in Côte d'Ivoire have been influenced by Islamic practices and trends imported from Turkey. The Naqshbandiyya, one of the religious orders widespread in Turkey and Central Asia, has been emulated among the Ivoirian partners of Turkish religious foundations, excluding Salafi groups, who are part of anti-Sufi movements. In Abidjan, Imam Traoré Moctar, guide of the Zou-Nouraine Association for Education and Charitable Works (AZEOB) and formerly a member of the Tidjaniya Hamawiyya community, joined the Naqsh-bandiyya, as did some beneficiaries of Turkish social assistance. Since 2013, many female Muslim students have attended the school Fasl-ı Bahar KızKur'an Kursu for their Islamic training in Istanbul. These study programmes have introduced some of them to the Fiqh, Tasawuf, and Aqida, as well as to secular cultural elements such as the Turkish culinary tradition. In addition, the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi foundation supports Sohoba, a periodic seminar organized by AEEMCI on Islamic as well as secular topics. The maintenance of religious ties is also done through donations on the occasion of Islamic festivities, in particular the fasting of Ramadan, the celebrations of Eid and the pilgrimage to the holy places of Islam.

Figure 2: Kurban: Ceremony of immolation and distribution of beef during Eid 2016 in Abidjan. Photo credit: Issouf Binaté

Conclusion

By a form of subtle proselytism, the Turkish-Ivoirian encounter contributed to the diversity of Islams in Côte d'Ivoire, where new religious movements close to Turkish preachers emerged. Some Ivoirian national Muslim organisations have been instrumental in advancing Turkish influence. This development has been accompanied by the construction and architectural reconfiguration of mosques as well as numerous investments in the religious infrastructure of Ivoirian cities. With various programmes of cooperation in the sector of education, which allow Ivoirian Muslim students to study in Turkey, the Turkish religious soft power has made the Islamic sphere in Côte d'Ivoire more composite and cosmopolitan. In this context already marked by religious diversity, the Ivoirian Muslim community finds itself reconfigured both by the plurality of newly emerging Islamic practices and by the presence of partners from other Muslim countries. In this field of transnational economic and religious enterprises, which also includes cooperation with countries such as Morocco and Iran, Turkey is becoming a major player.

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Sociabilities and Religiosities in Urban Senegal

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Abstract

This article addresses the question of how social positioning and stratification influence religious diversity in urban Senegal. The author approaches religious diversity from a sociological point of view, with a methodological focus on intra-religious diversification. Based on contrastive case studies carried out in Dakar, the article analyses how forms of sociability that are characteristic of a specific social milieu contribute to distinctive religious identities and how people's social embeddedness shapes their own religious self-positioning. Linking Georg Simmel's (1984) concept of sociability with the formations of individual religiosities, the article provides an empirically grounded theoretical reflection on the interrelatedness of religious diversity with social heterogeneity in urban West Africa.

Keywords: Senegal, intra-religious diversity, individual religiosities, sociability, urban social milieus

Résumé:

Cet article traite de la question de l'influence du positionnement social et de la stratification sur la diversité religieuse dans les zones urbaines du Sénégal. L'auteur aborde la diversité religieuse d'un point de vue sociologique et en se concentrant méthodologiquement sur la diversification intra-religieuse. Sur la base d'études de cas contrastives menées à Dakar, l'article analyse comment les formes de sociabilité caractéristiques d'un milieu social spécifique contribuent à la formation d'identités religieuses distinctes et comment l'ancrage social des individus façonne leur propre auto-positionnement religieux. En reliant le concept de sociabilité de Georg Simmel aux formations des religiosités individuelles, l'article fournit une réflexion théorique empiriquement fondée sur l'interrelation entre la diversité religieuse et l'hétérogénéité sociale dans les zones urbaines d'Afrique de l'Ouest.

Mots-clés: Sénégal, diversité intra-religieuse, religiosités individuelles, sociabilité, milieux sociaux urbains

This article approaches religious diversity in urban Senegal – a country with a vast Muslim majority – from a sociological point of view and with a methodological focus on the formation of individual religiosities. More specifically, it considers diversity within diversity by focusing on how Islam is practiced and expressed within specific social milieus and in the context of particular practices. However, I am not concerned with religious diversity in terms of differing groups and collective identities, but rather with questions regarding people's own religious self-positioning. Moreover, I ask how individual religiosities are embedded in and shaped by their urban social environment and how they are, at the same time, contributing to its transformation. Based on contrastive case studies carried out in Dakar in 2017 and 2018,[5] which I treated in more detail elsewhere (Sieveking 2020a), this contribution concentrates on the

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[5] These case studies were carried out in the framework of the ERC-project 693457 "Private Pieties. Mundane Islam and New Forms of Muslim Religiosity: Impact on Contemporary Social and Political Dynamics".

methodological aspects of my research. It provides an empirically grounded theoretical reflection on the interrelatedness of religious diversity with social heterogeneity in urban West Africa. I do this by linking Georg Simmel's (1984) concept of sociability with formations of individual religiosities, concentrating on the questions: How do forms of sociability that are characteristic of a specific social milieu contribute to distinctive religious identities? And how are social positioning and social stratification shaping religious diversity? Thereby my contribution addresses the aspect of intra-religious diversity, which can also be related to questions regarding the influence of cross-cutting religious and social distinctions on the formation of majority and minority constellations among the population.

My analysis of diverse Muslim sociabilities encompasses performative and aesthetic elements and indicates that a focus on embodied forms of sociability helps to understand the inherent diversity and specificities of Islam in the West African region in terms of a lived tradition.[6] Moreover, forms of sociability can also be analysed as modes of religious distinction, while serving, at the same time, as modes of social distinction, thereby providing insights into the dynamics of modern urban transformations of Islamic traditions. In this respect, my research addresses religious diversity from the angle of social differentiation, heterogeneity and inequalities that are shaping the material and human infrastructures of religion in contemporary urban contexts. However, because my focus is restricted to francophone educated middle-class milieus in Dakar, my analysis does not consider the majority of the less privileged parts of the Senegalese population, but rather concentrates on minorities. With this restricted focus, I have sharpened my analytic lens through contrastive case studies on various urban leisure practices (Qur'an reading courses and fitness training) as well as on professional dance practices in the realm of contemporary choreography. These practices are linked to urban infrastructures, which provide a concrete spatial (material) and a determined temporal context for the formation of Muslim (religious and non-religious) sociabilities in Dakar. At the same time, they indicate how specific social and bodily practices create (human) religious infrastructures.

Exploring the formation of everyday Muslim sociabilities from various angles, I analyse how religious and non-religious sociabilities are interrelated and how they are embedded in their respective social environments. My approach goes along with an intersectional perspective that focuses on how gender, age and socio-economic positioning are shaping encounters between people with diverse religiosities. Beyond the micro-level of encounters between individual actors, the interweaving of material and human infrastructure that enables the formation and re-enactment of sociabilities can also indicate temporal and spatial dynamics at

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[6] In contrast to Talal Asad's general concept of Islam as a discursive tradition, Rudolph Ware (2014) highlights the specific non-discursive forms of embodied knowledge that characterise traditions of Islamic education in West Africa. In his study of the specific Islamic sociability practiced within the Gülen Community in Istanbul, Fabio Vicini (2014) also emphasises the non-discursive embodied forms of everyday lived religiosity.

play on meso- and macro-levels. Yet, my use of ethnographical methods, reflecting my disciplinary background in social anthropology, privileges micro-sociological perspectives on social and cultural change with an actor-oriented approach and a focus on practice, embodiment and gender.

Before presenting empirical case studies on Muslim sociabilities in different urban contexts, I will first give an outline of the dynamics of religious diversification in Senegal and then explain how Simmel's concept of sociability can be used as a heuristic tool to examine the distinctive qualities of socio-religious milieus in urban Senegal.

Contextualising Islamisation and religious diversification in Senegal

The often-appraised culture of tolerance and hospitality (Wolof: *teranga*) in Senegal is strongly related to so-called "Senegalese Islam" – a label that is associated with local forms of Sufi Islam, which are deeply embedded in the fabric of Senegalese society. Although the current situation of political crisis, violent tensions and contestations indicates that the conditions for social peace in Senegal and its supposed tolerant democratic culture are deeply undermined and under threat, local religious institutions are still considered important factors of moderation and pacification. With an estimated 96% majority of Muslim population, the Senegalese religious landscape can nevertheless be characterized as diverse. Its most salient feature is various Sufi orders (Arab: *turuq*, plural of *tariqa*: way). Historically, the *turuq* were the major forces of Islamisation, which started in the eleventh century in the northern part of the territory that later became Senegal. Massive Islamisation from below, however, only took place when the traditional social order of local kingdoms was breaking down under French colonial rule (Diouf 2013). The two major locally established *turuq* include branches of the Tijaniyya and the 'homegrown' Muridiyya, a *tariqa* with a local origin that grew out of the Qadiriyya. Their influence in Senegal was never limited only to the religious sphere, but has also permeated in the political and economic realms.

Since colonial times, the relations of Sufi religious leaders (*marabouts*) with the state have been characterized by mutual accommodation and intervention. Reformist movements, which appeared on the Senegalese religious landscape beginning in the 1930s (Loimeier 2016), opposed these power arrangements, criticizing not only the secular state but also questioning the authority of the *marabouts*. These new reformist groups have been most influential through their activities in the (public and private) education sector. Their persistent call for the introduction of arabo-islamic elements in public schools and their demand for educational reform were eventually successful, as the national educational reform, initiated in 2002 under the presidency of Abdoulaye Wade, indicates (Bodian and Villalón 2015). Yet, in the meantime, reformist tendencies have also developed within the popular local *turuq*, which are in a constant process of internal conflicts and subdivisions but still dominating the pluralistic

religious field in Senegal. Hence, processes of "Islamisation from below" within Senegalese society have been characterized by a religious diversification, in which impulses by Islamic reform movements and the factor of education have played an important role – in the religious sphere as well as beyond. However, particularly in urban contexts, an analysis of the effects of this diversification must consider the formation and social embeddedness of individual religiosities (Seck 2010).

In the literature on how Senegalese society has experienced change since the generalized socio-economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, the strong involvement of the urban youth and the increasing engagement of women in religious movements has often been highlighted (Diouf and Leichtman 2009). Especially women's engagement in religious education indicates the deep entanglements of Islamisation and urbanization processes. Many young women who have received secular school or even higher education have also engaged in religious education and their knowledge about the Qur'an has often risen far beyond that of their parents (Augis 2012). On the basis of this knowledge, they are not only claiming religious autonomy but also the right to decide their own life trajectory, including decisions concerning marriage, family life, and their own professional careers. In terms of social aspirations, these women are oriented towards a modern urban lifestyle that combines Western middle-class living standards with globalized Islamic lifestyle ideals (Augis 2013).

Hence, the dynamics of religious diversification are not only emerging from within the religious field nor are they restricted to it – they are also reinforced by (as well as reinforcing) broader social transformation processes that go along with urbanization. These dynamics include the effects of demographic change, which is particularly salient regarding the declining birth rates of women in Dakar,[7] and entails shifting gender relations and the restructuring of family life. Further elements of change are the translocal rural-urban as well as transnational migration networks, which form an integral part of the social fabric of Senegalese cities and are contributing to the (religious) diversity of the urban population. Last but not least, education plays an important role in religious diversification. It is a crucial element in processes of social differentiation, shaping gendered mobilities and various forms of migration (Neveu-Kringelbach 2015). The religious diversity of cities in Senegal is strongly interrelated with the diverse forms and degrees of (religious and secular) education among the respective urban population. As in other West African contexts too, the increasing heterogeneity of urban middle classes is a characteristic of these interrelated processes of social transformation (Alber 2016: 178).

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[7] Dial (2008: 93) refers to the results of studies carried out between 2001 and 2003 in Dakar which show that the average birth rate of women in their 30s has declined from 4 children (among the generation born between 1942-56) to 1.4 children (among the generation born between 1967-76).

The question of how religious diversity can be understood through the distinct socio-religious milieus which are shaped by these transformations of urban everyday life is at the core of my research. It also guides the reflections on my methodological approach to diversity within religious diversity in this paper. As a first step towards answering the question, I developed an empirically grounded method that systematically examines the distinctive characteristics of a particular socio-religious milieu by focusing on the "forms of sociability" (Simmel 1984: 52) that can be observed within this milieu. In the next step, I compared the sociabilities embodied in various practices, religious as well as non-religious, that are partly milieu-specific and partly crossing the social boundaries of specific milieus.

Conceptualising sociability as a heuristic tool

My conceptual approach has been inspired by Georg Simmel's (1984) writings on sociability (German: "Geselligkeit"), a term by which he denotes particularly valued forms of togetherness (German: "Miteinander") that are typically embodied in voluntary associations. A fundamental characteristic of sociability, according to Simmel's conceptualisation, is the pure joy of togetherness and the absence of any "rational", instrumental or strategic reason for associating. Therefore, he conceives of sociability as the "playform" of society (Simmel 1984: 53). Forms of sociability have an aesthetic dimension and are embodied through tacit rules of appropriate behaviour, politeness, tactfulness, etc.… For Simmel, these aesthetic qualities and implicit rules correspond to an idea of "the good form" (Simmel 1984: 52) of sociable interaction that is shared by the participants of a sociable encounter. Knowledge about this "good form" remains unspoken and largely unconscious, but it has to be enacted in order to achieve the specific joyful, amicable and pleasurable qualities of sociability. Sociable practice requires the banishing of any referents of "inappropriate form", including, for example, overtly utilitarian political or economic motives for participating in a sociable encounter, which should remain in the "shadow realm" of sociability (Anderson 2015: 28–29). Another important aspect of sociability is the fact that it (temporarily) excludes the "reality" in terms of differences in socio-economic status and allows for a quality of relations "as if everybody was equal" (Simmel 1984: 58).

Rather *en passant*, Simmel (1984) remarks that sociability is best enacted within the boundaries of a given social milieu or class – a sociable encounter that transgresses such boundaries can easily become embarrassing, as he points out. This remark is particularly interesting when applying the concept of sociability as a heuristic tool for observing, describing and analysing distinct socio-religious milieus in urban Senegal. Different socio-religious milieus in Senegal can be distinguished by their specific "sociability ethos" – an ethos that characterizes their 'typical' ways of interacting and their particularly valued forms of being together (Renou 2003: 56). To be able to comply with the tacit rules of diverse Muslim sociabilities that characterize the pluralistic Senegalese religious landscape, a person has to master specific "registers"

of sociability (Renou 2003: 56). These registers are not defined by explicit ethical codes or religious doctrines – they are part of the social habitus and the embodied cultural capital of the respective socio-religious milieu.

Against this conceptual background, we can ask: to what extent are religious sociabilities in Senegalese cities encompassing different social milieus? And to what extent are distinctive Muslim sociabilities restricted to a particular class, social category or stratum?

Contrastive case studies on Muslim sociabilities in Dakar

The ways in which individual religiosities in urban Senegal are embodied and lived on a daily basis include a range of social practices (some framed as religious, others as non-religious) that are shaped by particular forms of sociability. This can be illustrated by my contrastive case studies on professional dancers and on different leisure practices (Qur'an reading courses and fitness training) within Dakarois middle-class milieus which indicate that, in their daily lives, people switch between different registers of Muslim sociability.[8] However, in order to be practiced appropriately, forms of sociability have to be incorporated over time. They cannot be adopted spontaneously by free choice, since they often depend on an embodied milieu-specific habitus. In this respect, religious (as much as non-religious) sociabilities also function as markers of social distinction (Sieveking 2022).

Focus on middle-class milieus

My fieldwork on Muslim religiosities in Senegal, carried out in 2017 and 2018, concentrated on selected middle-class milieus in Dakar where I explored the ways in which this specific social environment is shaping the religiosity of the inhabitants. One of the findings of this research was the observation that the dynamics of (re-)Islamisation in Dakarois middle classes go along with a trend towards individualization and claims for autonomy in defining one's own private religiosity – a trend that can also be observed in other Muslim contexts (Föllmer et al. 2022).

Although symbols of Islam are almost omnipresent in the Senegalese public sphere, not all Muslims are particularly religious or consider themselves pious. In order to acknowledge this and avoid a 'religious bias', I carried out contrastive case studies on urban leisure as well as professional artistic practices that included a Qur'an reading course as well as 'non-religious' practices like contemporary dance or fitness training (Sieveking 2021). I was curious if the manifestations of individual religiosities and people's religious self-positioning in these different

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[8] Ethnographic case studies in other Senegalese cities, including Saint-Louis and Kaolack, have shown, furthermore, how distinctive urban Muslim sociabilities are taking form in each of these contexts. These studies were carried out within the framework of my MIASA-fellowship (September – December 2022) in collaboration with Abdourahmane Seck, coordinator of the Critical Studies Action Group – Africa (GAEC) and four GAEC-Africa volunteer-researchers (https://gaecafrica.org/gaec-africa-west-africa-ghana-sinopsis-program-miasa-accra/).

fields of practice would overlap or contradict and mutually exclude each other. Comparing the sociability of a particular brand of Qur'an reading courses for "intellectuals" (Sieveking 2020b; 2022) with typical forms of fitness training sociability indicated surprising parallels, namely regarding gender relations and the fact that 'gender mixing' in these specific contexts of practice were not perceived as a problem. Indeed, the tacit acknowledgment and practical enactment of gender equality among participants of the Qur'an reading as well as of the fitness training courses were an important factor for their success. They not only corresponded to the embodied modern lifestyle and habitus of the respective target group but were also associated with a supposed 'professionalism' and 'effectiveness' of pedagogical methods that do not rely on gender segregation. On a practical level, the aspect of gender difference mostly remained in the "shadow realm" of sociable interactions within these contexts of practice where everybody behaved "as if" everybody (male as well as female participants) was equal (Sieveking 2022: 791).

Focus on dance practices

By contrast, in the context of dance practices the body and its gendered aspects are often strongly eroticized and sexualised and therefore generally perceived as immoral and a potential threat to any pious Muslim. In contrast to the context of fitness training, gender mixing as well as the visible display of large parts of the body in the context of popular dance events were conceived by most of my Muslim interlocutors as highly problematic with regard to the principles of Islam, if not categorically *haram*. Nevertheless, in many conversations my interlocutors also conceded that local cultural traditions and popular performative and ritual practices were de facto contradicting rigid religious restrictions. These contradictions were often discussed in a very joyful manner, expressing the appreciation and pride people were taking in their own cultural forms of sociability, including the practice of a rather 'soft' and malleable version of Islam. In fact, rhetorical skills and wit deployed in comments on the contradictions of everyday lived religiosities are highly appreciated elements of sociable conversations – although not in every situation. Ironic comments on 'typically Senegalese' Muslim religiosities were, for example, not appropriate during the Qur'an reading courses, but they could be a valued part of coffee breaks or amicable conversations among participants outside the classroom.

In contrast to people who are jokingly commenting the 'irreligious' bodily and performative practices of many Senegalese Muslims, the situation of people who have made dance their profession is different. For professional dancers, the contradictions between the requirements of their professional occupation and the expectations of their Muslim social environment are serious and often experienced as a painful conflict and existential dilemma. Instead of just temporarily moving in and out of the sociable forms of a dance event, the 'irreligious' exposure of their bodies on stage is constant and cannot be ignored. It is a condi-

tion that was considered by all my interlocutors as particularly problematic for Muslim women. However, in other contexts, such as ritualised family ceremonies, women's dancing was perceived as appropriate, while men were expected to refrain from it. In a general manner, my contrastive case studies showed that whereas dance sociabilities put the gendered body on centre stage, it remained symbolically silenced in the other contexts of urban leisure practices mentioned above.

Conclusion

Exploring the formation of everyday (religious and non-religious) Muslim sociabilities in specific milieus of Dakar, my research provides an empirically grounded theoretical reflection on religious diversity in urban West Africa. My approach corresponds with an intersectional perspective that focuses on how the gender and socio-economic positioning of the actors observed in the various settings are shaping sociable encounters. It emphases the micro-level of encounters between individual actors, but the interweaving of material and human infrastructure that enables the formation and re-enactment of sociabilities can also be explored to analyse temporal and spatial dynamics at play on meso- and macro-levels.

Up to the first decade of the 2000s and including the beginning of the second mandate of president Abdoulaye Wade, the recurrent (self-)representation of the Senegalese state as a stable democracy and its society as particularly tolerant was rarely questioned. Its relative stability and social peace, which constituted its "exceptionalism" as compared to other countries in the West African region (Smith 2013; Villalón 1995: 2) has often been related to its cultural and religious pluralism and its specific forms of "Muslimness". In order to analyse how tolerance and inclusion are practiced in Senegalese society "from below", Etienne Smith (2013: 149) explicitly refers to the notion of sociability. Based on a survey in Dakar in 2006, he claims that there is a particular "sociability ethos shared by many terroirs, cutting across linguistic or religious divides" in Senegal, and thereby sustaining peaceful coexistence. This claim, which connects the micro-level of various "sociocultural practices and values" with the macro-level of the nation and its various terroirs, does not explicitly address the question of religious diversity nor the effects of social heterogeneity in the urban sphere.[9]

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[9] Moreover, Smith's analysis refers to a historical moment, where the current socio-political crisis, which unfolded around the prospects of a contested third mandate of president Macky Sall, could not yet be predicted. After his re-election in 2019 the ensuing systematic oppression of any serious opposition against his government has especially targeted the most successful opposition candidate, Ousmane Sonko, who is relatively young and particularly popular among the urban youth. The extent of political violence enacted by the state, escalating in June 2023, the loss of trust in the rightful execution of its power and the degree of discontent, anger and frustration among the population were still quite unimaginable in 2006.

Hence, the question of how far a shared "sociability ethos" can also cut across the boundaries of different (urban) social milieus remains open. Moreover, with respect to rising socio-economic inequalities on various scales, one can also ask about the limits of sociable practices. To what extent are forms of (religious) sociability, which rely on an enactment of togetherness "as if" everybody was equal, related to forms of embodied religiosity that rather maintain or even enforce social stratification? By raising these questions, I want to indicate that we can gain a great deal from exploring the interrelatedness of sociabilities and religiosities when studying religious diversity in the context of rapid urbanization and deep social transformation processes in West African cities.

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Religious Diversity through the Life Trajectories of Northern Migrants in Madina, Accra

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Abstract:

In this paper, I explore the interrelatedness of individual migration and religious conversion stories, both temporal and permanent. Through two contrastive case studies, I analyze the role of migration in religious diversity among Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of African Religious Traditions in Accra's urban settings. I illustrate how the life trajectories of Aisha and Solomon provide some critical and insightful perspectives on how migration and urban settings intersect in shaping individual social actors' lived religious experiences in a multi-religious field and help them navigate between different familial and societal demands, as well as how individuals' upbringings can impact religious diversity.

Keywords: religious diversity, northern migrants, Madina, Accra, Ghana

Résumé:

Dans cet article, j'explore l'interdépendance des histoires individuelles de migration et de conversion religieuse, à la fois temporelles et permanentes. À travers deux études de cas contrastives, j'analyse le rôle de la migration dans la diversité religieuse parmi les chrétiens, les musulmans et les adeptes des traditions religieuses africaines dans les milieux urbains d'Accra. Je montre comment les trajectoires de vie d'Aisha et de Solomon offrent des perspectives critiques et perspicaces sur la façon dont la migration et les environnements urbains se croisent pour façonner les expériences religieuses vécues par les acteurs sociaux individuels dans un domaine multireligieux, les aider à naviguer entre les différentes exigences familiales et sociétales, ainsi que sur la façon dont l'éducation des individus peut avoir un impact sur la diversité religieuse.

Mots-clés: diversité religieuse, migrants du nord, Madina, Accra, Ghana

As in other cities in West Africa, religious diversity in Accra has been continuously shaped and negotiated by migrants' presence in the urban space (Osella and Soares 2020; De Witte 2008). The concrete space referred to in this article is Madina, a suburb in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Over the years, Madina has witnessed an influx of rural-urban migration (Zaami 2010). Madina is the capital of the La-Nkwantanang Madina municipality and has become the hub for major commercial activities (Ghana Statistical Service 2010). Madina Zongo has also become one of the migrant communities in Accra and is home to most northern migrants engaging in seasonal migration (Zaami 2020). *Zongo* refers to settlements within West African towns that are predominantly inhabited by migrants. The community is characterized by the use of the Hausa language as a lingua franca and the practice of Islam as the shared religion. In modern Ghana, *zongo* communities serve as a melting pot of individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds, including those from both northern and southern Ghana, as well as immigrants from neighbouring countries (Pontzen 2021). In this working paper, I present two contrastive

case studies to illustrate how northern migrants in Madina are embodying religious diversity through their life trajectories. Thereby I expand the focus of my previous work on this migrant population, which analysed the gendered dynamics of migrants' livelihood strategies, and explore the interrelatedness of individual migration and (temporal) religious conversion stories with two exemplary cases. The paper thus addresses the issue of how migration and mobility interplay with religious diversity in urban contexts, and it raises the question of religious minorities and majorities. Most importantly, however, it demonstrates that while religious diversity is often understood by distinguishing between Christians, Muslims and African Traditional Religions, or by exploring the diversity within them, it is equally important to explore how individual social actors live this diversity, navigate between different religious practices, and sometimes embrace two religions at the same time. The context of Madina's religious infrastructures plays an important role in how religious diversity is lived and experienced, as these infrastructures shape individual religiosity on an everyday basis (Meyer 2016).

My first case study focuses on Aisha, who migrated to Madina after a broken marriage in search of a better life. Her life trajectory shows that her individual religiosity has become diverse, although she came from a conservative Muslim family. The second case is about Solomon, who was born into a family practicing both traditional religion and Christianity but raising him as a traditionalist. However, arriving in Accra, though from a plural religious background, he increasingly rejects religious diversity. The two case studies present perspectives on individual religious journeys that can contribute to the understanding of religious diversity in Accra's urban settings.

Case study 1: Aisha's migration trajectory

Aisha is a Muslim migrant from the northern region and embarked on her journey to Madina in April 2021 after her marriage dissolved because her husband failed to provide for her needs in the household. In addition to her needs, Aisha wanted to continue with her education after marriage but the husband was not in agreement with her dream. Yet, her parents insisted she remain in the matrimonial home and be submissive. In my interview with her, she highlighted that the Qu'ran teaches women should be submissive to their husbands – yet she disagrees with this because she believes that submissiveness must be reciprocal between husband and wife. Initially, Aisha followed her father's advice and returned to her husband's house but when she realized that her husband could still not provide for her wellbeing, she decided to migrate to Madina.

Although she came from a conservative Muslim family in northern Ghana, she had been exposed to religious diversity during her high school years. She narrated her experience in a boarding senior high school with her school mother, who was a Christian and had introduced her to church. Aisha had enjoyed attending the school church with her school mother, but

when she returned home during holidays, she practiced her religion as a Muslim. Even though she has not converted to Christianity, this encounter has continued to shape her life, as I will discuss later.

Lived religion in Madina

Upon arrival in Madina, Aisha continued practicing her religion as a Muslim by observing the five daily prayers except when she was in her menstrual cycle. She prayed in two mosques; one was closer to Madina's market, the space in which she worked, and another mosque was closer to where she lived. The elements of urban infrastructure that play a key role in how most migrants live their religion in Madina are the mosques and the market; the closeness of these infrastructures allows them to work and to pray regularly (Knott, Krech, and Meyer 2016). The mosque closer to where Aisha lives was constructed to meet the needs of the migrant community, while the one closer to the market is to serve the needs of the traders and workers within which the market is situated.

Madina started as a predominantly Muslim settlement like any other *zongo*. However, as the surrounding areas of the Madina Zongo grew, people of various faiths were attracted to the place. Thus, while the Madina Zongo, located directly opposite the main Madina market, remains mainly Muslim quarters, the other parts that fall within its radius are more diverse. The market itself is also diverse, with people of different nationalities, religions and ethnic backgrounds coming for various economic transactions. This characterises the market as a cosmopolitan space where encounters between people with different religious identities take place. According to Aisha, who is a *kaya yoo* (head porter), the majority of her customers are Christians. Because of her background and her experience with both Islam and Christianity, her relationships with some of them went beyond business transactions. Beyond the economic aspect, she also established social ties with some of her customers, an experience that allows her to be flexible in her religious encounters with others in Madina.

Aisha thus became acquainted with a customer who has regularly picked her up to go to church. Aisha decided to become flexible and embrace both Christianity and Islam. First, it began with her customer inviting her to the opening of a new church, where she was impressed by the performances of choristers in administering songs and Bible readings. Aisha's second and third visits to the church, still on the invitation of her customer, excited her even more. In addition to the spiritual services offered by the church, food and drinks were also served. The quality of the food was something Aisha could rarely afford with her meagre income and the conspicuous choristers' display, which Meyer (2013; 2020) refers to as aesthetics of material religion, were among the things that attracted Aisha to church. However, despite Aisha's excitement about going to church on Sundays, she initially stopped attending church services for three weeks, then resumed, and finally stopped completely, because she realized that she

could not practice her daily Muslim prayers on Sundays. Her individual religious practice suffered when she tried to combine it with Christian service. "One cannot use two eyes to look into a bottle," she said when she explained her decision to stop going to church and focus on one religion, yet without losing her admiration for Christianity. Her ambivalence regarding religious practices has continued to show up in her everyday interactions with her customers.

Aisha represents not merely an example of a cosmopolitan Muslim living in Madina; she embodies Madina's religious diversity. Despite being a devout Muslim and having attended church services in the past, she maintains a warm relationship with all her Christian and Muslim friends and clients. However, in the long term she rejected combining Islam and Christianity and needed stability with one particular religion. Aisha can be considered as a cosmopolitan Muslim whose religiosity is shaped by a temporal and shifting embodiment of religious diversity. In my interaction with her, I realized that both the Quran and the Bible continue to shape her religious views.

Religious diversity beyond the individual

Aisha begins her daily work at 4 am and closes at 6 pm. While at work in Madina market, she can observe her five daily prayers by asking her customers' permission to go inside the nearby mosque and pray before she continues to work for them. She explained that the Muslim prayers usually have a shorter and a longer version; when she is at work, she observes the shorter versions of prayers, which take under three minutes. Aisha's Christian customers are mostly tolerant enough to allow her to pray while she works for them and she is able to negotiate how long she keeps them waiting. According to her, the way she is combining work and prayers is in the interest of herself and the customer, and this, according to her, is understood by Allah. In this sense, her practice of religious diversity goes beyond herself as an individual and includes her Christian customers – together, they are building some form of mutual trust and respect. This process of trust-building is also connected to the broader environment, reflecting the cultural and social heterogeneity of Madina. It reflects the practices of tolerance and diversity that are specific to the Madina market space, whether embodied by customers, market women/ men, or migrants. Such everyday practices of trust-building between Muslim and Christian traders in the Madina market can be observed in many of Aisha's daily routines. A Christian migrant from the Ashanti region, for example, allows Aisha to sit under her 'stall' when she has no load to carry. She also trusts Aisha with her goods when she has errands to run.

The decisive role of concrete urban spaces and the immediate socio-cultural environment in promoting religious diversity became evident when Aisha mentioned that when she returns to her hometown in the northern region, she will not be able to express her interest in religions other than Islam. In addition to coming from a conservative Muslim family, her brother

is an Imam of the mosque attached to their family house. They would not tolerate her practicing two religions. Nevertheless, while living in Madina, although she still considers herself as a Muslim, she can become flexible enough to combine Islam with Christianity – at least for a while.

Case study 2: religious diversity through the life trajectory of Solomon, born as a follower of African Traditional Religion (ATR)

Solomon was born to a religiously plural family. His father practiced African Traditional Religion (ATR) and his mother was a Christian. He was brought up as a traditionalist because of his father's dominant influence in the family. Solomon's parents illustrate a case of ambiguous religious diversity marked by elements of tolerance and intolerance. Their relationship showed tolerance because Solomon's parents belonged to different religions yet they respected each other's choices. However, Solomon mentioned that he always longed to be a Christian – the religion of his mother – but could not follow his mother to church because his dad controlled the household in an authoritative patriarchal manner by insisting that he follow his religion.

Solomon's migration to Madina and conversion to Christianity

Solomon came as a seasonal migrant to Madina in January 2010, and he has been returning to his village regularly. His conversion from African Traditional Religion to Christianity occurred in Madina in 2010 when Solomon attended an Easter congregation organized by the God Kingdom Church. Two of his sisters who were Christians invited him to attend the Easter celebration. The preaching was about the death and resurrection of Christ. After the sermon, the pastor called on those who wanted to convert and give their life to Christ. Solomon said he wanted to follow this call and step out but feared the crowd. The sister sitting next to him encouraged him to go forward and give his life to Christ, so he "took a bold step" and went forward to the altar for the ritual of conversion. According to him, his conversion was influenced by the sermon about the death and resurrection of Christ. In this regard, the material process of Easter, the church, the people and bodily performances played a role in his conversion (Knott, Krech, and Meyer 2016; Parmenter 2013).

Solomon is a sportsman who played football on Sundays. The Sunday after his conversion, he forgot that he was supposed to be at church and instead suited up to play football. On his way, he met his sister, who was on her way to church and asked him to go back home and change and come to church. Clearly, Solomon did not know that he needed to attend church service every Sunday after his conversion. With the help of his sister, he managed to change his routine to attend church service on Sundays and play football on Saturdays. Solomon's conversion was inspirational; however, the sisters helped him to sustain his Christianity.

Solomon's lived religion in Madina

Solomon came to Madina as a truck pusher at the market. After his conversion, in addition to Sunday services, he also dedicates Tuesday, Friday and Saturday evenings for prayer and Bible study and in 2021 he became a church deacon. In the interview, Solomon narrated how his life has been transformed since his conversion to Christianity. He mentioned how God communicates with him through dreams. He gave an instance of how God told him to relocate from Madina Zongo junction, a predominantly Muslim community, to a more diverse location. He recounted the misfortunes that had befallen him while living at Madina Zongo junction, where his personal belongings were frequently stolen and where he had rarely earned enough money to survive the next day. According to him, his relocation brought him success in his work. Aside from his personal earnings, he also receives financial support from the church, which enables him to pay his brother's hospital bills.

Solomon's conversion story informs us about Madina's diversity, while his narration also illustrates how the church constitutes an infrastructure that provides Solomon with a pathway towards a better life (Meyer 2013). On this journey, however, his worldview about religious diversity changed. He was now describing followers of other religions as 'unbelievers' and 'idol worshippers'. When he used these terms, he was referring to his father's religion and to Islam. In fact, his relocation from Madina Zongo junction to Adenta was influenced by his own religious beliefs and his attitude towards religious 'others'. His spiritual interpretations of his missing personal item stories indicate why he decided not to co-exist with these 'others'.

Conclusion

The life trajectories of Aisha and Solomon, both migrants from the northern region of Ghana, constitute two contrastive case studies that provide deep insights into the spatial and temporal dynamics of religious diversity in Madina, Accra. In their narratives, these two migrants described how the way they have lived their religions is entangled with their upbringings, work routines, and livelihoods. Their stories highlight the strong effect of material components of religious practice, be it in terms of food or financial support in case of physical health problems, where medical insurance is missing. They also indicate the important aspect of trust-building among members of diverse religious communities, as well as the reverse effect: how suspicion against religious 'others' leads to segregation. Both cases show how Madina has provided them with a social space to discover their multiple and shifting religious identities. In other words, Madina is a space where migrants shape each other's religiosities through their mutual interactions and encounters with others in the market and community. Hence, focusing on individual life trajectories and stories of (temporal) conversion of migrants, who are carving for themselves flexible multiple identities between different religions, can serve as an entry point in studying religious diversity in urban spaces (Verkaaik 2013).

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Religious Diversity in Sharia-Compliant Cities in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract:

This paper examines religious diversity through everyday life experiences of various religious or not-so-religious groups and how they negotiate cultural and theological differences in the context of the sharia implementation in urban northern Nigeria. More specifically, it analyses how the sharia (implementation of Islamic law) reconfigures inter-faith relations, especially between Muslim and Christian minorities. Initially intended to reinforce strict conservative practices in urban centres, the reform has equally facilitated religious pluralism and hybrid practices such as the invention of Jesus *Mawlid*, which is observed by both Muslims and Christians as well as the blending of religion with previously considered irreligious urban cultures.

Keywords: religious diversity, sharia implementation, interfaith relations, Nigeria

Résumé:

Cet article examine la diversité religieuse à travers les expériences de la vie quotidienne de divers groupes religieux ou non-religieux et la manière dont ils négocient les différences culturelles et théologiques dans le contexte de l'application de la charia dans les zones urbaines du nord du Nigéria. Plus précisément, il analyse la manière dont la charia reconfigure les relations interconfessionnelles, en particulier entre les minorités musulmanes et chrétiennes. Initialement destinée à renforcer les pratiques conservatrices strictes dans les centres urbains, la réforme a également facilité le pluralisme religieux et les pratiques hybrides telles que l'invention de Jésus Mawlid, qui est observé à la fois par les musulmans et les chrétiens, ainsi que le mélange de la religion avec des cultures urbaines auparavant considérées comme irréligieuses.

Mots-clés: diversité religieuse, application de la charia, relations interconfessionnelles, Nigeria

This paper discusses religious diversity in the context of sharia regimes in northern Nigeria. I describe everyday life experiences of people from various religious or not-so-religious groups who negotiate cultural and theological differences in the context of the sharia regime in northern Nigeria. More specifically, I analyse how the sharia context (implementation of Islamic law) reconfigures inter-faith relations, especially between Muslim and Christian minorities. Thereby I explain how a reform that was initially intended to reinforce strict conservative religious practices instead facilitated religious pluralism characterized by hybrid religious practices.

Nigeria is an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous country of over 200 million inhabitants. While Christians and Muslims are in nearly equal proportions, there are also practitioners of other religions, such as *Maguzawa* in northern Nigeria. Since the introduction of Islam in the Hausa-phone region between the 11th and 14th centuries, those who practice traditional African religions are commonly referred to as *Maguzawa* (sin: *Bamaguje*). This term originates

from the Arabic word "*majus*" (corrupted to "*magus*") or Zoroastrianism, which is a category in the Quran that allows non-Muslims to maintain their own faith as long as they pay the *jizya* (a religious tax paid by non-Muslims) (Barkow 1973: 62).

Politically, Nigeria is broadly divided between northern and southern regions even though subdivisions exist within each of the regions. The North is predominantly Muslim, and the South is predominantly Christian. In terms of Northern Nigerian religious demography, the vast majority of Muslims are members of the Sunni branch of Islam, which is further subdivided into other categories. The Sunni broader subcategories are Sufis (Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya brotherhoods), Salafis (Izala), and those who do not accept labels. Both Shia Muslims and Christians are minority groups in the predominantly Muslim northern region.

In the early 2000s, some elected governors in Muslim-majority states adopted sharia (the Islamic legal system) as their official legal system (Ostien and Dekker 2010). Since the sharia regimes blend religion and government, this development reinforced the dominance of the Sunni Muslim majority over various minority groups such as Christians, non-Sunni Muslims, and non-religious people (Ibrahim 2022). This dominance became more obvious in urban centres where such diverse groups cohabit. While scholars have extensively studied how religion, particularly the sharia project, has polarized people of different faiths (Harnischfeger 2004; Harris 2013), my focus in this article is on people's everyday life experiences and the diverse ways in which religious subgroups constantly renegotiate living together on a daily basis in those sharia-compliant cities.[10]

In the context of the MIASA IFG 7 framework of understanding religious diversity in urban Africa, I use three case studies in this paper to demonstrate how various groups engage with each other in inter- and intra-religious relations, and how their divergent practices in terms of enforcing or resisting hegemony facilitate religious pluralism within a shared urban space. Thinking infrastructurally (see the thematic introduction of this collection of working papers), the first case presents how contemporary reformers, with the support of the sharia regimes, influence religiosity in urban spaces by reshaping cities' physical infrastructure. The second case presents dynamics of religious diversity involving (non-physical and human) religious infrastructures. The third case analyses how interactions between Muslims and Christian minorities in the context of Muslim majority settings led to the invention of Jesus Mawlid as a practical example of religious pluralism in northern Nigeria. My contribution thus addresses both the issue of religious infrastructures and the question of minority-majority relations.

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[10] The phrase sharia-compliant city is an emic term used within the local communities in which I conducted my research. When sharia was first implemented, it was common to see large signboards at the entrance of some cities, like Kano, that read "Kano is a sharia-compliant city. Please take heed".

Shaping religion and religiosity through physical infrastructure in Sokoto

Sokoto is one of the states in which sharia was adopted and enforced in the early 2000s. Before sharia, the city had two cinemas, the Sokoto Cinema and the Northern Cinema, which showed Western, Asian, and Nigerian films. Established in the decades following independence, both of them became not only symbols of development and entertainment hubs but also major cultural influencers that stimulated other activities around them in the 1970s. Very much in line with Brian Larkin's (2008) description of how infrastructure generates effects far beyond the immediate purpose for which it was created, commercial activities typical in urban centres, such as restaurants, beer parlours, and brothels, developed quickly around the Sokoto Cinema building. Hence, the neighbourhood known as Sokoto Cinema became one of the most populous locations in the city.

Following the adoption of sharia, debates around cinema infrastructure shifted from economic development and education-centred to moral discourse championed by the contemporary sharia reformists in northern Nigeria. For instance, there was a popular discourse among the sharia proponents that cinemas were a major promoter of 'un-Islamic' activities that tainted the city's Islamic image, which was previously the headquarters of the Sokoto caliphate. In this regard, the reformists viewed ending cinema in Sokoto as one way of transforming the city into a sharia-compliant one.

In 2002 the Sokoto government bought Sokoto Cinema for the sum of thirty million naira (at that time, USD 250,000) and converted it to a mosque. The government remodelled the building, adding a minaret section to the existing structure, removing the seats inside the hall, and creating more entrances for the worshippers. The state named this new house of worship Isa Mai Kwari Mosque in memory of the last son born to the nineteenth-century Islamic reformer Usman Dan Fodio, founder of the Sokoto Caliphate. Northern Cinema was converted into a political office before the building was demolished.

Another example is how the contemporary reformers through the state government invested money in erecting small signposts with Arabic inscriptions and sometimes with transliteration carrying expressions such as "lā ilāha illā llāh" (there is no deity but Allah), "Allahu Akbar" (Allah is the greatest), and "hasbuna Allāhu wa nicamal wakīlu" (sufficient for us is Allah, and [He is] the best disposer of affairs) (see Fig 1).

Figure 3: A religious signpost in Sokoto. Photo credit: Musa Ibrahim

This form of infrastructural transformation from profane to sacred is what some people within and outside the government use as visual persuasion that Sokoto is physically reformed into a sharia-compliant city. The conversion of the cinema into a mosque and the erected signs with religious inscriptions are part of religious infrastructure not only architecturally; they enable or prevent certain activities and in turn, shape individuals and groups' experiences of urban life. People born since the beginning of the contemporary Islamic reform, who are now over twenty years old, have never known, let alone experienced, city conviviality through a conventional cinema, unless they have lived outside the sharia-compliant states. Indeed, the only thing that has resisted these transformations is the very name of the neighbourhood, which has remained "Sokoto Cinema" nearly two decades after the cinema's closure. In the same vein, as Timothy Mitchell's (1994; 2005) notion of sensory modality suggests, the Arabic calligraphy on the signs and their placement at strategic public locations invites those passing by to cultivate certain forms of religious subjectivities. Becoming part of people's everyday life, the texts generate a mixed media experience of seeing, reading, and performing. The act of seeing these symbols is usually followed by reciting the texts written on them as daily *azkar* (pl. of *zikr*, Arabic: remembrance of Allah) and *du'a* (prayer or supplication). Reading such texts is a devotional act, which conforms to central claims of the sharia-compliant discourse and has a significant spiritual impact on the life of Muslims involved.

By allowing or denying the presence of certain infrastructure, these examples show how contemporary Muslim reformers are using physical infrastructure for influencing or enforcing specific forms of religiosity among urban populations.

Religious diversity and non-physical human infrastructure in Kano

The second case involves urban subcultures and religious worldmaking observed in Kano. After forming a government, the sharia reformists established *yan hisbah* (sharia police) as part of the religious (security) infrastructure in the city. The *yan hisbah* surveil public spaces and enforce moral codes, such as 'proper' dressing and gender separation in public transportation, as well as censoring youth cultures they consider 'un-Islamic'.

In Kano, one finds urban subgroups associated with specific urban cultures. An example of this is *yan birni* (also known as *yan gayu*), a category of cosmopolitan youth influenced by globalised popular cultures, especially American hip-hop artists. Some of these youth appear in public with plaited, dreadlocked, or punk hairstyles and sometimes wear chains/necklaces, and earrings. They constitute a counter-public in the context of the imagined morally consolidated urban public that the sharia reform project is working to establish in the city. Most of these *yan birni* are Sunni Muslims, which makes them part of the religious majority. However, they are culturally a minority who do not conform to the social norms in their environment. The sharia police frequently arrest these youths and publicly shame them by forcefully shaving their hairstyles and changing their clothing.

In this sharia enforcement that created tension between the *yan birni* and the *yan hisbah*, groups of Shia Muslims intervened. They allowed them to participate in their own public religious events, including during the *mawlid* and Ashura processions, with all sorts of hairstyles and wearing ripped baggy jeans and assorted jewellery (see Fig 2). Thereby they embraced those marginalized young Sunni Muslims by giving them a sense of belonging: They can be Muslims and appear the way they want.

Figure 4: Shia-Muslims and yan birni (cosmopolitan youth) during a religious procession. Photo credit: Suleiman

As Hoelzchen and Kirby (2020: 7) point out, religious infrastructure facilitates "the act of living" – a capacity to inhabit certain modes of (collective) existence and action that constitute an endeavour to simultaneously survive and live meaningfully amidst conditions of marginality. While this collaboration between Shias and *yan birni* is staged to counter Sunni sharia reformers' hegemony, it is also tied to the notion of majority-minority politics in the region. Both groups are minority Muslims who feel marginalized in the sharia project. In other words, their alliance shows intra-religious pluralism, and it challenges the sharia reformers' dominance over or control of public religiosity. Without the Shias providing a convivial religious space, this group of urban cosmopolitan youth may not have been able to overcome the sharia police and live the way they wanted.

As these examples provide us with ways to think about Muslim multiculturalism, pluralism, and urban diversity, they also help us to consider transnational Muslim networks as religious infrastructure. On the one hand, pro-sharia activists in Nigeria are mostly Sunnis, with most of those holding leadership roles being part of transnationally connected Salafi movements. They have a strong tie to Saudi Arabia and claim credit for the contemporary iteration of *ummah* in Nigeria through sharia implementation (Ben Amara 2014), even though Sufis were also involved. On the other hand, there are also Iran-funded Shia movements, striving to assert their influence in Nigerian cities.

Religious pluralism, Muslim-Christian minorities, and the invention of "Jesus *Mawlid*"

The quest for religious pluralism amidst intra- and inter-faith politics facilitated unusual collaborations between minority religious groups in northern Nigeria. One example was how, in the mid-2010s, Shia Muslims and Christians invented hybrid religious practices that deviate from the Sunni majority norms. It was the Shia who invited Christians to join them in their invented "Jesus *Mawlid*" (Jesus' Birthday), which they annually perform, albeit differently from the conventional Christmas (in both beliefs and practices).

The idea of "Jesus *Mawlid*" is based on Shia understanding of the Quran 2:285 that Muslims must believe in all prophets sent by Allah and are mandated not to discriminate against any. Therefore, since they celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, they also feel obliged to celebrate other prophets, especially those known as *ulul-'azm* (the resolute ones), mentioned in the Quran 46:35 and some hadiths (prophetic traditions). Among the *ulul-'azm* mentioned in the Qur'an is Jesus. Furthermore, in Shia theology, there is a strong connection through *wilaya* (authority) between *ulul' azm* prophets and the twelve Shia Imams. They believe in a hadith in which the Shia Imams are introduced as inheritors of the knowledge, miracles, and virtues of the *ulul' azm* prophets. It was in this context that they invented "Jesus

Mawlid". It is worth pointing out here that they are using code-switching when naming the event. In Hausa, they call it "*Maulidin Annabi Isa*". However, since they also speak in English, and to give the event an Islamic aura, they self-translated it to "Jesus *Mawlid*" instead of Jesus' birthday or Christmas.

"Jesus *Mawlid*" constitutes an event during which a group of Shia Muslims invite Christians inside a hall decorated with assorted ribbons, balloons, and lighting. On the walls, they hang pictures of Jesus and their leader Shaykh Ibrahim el-Zakzaky. They deliver sermons in turns. When Shias talk about Jesus from Muslims' viewpoints, Christians speak about him from the biblical perspective. Through these performances the two groups have reconfigured themselves from minorities from separate religions into an interfaith minority group. Their invention, "*Jesus Mawlid*", serves as an exceptional forum of religious pluralism that has been historically uncommon in the region.

Conclusion

The case studies presented in this paper demonstrate instances of the formation of a religiously diverse urban space even in a situation where the government is neither in favour of religious diversity nor religiously neutral. In other words, these examples highlighted how diversity has been contested and that ensuring religious diversity in urban centres is not a neutral political project. It involves a great deal of political and cultural struggles, creative meaning-makings, and manifold power relations between various religious groups. This includes using infrastructure (physical and non-physical, including humans) as enablers and disablers of performances of everyday religiosity and religious experiences. However, the religiously contested playing ground created by sharia implementation not only shapes how dominant groups and various minority groups relate to each other but also facilitates their reconfiguration in ways that promote religious pluralism.

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