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Common grounds: urban spaces, everyday religious encounters, and the dynamics and techniques of coexistence in Madina, Accra (1959-Present)
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Introduction

Urban Spaces, Plurality, Everyday Religious Encounters and Coexistence

The Beginning of a New Periscope

I moved to Madina West in October 2011 while serving as a National Service personnel in the Department of History at the University of Ghana, Legon. During this period, I stayed with a Muslim friend named Larry, a devout practitioner of Tijaniyya Islam.¹ Coincidentally, we were history students and hallmates at Commonwealth Hall, the only male hall at the University of Ghana. Until I left Larry's house in July 2012, we shared a room and sometimes ate from the same bowl. Within a few months, I made new Muslim friends through Larry. Our conversations were honest and friendly and typically covered topics like the ethics of internet fraud (*sakawa*) mostly justified against the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. Other issues of interest included fake mallams and pastors, petty theft, social gathering spaces for males (*bases*) in the Zongo, and national politics. My friends often discussed Madina's unique and peaceful nature compared to other Muslim communities in Accra like Ashaiman, Nima, Maamobi, and Fadama.

Life in Madina seemed ordinary, aside from sporadic clashes between people. I maintained amicable relations with my Muslim friends and avoided offending anyone or inciting animosity. One day, Larry revealed that his friends, who had visited him earlier, admired our friendship. They were astonished to discover that I was a practising Christian and more surprised to note that we both prayed in his room, albeit differently. I inquired about why they were astounded, and Larry explained that people in the community held preconceived notions about Christians and vice versa. This was no news to me because mutual suspicion often occurs between people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The problem is how this mutual suspicion is acted out and managed. Our peaceful coexistence challenged their perceptions and defied their long-held stereotypes. We laughed it off, and I did not give much thought to his friends' reactions, except to ensure that I did not knowingly offend anyone or cross certain social or religious boundaries. My experience with Larry's friends extends beyond the issue of mutual suspicion to social dynamics, intergroup cohesion, and the complexities of coexistence.

¹ Larry is currently pursuing doctoral studies in Comparative Indigenous Studies in Norway at the Arctic University of Norway.

In August 2012, I gained admission to pursue my master's degree at the University of Ghana, and I chose to remain in the community due to its proximity to the university. Throughout my academic journey, I continued to live in Madina while working as a Graduate Teaching and Research Assistant at the Institute of African Studies (IAS) after completing my MPhil programme. Despite spending significant time in the community, I mostly perceived it as overly peaceful and carefree and thus did not closely follow local events. It was not until my involvement in the *Madina Project* that my perspective shifted profoundly. The project unveiled aspects of community life that had previously escaped my notice or were often overlooked. It brought to light subtle tensions simmering beneath the surface that occasionally escalated into violent conflicts. Moreover, it prompted broader reflections on individual and group discourses surrounding images, alcohol consumption, sonic environments, corporeality, prostitution, crime, and other practices of the religious "other" within Madina. Most importantly, my curiosity was drawn to people's *techniques*, *practices*, and daily efforts to avoid violent conflicts, even amid tensions.² This phenomenon in Madina thus presented a new way of looking at social dynamics and cohesion, particularly in the context of religious coexistence.

In hindsight, the *Madina Project* was a pivotal awakening that challenged my initial presumptions and prompted a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in community dynamics, intergroup relations, and cohesion. It underscored the importance of attentive observation and critical engagement with the social environment, thus reminding me of the significance of interrogating seemingly mundane aspects of everyday life, especially those involving diverse groups. Most importantly, I began to ponder the phenomenon of the in-betweenness of coexistence, that is, the social, cultural, and political processes and interactions between peaceful coexistence and violent or conflictual coexistence. I started reflecting on

² In this study, I define *techniques* as the strategies, methods, and skills that individuals or groups employ to navigate coexistence. These require a certain level of intentionality and adaptability, which evolve over time based on context and actors. Techniques often involve conscious mechanisms such as avoidance, silence, and indirect or coded communication. Techniques are thus embodied and sensuous in nature. *Practices*, on the other hand, refer to the habitual, embodied, and mostly unconscious ways in which people live together over time. Unlike *techniques*, practices are not necessarily deliberate or strategic; rather, they form part of an ongoing, lived reality. They encapsulate everyday routines, cultural norms, and institutionalised behaviours that sustain coexistence. In essence, *techniques* reflect an active and often intentional engagement with coexistence, whereas *practices* represent the ingrained and habitual ways through which coexistence is sustained in daily life. Given their interrelated nature, I use both terms in tandem throughout this study.

practices and *techniques* people put in place to avoid violent conflicts, but simultaneously, also, made sure that religious practices and boundaries are not overly compromised.

The Madina Project: Matters and Modalities of Coexistence in an Entangled World

This dissertation results from the *Madina Project* and seeks to answer the question above through a socio-historical and ethnographic analysis of shared urban spaces in Madina West. In an era of heightened global flows and interconnectedness, increasing entanglement of religious matters, as well as secular-religious debates, that often lead to tensions and conflicts, the *Madina Project* explores matters and modalities of coexistence in a diversifying neighbourhood like Madina in Accra. The *Madina Project* is a collaborative research initiative involving the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University and the African Studies Center Leiden (ASCL) at Leiden University in the Netherlands, along with the IAS at the University of Ghana. The project investigates the historical and contemporary modalities of coexistence in Madina through the lenses of food, fashion, health-seeking, and urban spaces, among other pressing matters. The team consists of four Dutch scholars, nine Ghanaian scholars, and four doctoral students. Members of the project come from diverse academic backgrounds, including History, Religious Studies, African Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, and Theology.³

This study specifically investigates religious coexistence in Madina from a social and cultural history perspective, primarily focusing on daily social interactions and the socio-spatial dynamics of diversity within an urban African setting, especially in Madina West, Accra. It explores how religious encounters take place in shared urban spaces like marketplaces, lorry parks, and football parks, and how individuals from different religious backgrounds interact or fail to interact within these spaces. I refer to these as common grounds and have developed a spatial concept—the common ground framework—to analyse them, utilising a combination of historical and ethnographic methods. The common ground framework allows for a broad analysis by integrating their historical and cultural dimensions, offering a deeper understanding of their significance and dynamics. In this context, common grounds are the physical spaces I examine, such as

³ Details of the Madina project can be found at <https://religiousmatters.nl/projects/madina/>. The *Madina Project* is part of the larger *Religious Matters in an Entangled World Project*, <https://religiousmatters.nl/>. This research project examines religion in plural settings across Europe (with a focus on the Netherlands) and Africa (particularly Morocco, Ghana, and Kenya) from a comparative and transregional perspective. The central idea of the program is that religion becomes tangible and perceptible through people, whose beliefs and practices involve the use of various materials—such as buildings, images, objects, and texts—and whose bodies and senses are shaped by these beliefs and practices. By adopting a material approach to religion, the project investigates the actions and material forms through which religions manifest, coexist, and potentially clash within specific pluralistic contexts.

marketplaces, football parks, and lorry parks. Conversely, the common ground refers to the conceptual framework I use to highlight the socio-spatial, material, institutional, and ritual mediations, as well as the sacred-secular entanglements and everyday relational and interactional dynamics that shape these spaces and the practices of coexistence within them. The common ground is a shared urban social space with an ambiguous ownership and contested character, which fluidly shifts between being a legal public space, an assumed public space, or an appropriated public space, depending on current socio-political conditions.

The interdisciplinary approach employed in this study bridges the past and present and thus provides a broad understanding of the socio-religious dynamics in Madina. The use of archival sources and oral history, for example, contextualises contemporary religious encounters within broader historical processes in Madina. Additionally, ethnographic methods such as participant observation, socio-spatial mapping, and reflexive practices offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals. For instance, conducting in-depth nighttime fieldwork allowed me to capture unique aspects of social life in Madina that are otherwise less visible.

In Madina, urban spaces serve as important sites of religious expression and encounter. They function as arenas where the complex dynamics of human interaction and communal relations unfold, thus reflecting the social, cultural, and religious life of the community. Few events that transpired before the beginning of the *Madina Project* offer poignant vignettes that illustrate these complexities. One evening in October 2010, a group of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians gathered for prayers on a communal football field, *Zurak Park*, at Libya Quarters, and were reportedly caned and forcibly dispersed by some Muslim youths.⁴ The youths claimed that the loud worship by the Christians caused sonic disturbances.⁵ Shortly after this confrontation, the Victory Society of the Methodist Church Ghana, located opposite the park, was taken to court over noise complaints and subsequently restricted from making noise after 10:00 PM.⁶

Similarly, on May 17, 2011, tensions escalated into violence when Muslim youths attacked the Faith Baptist Church at Zongo Junction. The conflict centered on a contested space previously

⁴ Libya Quarters is one of the suburbs/neighbourhoods in Madina. It is named after the first inhabitants of the area who were nationals from Libya. These Libyans operated in the fuel (petrol and diesel) business at the time.

⁵ Personal interview with Samuel Ayesu Larney at Libya Quarters, 17th July, 2017. Larney is 32 years old and has been living in the community since he was 6 years old. He is a teacher and a footballer in the community and lives close to the football parks.

⁶ Personal interview with Samuel Ayesu Larney at Libya Quarters, 17th July, 2017. Larney is also a member of the Methodist Church mentioned in this study. He is the Leaders Meeting Secretary of the church. This story was also corroborated by Kwesi Tekyi Essel-Yorke, the Steward of the church. See also Fig. 1.

used by both Muslims and Christians for social gatherings, which had allegedly been sold to a private developer—namely, the church. Tragically, the confrontation resulted in the deaths of two Muslim youths, reportedly from stray “bullets fired by the police” during warning shots, and the arrest of twenty others involved in the altercation.⁷ The aftermath of the May 17 incident sparked diverse interpretations that ranged from media reports which dominated public discourses to individual narratives, intergroup perspectives, and communal accounts. These discussions prompted varied responses, including government interventions, thus underscoring the complex and multifaceted nature of the clash.

The incidents recounted above highlight the crucial role that urban spaces, particularly those examined in this study, play in shaping community life in Madina. They draw attention to the significance of contested spaces and the impact of diverse soundscapes on interreligious interactions in the community. Furthermore, these narratives emphasise the importance of personal engagement and critical reflection on daily interactions within the community and hence shed light on the often-overlooked nuances of Madina’s social dynamics and discussions surrounding interreligious encounters and relations. While these isolated cases of open confrontation offer valuable insight into the complexities of coexistence in Madina, the primary focus of this study is not on open conflicts but rather on how such conflicts are, to a larger extent, avoided.

The central argument of this study posits that religious coexistence in Madina’s shared urban spaces is primarily shaped by material relationships, with religious convictions grounded in the theologies (teachings) of respective traditions playing a secondary, albeit influential, role. These theological perspectives should be understood as additional layers that overlay and shape material relationships rather than serving as their foundation. In essence, daily coexistence in Madina is pragmatically driven, multi-layered, and shaped by the realities and contingencies of economic, social, cultural, and political factors.

The study advances several interconnected arguments. First, it asserts that coexistence in Madina’s shared public spaces is inherently fluid, characterised by boundary crossing, constant negotiations, and the continuous remaking of boundaries. Second, it emphasises that shared urban spaces in Madina, such as marketplaces and lorry parks, extend beyond economic functions to

⁷ Personal interview with Inspector Sampson Afrifa Ababio and Corporal Onasis Agyekum at Libya Quarters, 27th August, 2017. Both officers work at the Madina Divisional Office of the Ghana Police Service. They happened to be part of the officers who were deployed to enforce law and order at Zongo Junction during the incident.

become significant nodes for social, cultural, and religious practices and exchanges. These interactions contribute both to the production of shared knowledge and the differentiation of identities. Finally, the study argues that historical factors, such as migration patterns, socio-political transformations, and urban development, have greatly shaped the religious landscape and the evolving nature of coexistence in Madina.

This study therefore seeks to address the historical evolution and contemporary dynamics of urban spaces, everyday religious interactions, and coexistence in Madina. Specifically, it aims to contextualise how physical and shared urban spaces, socio-religious practices, communal identities, and coexistence have interplayed historically and continue to do so in this urban setting.

To achieve this aim, the following sub-questions are explored: how have historical factors such as migration patterns, urban planning, land tenure relations, and socio-political developments shaped the religious landscape and dynamics of coexistence in Madina? In what ways have daily religious interactions in Madina's shared urban spaces influenced the characteristics and dynamics of coexistence within the community? How have residents of Madina navigated and negotiated their religious identities within shared urban spaces and daily interactions? What challenges, tensions, techniques and practices have emerged in socio-religious interactions and coexistence in Madina?

By addressing these questions, this study provides a deep understanding of the complex social dynamics in Madina, with a particular focus on social encounters in shared urban spaces, daily religious interactions, and practices and techniques of coexistence. Through a historical analysis of social practices and identity negotiations, the research contributes to several academic fields, including social, cultural, and urban history, religious studies, conflict studies, and peace studies.

Furthermore, the research emphasises the significance of an interdisciplinary approach, by integrating historical, sociological, anthropological, geographical, and fictional (literary), and spatial analyses. This approach provides valuable insights into the relationship between urban spaces, religious interactions, and discourses of coexistence at the local level. These insights offer important implications for the development of inclusive communities and the promotion of social cohesion in rapidly urbanising African cities like Madina.

Contextual Perspectives: Social Relations and Socio-Spatial Structures

Space is a palimpsest. Over time, it acquires layers of meanings by the way it is inhabited. These layers of meaning can be uncovered to understand the space. What the space denotes is understood by looking at it from a distance with a

“viewpoint”, but to uncover the embedded connotations, it is important to look at it from within by inhabiting it.⁸

Thinking historically is a process of locating oneself in space and time. And a location... is an itinerary rather than a bounded site—a series of encounters and translations.⁹

This dissertation therefore explores how shared urban spaces in Madina, particularly Madina West have shaped social encounters and coexistence among its diverse religious groups from 1959 to date.¹⁰ It analyses the historical development and transformations of these spaces and their effect on the dynamics of religious coexistence within Madina. The community’s diverse inhabitants, encompassing followers of Christianity, Islam, and Ga Indigenous religions, have formed social networks in shared public spaces, shaped by religious, cultural, social, political, economic, and individual factors. These interactions—taking place in marketplaces, lorry parks, pavements, streets, and football parks—have fostered religious borrowing, cooperation, communication, conflict, and engagement within the community. This study, therefore, focuses on how daily religious practices and rituals have manifested in these urban settings and their implications for practices of coexistence in Madina West (Madina Zongo II) from its establishment in 1959 to the present.

As the first opening quote emphasises, it is crucial to recognise that spaces evolve over time, accumulating layers of meaning through inhabitation. Understanding these meanings requires direct engagement and firsthand experience, rather than distant observation. Similarly, the second quote underscores that “thinking historically” means placing oneself within a specific space and time, acknowledging that a location is not static but is shaped by a series of encounters, interactions, and translations that occur over time. These perspectives highlight the importance of considering the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of shared urban spaces, particularly regarding religious encounters and coexistence.

Therefore, a broad understanding of these spaces involves immersing oneself in their dynamics and historical narratives to uncover the complex layers of meaning and relationships among different religious groups. In essence, understanding shared urban spaces requires analysing their social and symbolic meanings through daily rituals, human-to-human and human-

⁸ Reena Tiwari, *Space–Body–Ritual: Performativity in the City*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 16

⁹ James Clifford. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 11

¹⁰ Madina West refers to the enclave that forms the second Zongo in the Madina community.

to-object interactions, and practices of coexistence in religious contexts. This involves tracing the origins, evolution, changes, and continuities of these spaces and their effect on social and cultural interactions within them.

Public urban spaces are vital for understanding religious coexistence in diverse communities, as they act as the lifeblood and historical archives of urban neighbourhoods. These spaces are dynamic centers where people gather, interact, and engage in various activities, weaving a vibrant social fabric. They function as zones of contact, facilitating exchanges and the creation of knowledge through the sharing of ideas, information, and lived experiences among diverse inhabitants.¹¹ These spaces take many forms, from lorry parks to markets and streets, collectively contributing to the community's vibrancy and identity. They serve multiple purposes, hosting leisure, as well as social, cultural, religious, economic, and political activities. Beyond their physicality, urban spaces symbolise a neighbourhood's history, culture, and identity, reflecting its collective memory and shaping its past, present, and future.¹² In essence, they are "densities of stories, passions, hurts, revenge, avoidance, deflection, and complicity".¹³

Public urban spaces are not exclusively venues for positive interactions filled with joy and vitality; they are also areas of contention and complex social and power dynamics. These spaces involve constant negotiations, boundary-setting, encroachments, repressions, and political manoeuvring, often leading to tensions and conflicts among various stakeholders.¹⁴ This suggests

¹¹ Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 2-7; Ato Quayson, "Signs of the Times: Discourse Ecologies and Street Life on Oxford St., Accra", *City and Society*, 22, 1, (2010): 72-96; Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street: City Life and the Itineraries of Transformations*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

¹² For instance, in "The Arcades Project", Walter Benjamin uses the concept of the flâneur to explore the vibrant streets of 19th-century Paris. Through this observer of city life, Benjamin examines the dynamic urban environment and the evolving nature of modernity. He delves into the city's arcades and streets, uncovering layers of history and showing how its architecture and culture retain imprints of the past, highlighting the interconnectedness of history and the present. In this way, Benjamin offers profound insights into the complex relationship between history, culture, and urban spaces in the context of modernity. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999); Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989).

¹³ AbdouMalik Simone, *For the City Yet to Come*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 11

¹⁴ An important conceptual insight into this dynamics is "The Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary" espoused by Asef Bayat. The concept explores how individuals and communities engage in subtle, non-confrontational acts of resistance in repressive or unfavourable political and social contexts. These everyday acts of resilience challenge the conventional view that major movements are the primary drivers of societal change. Bayat emphasises the significance of these small actions as vital forces for transformation, particularly when overt resistance could have severe consequences. The concept highlights the agency of ordinary people in shaping their societies and offers a new perspective on the dynamics of social change. See for instance, Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 43-65; *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 7-10, 15-21.

that while public urban spaces provide opportunities for diverse religious communities to express their beliefs and realise their potential, they also present challenges to coexistence. For instance, in Madina, these spaces reveal the ongoing encroachment of vendors and individuals on urban streets, the formation of informal networks, and the clandestine operations of Municipal Security guards against kiosk owners and commercial sex workers in the early hours between 1:00 AM and 2:30 AM. These encounters occasionally escalate into conflicts and legal disputes, where the ownership and control of public spaces are questioned and contested.¹⁵ Therefore, understanding these complexities and conflicts—especially within the context of Madina—is essential for religious practitioners, city planners, policymakers, and communities aiming to promote inclusive and sustainable urban environments.

In Ghana's Greater Accra Region, Madina epitomises religious and ethnic diversity, transnationalism, and coexistence within an increasingly urbanised setting. It emerged from Ghana's modernisation and urbanisation efforts, which began in the late 1950s. Originally a rural settlement, Madina transformed into a rapidly urbanising community due to its proximity to the University of Ghana and the capital city, Accra. This shift attracted a diverse population, which reflects various ethnic, cultural, national, and religious backgrounds. As a result, Madina's physical landscape has undergone significant changes. Once characterised by agriculture and traditional housing, it now presents a mix of residential, commercial, and public spaces, which feature modern buildings alongside conventional structures, symbolising the coexistence of the old and new.¹⁶

Religion plays a central role in the lives of Madina's residents, with the community being home to followers of Islam, Christianity, and Ga traditional religions. Prominent religious landmarks, such as mosques, churches, and shrines, symbolise Madina's spiritual significance and diversity. Daily religious practices, including communal prayers, processions, and occasional festivals, offer a glimpse into religious interaction, tolerance, and communal harmony among its

¹⁵ Personal Fieldnotes, 30th July, 2018; 2nd August, 2018 and 7th August, 2018.

¹⁶ A.K. Quarcoo, N.O. Addo and Margaret Peil, *Madina Survey: A Study of the Structure and Development of a Contemporary Sub-Urban Settlement*, (Legon: Institute of African Studies, 1967), 5; Seth Opuni Asiama, "Social Analysis, Urbanisation and Land Reform in Ghana", Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1980; Samuel A. Ntewusu, "The Northern Factor in Accra: A Historical Study of Madina Zongo as A Sub-Urban Settlement, 1957-2000", MPhil. Thesis, University of Ghana, 2005; Quayson, *Oxford Street*, 204; Osman Bari, *A Comprehensive History of Muslims and Religion in Ghana*, (Accra: Dezzine Focus, 2009), 444-448

inhabitants. Beyond formal institutions, Madina's religious diversity permeates everyday life, thereby shaping the community's social fabric.

As one enters Madina from Accra or Legon, the lorry parks at Zongo Junction serve as key transportation hubs, connecting Madina to other parts of the city. Amidst the hustle and bustle, itinerant preachers, predominantly from Christian and Muslim traditions, deliver messages of faith, hope, and salvation. They engage in religious discussions and offer spiritual guidance to both residents and passersby. However, these interactions sometimes provoke cold reactions from certain individuals, which occasionally lead to confrontations or unfriendliness. Similarly, the vibrant marketplaces in Madina reveal a complex network of interactions among traders from diverse religious backgrounds, coexisting amicably as they engage in economic and social exchanges. These markets exemplify how religious coexistence seamlessly integrates into everyday economic activities. Furthermore, in the Libya Quarters area, local football parks serve as gathering points for individuals of various faiths, united by their shared passion for the game. Beyond sports, these parks also hold significance as spaces for religious practices, including prayers, rituals, and festivities, most of which take place at night. These activities add a distinct layer to Madina's social, cultural, and religious dynamics.

Madina, also known in Accra for its political vibrancy, relies on markets, lorry parks, and football parks as key venues for political campaigns. These spaces provide opportunities for direct engagement with a diverse public, drawing large crowds from different areas and appealing to local communities and the youth. Politicians use these platforms to convey their messages, generate enthusiasm, and secure critical votes in this dynamic community during elections.

The marketplaces, lorry parks, and football parks in Madina reflect the continuous incorporation of religion into the urban environment, and this highlights the multifaceted nature of shared public spaces where religious expressions, interactions, and practices of coexistence flourish. These spaces produce a cacophony of diverse soundscapes—religious chants, calls to prayer, conversations, and the hum of daily life—that reflect the complexity of sensory and auditory relationships in the area. This auditory network mirrors the diversity and coexistence of religious practices in Madina's urban setting, thus blurring the boundaries between secular and sacred domains. This fluidity fosters complex entanglements among followers of different religious traditions, as well as between humans and objects, and hence creates a rich social fabric,

a shared communal identity, the production of differences, and dynamic practices of religious coexistence.

Despite the vibrant religious interactions in Madina, these apparent engagements may project a utopian image, masking underlying challenges stemming from rapid urbanisation and population growth. Issues such as disputes over public spaces, the impact of loud religious sounds, and the harassment of vendors over streets and pavements have led to conflicts, destruction of property, and even loss of lives. Politicians have exploited these tensions for political gain, hence exacerbating divisions. These challenges in Madina reveal the complex intersections of power, socio-economic disparities, cultural expression, religious identities, and political agendas. Therefore, it is essential to analyse these dynamics within Madina's urban spaces, daily religious interactions, and their effects on coexistence among diverse religious practitioners. Such an understanding will help identify practices that promote inclusive plurality in Madina.

Madina thus provides a unique and dynamic backdrop for studying religious diversity and coexistence because it offers valuable insights into the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of interreligious interactions in a diversifying urban environment. Despite its diversity, Madina stands out as a relatively peaceful community compared to other Zongos in Accra. The term “Zongo”, originated from the Hausa language, and refers to neighbourhoods predominantly inhabited by West African Muslims in regions like Ghana and Nigeria. Historically, it was known as “a camping place” for trading caravans, while the Twi term for Zongo translates to “strangers quarters”.¹⁷ These communities emerged during the colonial era to accommodate Muslim migrants, including the Hausa, Mossi, Fulani, Yoruba, and other Sahelian ethnic groups in Ghana. However, Madina is unique in that it was established in the postcolonial era. While it shares many cultural and religious affinities with other Zongos in Accra, Madina distinguishes itself with its distinct urban planning features. Zongos have long held strong cultural and religious identities, serving as important centers for local Muslim populations.¹⁸ Over time, these Zongos have become

¹⁷ The word is sometimes spelt as *zango*. For the sake of consistency, I will stick to the use of Zongo in this work.

¹⁸ Several pioneering works have been written on Zongos in Ghana, both in the past and contemporary times. Notable among these scholarly contributions are works by Deborah Pellow, *Landlords and Lodgers, Socio-Spatial Organization in an Accra Community*, (Westport, CT and London: Praeger Publisher, 2002); Enid Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo: The transformation of Ethnic Identities in Ghana*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), and Benedikt Pontzen, *Islam in a Zongo: Muslim Lifeworlds in Asante, Ghana*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Pellow's work examines Sabon Zongo in Accra, Schildkrout's is on Kumasi Zongo in Kumasi, and Pontzen's is on Kokote Zongo in Offinso, Kumasi. In addition, Ann Cassiman has conducted extensive anthropological research in Nima, another Zongo in Accra. Her works include “Browsers and Phone Girls: The Intricate Socialities of Friendship, Trust and Cyberlove in Nima (Accra)”, *Africa*, 8, 1, (2018): 72-89; “Fragments of Affinity: Photographic

religiously and ethnically diverse, incorporating groups from the Northern regions, as well as the Akan, Ewe, and Ga. Despite occasional conflicts and tensions, Madina has largely maintained a level of social harmony and coexistence among its religiously and ethnically diverse communities.

Materiality, Corporeality, and Sensual Relationships

I have previously emphasised that coexistence in Madina is not a passive phenomenon; rather, it is a relational and transactional process that unfolds at both individual and group levels. This process is shaped by interactions that involve both human and non-human entities, such as objects, animals, plants, and spirits, along with intricate human-object interactions. The historical evolution of urban spaces and coexistence in Madina is explored through the conceptual dimensions of materiality, corporality, and sensory relationships. This approach entails examining how everyday experiences, material elements, corporeal engagements, and sensory relationships in urban spaces converge to influence the dynamics of coexistence in Madina.

Birgit Meyer, a prominent advocate for the material and aesthetic study of religion, argues that scholars should transcend the immaterial and “mentalistic” approaches prevalent in religious studies. She critiques these approaches for being rooted in Western Protestant traditions that often rely on abstract theological concepts of the divine. Instead, Meyer advocates for a material approach that emphasises the significance of both material culture and the daily practices of religious adherents. Her work highlights the importance of understanding religion within its lived context.¹⁹ She posits that religion becomes tangible through the actions of individuals, their practices, and their interactions with objects, all of which are intertwined with power structures. Meyer views religion as “a practice of mediation through which a distance between the immanent and what lies ‘beyond’ it is posited and held to be bridged, albeit temporarily”.²⁰

Meyer further redefines the term “media”, not in its traditional sense, but to signify something that acts as a bridge across boundaries or constraints. She suggests that any physical object can be

Archives and the Material Performance of Personhood in a Zongo Community of Ghana”, *Journal of Material Culture*, 29, 3, (2024): 249–267; “Stitching Womanhood in the Zongo: Seamstress Apprenticeship in Accra”, *African Studies Review*, 65, 3, (2022): 642–668; and “Spiders on the World Wide Web: Cyber Trickery and Gender Fraud among Youth in an Accra Zongo”, *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 27, 3, (2019):486–500.

¹⁹ Birgit Meyer, “Mediation and the Genesis of Presence: Towards a Material Approach to Religion”, (Utrecht: Faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University, 2012); Birgit Meyer, “An Author Meets Her Critics: Around Birgit Meyer’s “Mediation and the Genesis of Presence: Toward a Material Approach to Religion”, *Religion and Society: Advances in Research*, 5, (2014) 205–254; Birgit Meyer, David Morgan, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate, “The origin and mission of Material Religion”, *Material Religion*, 40:3, (2010): 207–21; and also Ian Hodder (ed), *The Meanings of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression*, (London and NY: 2004).

²⁰ Meyer, “Mediation and the Genesis of Presence”, 2

adapted to serve as religious media, and this includes a wide range of items such as figurines, paintings, the human body, texts, images, incantations, language, and icons. According to Meyer, any item can assume the role of religious media, provided it has been sanctioned and validated within an established religious tradition.²¹ Additionally, she introduces the concept of “sensational form”, which refers to a “configuration of religious media, acts, imaginations, and bodily sensations within the context of a religious tradition or group”. This notion emphasises how various elements interact to create a sensory experience that shapes religious practice and understanding.²²

These configurations, often authorised and authenticated, play a crucial role in shaping personal and group identities while evoking experiences of divine presence, usually through routine performances or established formats. Sensational forms redefine religious mediation through bodily and sensory engagement. According to Meyer, these are formal procedures followed within a religious context that utilise material media to connect with or negotiate the invisible. Sensational forms can be understood as body techniques that enhance human senses through habitual practices designed to elicit specific feelings or intense emotions.²³

The mediation of the divine through materiality shifts focus from purely abstract theological concepts to the tangible practices and rituals of believers. This highlights the multifaceted nature of religious beliefs and practices, which can manifest differently across diverse cultural and social contexts. Therefore, it is essential to explore how individuals and communities interpret and engage with their faith within the complexities of their religious experiences. This exploration requires an understanding of the boundaries and constraints that influence the meaning-making process within religious practices. These boundaries not only delineate the parameters of belief but also shape how individuals and groups coexist in complex urban environments.²⁴

²¹ Meyer, “Mediation and the Genesis of Presence”, 24-26; Kim Knott, Volkhard Krech and Birgit Meyer, “Iconic Religion in Urban Space”, *Material Religion*, 12,2, (2016): 123-136; and also Patrick Eisenlohr, *Sounding Islam: Voice, Media, and Sonic Atmospheres in an Indian Ocean World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Patrick Eisenlohr, *What is a Medium?: The Anthropology of Media and the Question of Ethnic and Religious Pluralism*, (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2009).

²² Meyer, “Mediation and the Genesis of Presence”, 26.

²³ Meyer, “Mediation and the Genesis of Presence”, 26; Birgit Meyer, “Mediation and Immediacy: Sensational Forms, Semiotic Ideologies and the Question of the Medium”, *European Association of Social Anthropology*, 19, 1, (2011):23-39, Birgit Meyer, “Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism’s Sensational Forms”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 109:4, 2010:742-763.

²⁴ See works by for instance Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Matthew Engelke and Matt Tomlinson (eds.), *The Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity*, (NY and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007); Tanya Luhrmann, *How*

In shared urban spaces, the material dimension of religious encounters is closely intertwined with the corporal and sensory aspects of interactions among religious adherents. Sensory experiences—including touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell—play a crucial role in shaping cultures and identities. These experiences inform communication, rituals, daily life, and interactions with others.²⁵ In diverse urban settings like Madina, individuals from various backgrounds attribute distinct meanings to these sensory experiences, thereby underscoring the multi-layered nature of these urban environments.

Howes and Classen highlight the intricate connection between sensory perception and social structures, asserting that sensory experiences are not neutral but are deeply intertwined with the politics of everyday life. They argue that these experiences shape how societies are organized, controlled, and understood.²⁶ Also, Steven Feld offers insights into the interplay between our senses, culture, and the concept of place. He examines how sensory encounters—particularly through sound and music—affect our perceptions and emotional connections to specific locations. These encounters are crucial in shaping cultural diversity within a society.²⁷ Similarly, Brian Larkin illustrates how loudspeakers influence social interactions and cultural dynamics in Nigeria. He notes that loudspeakers function as tools of communication across various contexts, amplifying voices and creating soundscapes that shape public attentiveness and social behaviours. Larkin introduces the concept of “techniques of inattention” to suggest that the pervasive presence of loudspeakers results in auditory overload, which leads to selective listening and reduced public engagement. While loudspeakers can enhance communication, they can also obstruct meaningful social interactions due to the competition between various sounds and messages.²⁸

Therefore, paying attention to the material and corporeal dimensions of religion, as previously indicated, is essential for examining how religious encounters unfold in Madina’s urban spaces.

God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020); Tanya Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*, (New York: Knopf, 2012).

²⁵ David Howes, *Sensual Relations Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003).

²⁶ David Howe and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*, (London and NY: Routledge, 2014), 65-92

²⁷ Steven Feld, *Sense of Place*, (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1997). See also Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, 3rd edition, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012)

²⁸ Brian Larkin, “Techniques of Inattention: The Mediality of Loudspeakers in Nigeria”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 4, 2014: 989-1015.

This focus enables an exploration of how various elements—such as images, sounds, ritual languages, shrines, mosques, churches, attire, beards, food, and more—shape sensory relations and daily practices of coexistence. These elements shape religious diversity, expressions, and communal engagements that reflect the daily experiences and identities of Madina’s diverse residents.

Religious Encounters and the Question of Pluralism in Ghana: A Challenge

The concept of “encounter” fundamentally refers to an often unexpected or unplanned meeting between people, ideas, or forces. While it can signify a confrontation or difficult struggle, it can also simply refer to a coming together without conflict.²⁹ In the context of religious plurality, an “encounter” takes on a broader meaning, which involves interactions, meetings, or engagements between different religious traditions. These encounters may occur in various settings—academic spaces, interfaith dialogues, community events, or everyday social interactions within shared urban spaces. The term’s expansive and nuanced meanings in contemporary usage reflect the complexity of the phenomena explored in this dissertation.

Adopting a perspective that focuses on “encounters” between different individuals and groups reveals the multifaceted nature of religious interactions. Such an approach, though not entirely new, has proven valuable in understanding the dynamics of interreligious engagement. For instance, Talal Asad’s edited volume *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* uses the concept of “encounter” to emphasise the ambiguity of the relationship between anthropology and colonialism, illustrating how encounters can be charged with complexity and ambivalence.³⁰ Benjamin Soares asserts that since the 1990s, the notion of “encounter” has emerged as a central organising concept in academic studies, especially in African studies.³¹

²⁹ Benjamin F. Soares, “Introduction: Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa”, in edited by Benjamin F. Soares, *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006),3

³⁰ Talal Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, (London: Ithaca Press, 1973)

³¹ Soares, “Introduction”, 3. A number of works in this category include Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press,2002); Bianca Murillo, *Market Encounters: Consumer Cultures in Twentieth-Century Ghana*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017); Wale Adebawale (editor), *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa: Ethnographic Encounters*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2022); William C. Olsen and Walter E. A. van Beek (eds.), *Evil in Africa: Encounters with the Everyday*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2015); Maria Grosz-Ngate and Omari H. Kokole (eds), *Gendered Encounters: Challenging Cultural Boundaries and Social Hierarchies in Africa*, (New York: Routledge, 1997); Sean Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana: The Encounter between the LoDagaa and 'the World on Paper'*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Karen Tranberg Hansen (ed.), *African Encounters with Domesticity*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

This shift reflects a growing emphasis on understanding the dynamics of interaction, exchange, and engagement between different religious, cultural, and social groups. In particular, the focus on encounters allows scholars to explore how diverse identities and traditions come into contact, how boundaries are negotiated, and how these interactions shape social and religious landscapes. By framing “encounters” as a key analytical lens, this study emphasises the importance of examining both the cooperative and contentious aspects of these engagements within African urban contexts.

In this study, the complexity of encounters involves multiple religious traditions, including Islam, Christianity, and Ga Indigenous religions. Historically, as well as in contemporary times, interactions between adherents of these traditions have raised important questions about religious pluralism for the Ghanaian state, particularly in the post-independence era. The Ghanaian context, marked by an array of religious diversity, challenges the state to navigate the coexistence of these different traditions while maintaining social harmony.³² The encounters between these religious groups often unfold within shared urban spaces, where daily interactions reveal the underlying dynamics of religious pluralism and the state’s role in managing these relationships.

Despite constitutional directives and ongoing state efforts, religious pluralism in Ghana encounters challenges arising from debates and contestations regarding the interplay between the material, corporeal, and sensual aspects of religious practices. These challenges include conflicts and disputes over religious sounds, attire, images, spaces, architecture, and ritual performances.³³

³² This normative political idea of pluralism had been expressed earlier by Kwame Nkrumah in Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-colonization*, (London: Panaf Books, 1970), 70. These ideals are further reiterated in his other writings and speeches such as Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 66, 217; Kwame Nkrumah, “Address by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah at the 11th Party Congress at Kumasi on 28th July, 1962”, (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1962), 5. In this speech for instance, Nkrumah asserts that “Ours is a secular democratic state. We have no knowledge of inter-race tensions. We accept all colours, creeds and religions”. By this, he alludes to the questions of secularism, pluralism and non-discrimination in the country. To prevent any form of religious, ethnic or regional parochialism, he passed “The Avoidance of Discrimination Act (ADA)” in 1957, which specifically banned political parties established along these lines. The complex interplay between the pursuit of a secular state, religion, and pluralism during the Nkrumah era has been variously discussed by scholars such as Martin Odei Ajei (ed.), *Disentangling Consciencism: Essays on Kwame Nkrumah’s Philosophy*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), Ebenezer Obiri Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah. A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999).

³³ These subjects have been discussed by different researchers such as Justice A. Arthur, *The Politics of Religious Sounds: Conflict and the Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Ghana*, (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2017); Martin Luther Darko, “To Wear or Not to Wear: Contesting Hijab at the Pentecost Hospital in Madina”, *Material Religion*, 18,4, (2022): 494-495; M.H.A. Bolaji, “Secularism and State Neutrality: The 2015 Muslim Protest of Discrimination in the Public Schools in Ghana”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 48, (2018): 65-104; George M. Bob-Milliar and Karen Lauterbach, “The Politics of a National Cathedral in Ghana: A Symbol of a Corrupted Government, or Reaching Wakanda?”, *LSE Religion and Global Society Blog*, 2019; Timo Kallinen, “Independence Day in a Would-be

Diana L. Eck explains that pluralism involves more than just acknowledging diversity—it requires actively engaging with it. Pluralism seeks to move beyond mere tolerance by fostering understanding, respecting diverse commitments, and encouraging dialogue. It is about embracing inclusivity and cultivating relationships while allowing individuals to maintain their own identities and beliefs in a diverse society. Religious pluralism, in particular, refers to the coexistence of multiple religious beliefs, practices, and traditions within a community or society. It emphasises not only tolerance but also mutual understanding and respect for different faiths. Moreover, religious pluralism encourages open dialogue and cooperation between religious groups. It recognises the importance of both individual and collective freedom of religion and promotes peaceful and harmonious interactions across faith traditions.³⁴

The significance of fostering religious pluralism, as emphasised by Diana L. Eck, lies in recognising that while there is common ground between religious traditions, they are not all the same. Religious differences can often feel unsettling, and these differences may give rise to harmful stereotypes or negative attitudes toward those of other faiths.³⁵ From this perspective, religious pluralism, therefore, challenges individuals to reflect on how they relate to and engage with their neighbours of different religious backgrounds. It underscores the importance of respectful engagement and mutual understanding as crucial steps toward overcoming these potential tensions and promoting a more inclusive and harmonious society. By actively confronting these differences, religious pluralism encourages an environment of dialogue and respect, fostering peaceful coexistence in diverse communities.

Eck's explanation offers a normative concept of pluralism that envisions an ideal scenario of engagement and mutual respect among diverse religious traditions. However, this study does not begin with such a normative framework. Instead, it critically examines how pluralism is shaped by state policies and experienced by ordinary people. In Ghana, despite constitutional directives

Christian Nation: Agency and Morality in Ghanaian Debates over Public Rituals”, *Approaching Religion*, 12, 3, (2022): 32-47.

³⁴ Diana L. Eck, “What is Pluralism”, https://rootandbranches.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/03/eck_what_is_pluralism_2.pdf, (accessed on 24th August, 2023); Diana L. Eck, “Forward”, in edited by Barbara A. McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola, *Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Spiritual Politics on America's Sacred Ground*, (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005), ix-xv; Jan-Jonathan Bock and John Fahy, “Emergent Religious Pluralisms: Ideals and Realities in a Changing World”, in edited by Jan-Jonathan Bock, John Fahy, and Samuel Everett, *Emergent Religious Pluralisms*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave McMillan, 2019), 1-19

³⁵ Eck, “Forward”, xii

promoting religious pluralism, the reality is often different on the ground. Traditional religious practices, for instance, are frequently marginalised and relegated to the domain of “culture”, and thus operate on the periphery of the broader religious landscape. Similarly, Muslims face challenges in practising their faith fully, as evidenced by ongoing debates around the wearing of hijabs in certain contexts. These examples highlight the complexities and contestations that arise in lived religious experiences, contrasting with the idealised notion of pluralism.

Although Ghana’s 1992 Constitution strongly advocates for freedom, cultural rights, and social integration, these principles often remain more theoretical than practical. For example, Article 21(1) guarantees “freedom of thought, conscience, and belief”, as well as the right to practice religion and assemble freely. Article 26 reinforces the right of individuals to enjoy and promote their culture, language, tradition, or religion while prohibiting practices that harm others. Chapter Six, “The Directive Principles of State Policy”, specifically Articles 35 (sections 4 and 5), underscores the State’s responsibility to respect human rights, uphold the dignity, and foster social integration while preventing discrimination based on factors like religion.³⁶ Despite these constitutional ideals and continued state efforts, religious pluralism in Ghana is frequently tested by debates and contestations related to the material, corporeal, and sensory dimensions of religious practices. These dynamics, as discussed earlier, illustrate the complex challenges in implementing a vision of religious diversity (including sexuality) and coexistence that aligns with constitutional promises.

The “politicisation of religion and the religionisation of politics” in Ghana complicate the attainment of genuine religious pluralism.³⁷ This dynamic indicates that certain religious traditions may be privileged over others, reflecting how religious pluralism is politically constructed, regulated, and often manipulated to serve political agendas. Since independence, the intertwining of religion and politics has profoundly shaped the nation’s development, with religion being strategically employed by politicians to maintain traditional loyalties and wield influence over

³⁶ Republic of Ghana, *1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana*, (Accra: Assembly Press, 1992), 23, 27 and 35.

³⁷ This phrase is attributable to Dr Johnson A. Mbillah, a senior member on the Madina Project. It has also been used by Carolina Ivanescu in “Politicised Religion and the Religionisation of Politics”, *Culture and Religion*, Vol. 11, 4, (2010):309-325. Detailed discussions on the subject have been done by for instance Seth Tweneboah, *Religion, Law, Politics and the State in Africa: Applying Legal Pluralism in Ghana*, (London and NY: Routledge, 2020); Abamfo O. Atiemu, “International Human Rights, Religious Pluralism and the Future of Chieftaincy in Ghana”, *Exchange*, 35, 4, (2006):360-382; Ebenezer Obiri Addo, “Religion and Politics in Africa: An Assessment of Kwame Nkrumah’s Legacy for Ghana”, in edited by Nimi Wariboko and Toyin Falola, *The Palgrave Handbook of African Social Ethics*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 185-201; Jeffrey Haynes, *Religion and Liberal Democracy in the Fourth Republic*, (Accra: Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 2025).

people's identities and allegiances.³⁸ Recently, scholars have begun to interpret this ambiguity within the context of Christian nationalism, especially regarding the debates on sexuality and the National Cathedral project.³⁹ In this context, religion is not just a private or spiritual matter but also a potent political tool. It is often instrumentalised to mobilize support and maintain power, thus influencing how communities relate to one another, and shaping how religious identities are negotiated and expressed. These factors have significant implications for religious coexistence at the local level, particularly in Madina, where religious traditions intersect in shared urban spaces. At this point, the delicate balance between religious practices and political manipulation often determines the nature of interreligious encounters, as well as the broader framework of coexistence.

The distinction between the normative concept of pluralism and the reality on the ground is crucial in understanding religious coexistence in Madina. While pluralism is often understood as a prescriptive framework that organises how different religions relate to each other, it tends to be a top-down concept shaped by political ideals and policies. In contrast, this study seeks to examine how religious adherents in Madina practically relate to each other beyond these political prescriptions, by concentrating on everyday encounters in shared urban spaces. In this regard, the concept of plurality offers a more neutral and flexible framework.

Plurality goes beyond the prescriptive values of pluralism by recognising the lived reality of diverse religious traditions interacting without the expectation of conformity to an overarching normative ideal. It encourages relationality and comparison beyond the rigid boundaries of institutionalised religious categories. Through this lens, the study aims to capture the complexity of religious interactions in Madina, by focusing on the fluid and dynamic nature of these encounters rather than the rigid structures imposed by normative pluralism.

Plurality and Secularities: On the Value of Relationality

The concept of religious pluralism, often used to address religious diversity, frequently intersects with secularism and modernity. These three ideas are typically understood in a normative

³⁸ The use of religion and history as a political strategy has been discussed for example by Basil Davidson, *Black Star: A View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah*, (London: James Currey, 1973), 118-119; Addo, "Religion and Politics in Africa"; Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah*; John S. Pobee, *Kwame Nkrumah and the Church in Ghana: 1949 – 1966*, (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1988), "Religion and Politics in Ghana, 1972-1978: Some Case Studies from the Rule of General I.K. Acheampong", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 17,1, (1987): 44-62; and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "God Bless our Homeland Ghana": Religion and Politics in a Post-Colonial African State", in edited by Cephas N. Omenyo and Eric B. Anum, *Trajectories of Religion in Africa*, (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), 165-183.

³⁹ Jeffrey Haynes, "Christian Nationalism and Politics in Ghana", *Religions*, 14, 1202, (2023):1-23.

framework. To prevent the universalisation or normative interpretation of pluralism, secularism, and modernity in the context of Madina (Ghana) and broader West Africa, it is crucial to adopt a conceptual category that accurately reflects local realities. Instead, this study adopts the concept of “multiple modernities”, as coined by Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt. He emphasises that each society interprets and incorporates modern elements in its own way, influenced by its distinct historical and cultural contexts.⁴⁰ This means that modernity varies across countries and regions, with no single, uniform version of modernity. Similarly, Peter L. Berger argues that modernisation does not necessarily result in the decline of religion but rather encourages the rise of “two pluralisms”. The first is the coexistence of various religious options within a society, which aligns with the traditional notion of pluralism. The second is the coexistence of secular discourse alongside different religious discourses within the societal structure—an essential element of modern society.⁴¹ Charles Taylor refers to this second form as “secular forms”.⁴²

The concepts of “multiple modernities” and “multiple secularisms” help avoid epistemic or “cognitive injustice”, as discussed by De Sousa Santos, and the “provincializing of Europe” noted by Chakrabarty.⁴³ To achieve this, we must adopt an approach of “studying religion in Africa from Africa,” as advocated by, for instance, Birgit Meyer.⁴⁴ Valentin-Yves Mudimbe highlights how Eurocentric methodologies and epistemologies consistently cast Africa as an epistemic category

⁴⁰ Shmuel Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities*, (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁴¹ Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*, (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), ix, 53-54, 89-93; Peter L. Berger, “Urbanity as a Vortex of Pluralism: A Personal Reflection about City and Religion”, in edited by Helmuth Berking, Silke Steets, and Jochen Schwenk, *Religious Pluralism and the City: Inquiries into Postsecular Urbanism*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 27-35. See also Marian Burchardt, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, and Matthias Middell (eds), *Secularities Beyond the West: Religion and Modernity in the Global Age*, (Boston and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Inc., 2015), 1-18

⁴² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 179-180. Citing Charles Taylor’s work Peter Berger renders it as “secular frame”. See Berger, “Urbanity as a Vortex of Pluralism”, 29

⁴³ De Sousa Santos discusses the notions of epistemic or “cognitive injustice” in several of his works including Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018); *Decolonising the University: The Challenge of Deep Cognitive Justice*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017); *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, (London and New: Verso, 2008). On the subject of “provincializing of Europe” by Chakrabarty, see for example Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁴⁴ Birgit Meyer, “What Is Religion in Africa? Relational Dynamics in an Entangled World”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 50, (2020): 156–181.

in what James Ferguson metaphorically describes as “global shadows”.⁴⁵ More recently, Matthew Engelke has echoed this concern in his “Secular Shadows” critique by pointing out Africa’s marginalisation in the global secularism discourse. Engelke challenges scholars to ask, “Where is Africa in our analyses and understandings of the secular?” He argues that African scholars must engage and challenge broader debates in the social sciences and humanities on secularism to ensure African perspectives are integrated.⁴⁶ This engagement enriches and broadens global understandings of secularism.

This study thus examines religious diversity and coexistence in Madina through the lens of “multiple modernities” and “multiple secularities” as discussed by Shmuel Eisenstadt and Peter L. Berger. It calls for methodological, theoretical, conceptual, and pedagogical frameworks that challenge Eurocentric epistemic pomposity and dominance in African studies, particularly in the context of religious coexistence. Rather than relying on normative and prescriptive categories, adopting a concept that embraces relationality and comparison beyond rigid religious frameworks is crucial.⁴⁷ In this context, Eva Spies and Rüdiger Sesemann propose the concept of *plurality*, emphasising that relationality underpins religious distinctions.

Spies and Sesemann describe *plurality* as a descriptive concept that reflects the plural and diverse nature of the world. It serves as an analytical tool which acknowledges that everything and everyone is constituted relationally. Unlike plurality or pluralism, *plurality* suggests a “rhizomatic tout-monde”, characterised by the coexistence of diverse cultural expressions and ways of being, interconnected through multiple layers of relations within a global context. Plurality encompasses both a condition and a process, accessible through empirical methods, and extends beyond being a mere metaphor for diversity; it represents a fundamental and relational aspect of global existence. *Plurality*, therefore, signifies both a condition and a process,

⁴⁵ V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); James Ferguson, *Global Shadow: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴⁶ Engelke, Matthew, “Secular Shadows: African, Immanent, Post-colonial”, *Critical Research on Religion*, 3,1, (2015):1-2

⁴⁷ For instance, James Ferguson critiques the prescriptive practices and ideologies of international development projects in Africa, arguing that they often fail to meet their objectives. Instead of promoting genuine development, these projects typically expand bureaucratic institutions and reinforce existing power structures. Ferguson’s critique parallels issues in other fields, such as religious studies, where similar prescriptive approaches and knowledge production can also hinder understanding and genuine coexistence. For a detailed discussion see James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development,' Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, (Minneapolis and London: University Minnesota Press, 1996).

accessible through empirical methods. It transcends the notion of being merely a metaphor for diversity, embodying a fundamental and relational aspect of global existence.⁴⁸

In essence, plurality signifies multiplicity, processes, and relationships, grounded in the fundamental assumption that humans and their lifeworlds are constituted relationally, existing and evolving through relationships. A relational perspective views all phenomena—humans, bodies, objects, concepts, knowledge, nonhuman beings, and both material and imagined worlds—not as static substances but as entities that emerge and change through these relationships.⁴⁹ Lifeworlds and human actors are shaped by their relationships with various entities, including interactions with other humans (both the living and the dead), land, houses, tombs, and family histories, as observed in the Malagasy highlands. These relationships also extend to nonhuman beings, such as demons and the Holy Spirit, particularly within Pentecostal contexts.⁵⁰

Relationships occur in time and space and vary in concreteness depending on the observer's position. They can be imagined, affective, physical, or logical. Importantly, these relations may exist in the present, future, or past, often intersecting across these temporal scales. Relations are further conceptualised as multidirectional and multi-layered, allowing different modes of relating to coexist simultaneously. These modes include inclusion, cooperation, dependence, friction, rejection, or denial. In cases of rejection or denial, relating encompasses powerful processes of exclusion, disconnection, abandonment, and disavowal, which can be understood as “relations of absence” or more broadly as “nonrelations”.⁵¹

The concept of *plurality* enables an understanding of the modes of relationality among coexisting phenomena and structures. These modes can range from resistance, opposition, and rejection to convergence, parallelism, acceptance, and appropriation. The advantage of employing plurality and relationality as analytical tools lies in their ability to transcend forms of creolisation or normative ideas of pluralism, accommodating a full spectrum of options, including associated power structures, constraints, and inequalities.⁵² To apply the concept of *plurality* in understanding everyday practices and modes of coexistence in Ghana, particularly in Madina and,

⁴⁸ Eva Spies and Rudiger Seesemann, “Plurality and Relationality: New Direction in African Studies”, *African Today*, 63, 2, (2019): 135-136

⁴⁹ Eva Spies, “Being in Relation: A Critical Appraisal of Religious Diversity and Mission Encounter in Madagascar”, *Journal of Africana Religions*, 7, 1, (2019): 67

⁵⁰ Spies, “Being in Relation”, 68

⁵¹ Spies, “Being in Relation”, 68

⁵² Spies and Seesemann, “Plurality and Relationality”, 136

by extension, West Africa, it is essential to move beyond traditional religious spaces like churches, mosques, or shrines. While these sites are public and relationally constituted, they are confined to specific religious traditions, limiting the understanding of complex encounters and diversity. A deeper insight into these complexities can be gained by focusing more on common grounds such as marketplaces, lorry parks, or football parks, where diverse individuals and activities interact relationally. This relational approach also necessitates comparative analysis.

Studying Coexistence: Historical Trajectories, Relational and Comparative Values

Theoretically, coexistence involves different groups living together, more or less peacefully, characterised by mutual tolerance and respect. Its essence extends beyond mere accommodation to encompass economic and political equality, grounded in a shared understanding of justice and injustice.⁵³ The historical narrative of religious diversity and coexistence in West Africa is intricate and shaped by various historical, social, political, and cultural factors. Since the seventh century, the region has embraced a wide array of beliefs, including indigenous African religions, Islam, Christianity, and mixed or blended religious traditions.⁵⁴ Interactions among these religions have been marked by diversity, featuring collaboration and cultural borrowings alongside tensions and conflicts at various times and in different contexts.

The traditional approach to studying interreligious encounters in West Africa, dating back to the colonial era, primarily focused on the influence of Western Christianity and Arab Islam in the

⁵³ See discussion by for instance, Louis Kriesberg, “Changing Forms of Coexistence”, In: edited by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 47-66

⁵⁴ The primary religion in the region before the advent of Islam and Christianity was made up of various African indigenous religions, which were based on familial, ethnic, or territorial affiliations. The presence of Islam in West Africa can be traced back to the medieval period, beginning in the 7th century. It was introduced through trade routes that crossed the Sahara Desert, linking North Africa and the Sahel region. Over time, Islam became deeply integrated into the cultural and social fabric of West African societies, contributing to the establishment of significant Islamic empires and urban centers, such as the Mali Empire and Sokoto Caliphate. Christianity, in contrast, was introduced to West Africa and gained substantial traction during European imperialism, which began with the slave trade in the late fifteenth century and continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Various European nations, including the Portuguese, French, British, and Spanish, facilitated the spread of Christianity through their colonial outposts and missionary initiatives among the diverse communities of West Africa. For detailed histories on Islam and Christianity, as well as their syncretic blends with African Indigenous Religions, please see for example Nehemiah Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa : A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Nehemiah Levtzion (Editor), *Conversions to Islam*, (NY and London: Holmes and Meiers Publishers, 1979), 207-246; Robert M. Baum, “Historical Perspectives on West African Christianity”, in Elias Kifon Bongmba (Editor), *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, (NY and London: Routledge, 2016), 79-91; Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*, (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1999); Pashington Obeng, “Religious Interactions in Pre-Twentieth Century West Africa”, in edited by Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, *Themes in West African History*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 141-162; and Corey L. Williams, “Chrislam, Accommodation, and the Politics of Religious Bricolage in Nigeria”, *Studies in World Christianity*, 25, (2018):5–28.

region.⁵⁵ These studies often took a polemical stance, assessing the cultural compatibility and developmental impacts of these religions, reflecting broader European and Arab influences. They treated religions as bounded categories, overlooking instances of coexistence and failing to account for the region's actual religious diversity.⁵⁶ In contrast, this study shifts focus to contemporary encounters and their relational dynamics in the post-independence era. It aims to understand how religious adherents interact and coexist in modern West Africa, moving beyond colonial-era polemical frameworks to explore the complexities of these interactions from a non-Eurocentric perspective.

In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many studies on Christian-Muslim relations in Africa have continued to focus on crisis narratives.⁵⁷ Conflicts involving Islamic groups and Muslim minorities in the US and Europe are often seen as evidence of a clash between Western and Islamic civilisations. This perception is then uncritically applied to African contexts, reducing Africa to a data source that must align with European and North American theories.⁵⁸ Such

⁵⁵ Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, "Interrogating the Approaches of Christian-Muslim Encounters in West Africa", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 51, 3, (2016): 368.

⁵⁶ Studies in this category include works by Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 2013), 1st and 2nd Prefaces, 13-26; I.M. Lewis (Editor), *Islam in Tropical Africa*, (London and NY: Routledge, 2017), vii, 20-75; John A. Azumah, *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa: A Quest for Inter-religious Dialogue*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2014); and Anson P. Atterbury, *Islam in Africa: Its Effects-Religious, Ethical, And Social-Upon the People of the Country*, (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press and G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899). The continuous influence of the historical/traditional approach as discussed earlier produce what Mbillah calls "inherited discourses" of each other which create negative perception and mutual suspicion rather than cooperation. See for example Johnson A. Mbillah, "Inter-Faith Relations and the Quest for Peace in Africa", in edited by Klaus Hock, *The Interface Between Research and Dialogue: Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa*, (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2004), 66-79.

⁵⁷ These studies can be termed as alarmist. For earlier studies the Ghanaian and other African contexts see for instance Johnson Apenad Mbillah, "The Causes of Present Day Muslim Unrest in Ghana," Ph.D Thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham, 1999; ⁵⁷ Nathan Iddrisu Samwini, "The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relation", Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham, 2003; Emmanuel Kwesi Aning and Mustapha Abdallah, "Islamic Radicalisation and Violence in Ghana", in edited by James Gow, Funmi Olonisakin and Ernst Dijxhoorn, *Militancy and Violence in West Africa: Religion, Politics and Radicalisation*, (London and NY: Routledge, 2013), 134-174; Elorm Dovlo, and A.O. Asante, "Reinterpreting the Straight Path. Ghanaian Muslim Converts in Mission to Muslims", *Exchange*, 32, 3, (2003): 214-238; Peter Knoope and Grégory Chauzal, *Beneath the Apparent State of Affairs: Stability in Ghana and Benin*, (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2016); and Denise Brégand, "Muslim Reformists and the State in Benin" in Benjamin F. Soares and René Otayek (eds.), *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*, (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 121-136.

⁵⁸ Insa Nolte, Olukoya Ogen, and Rebecca Jones (eds.), *Beyond Religious Tolerance: Muslim, Christian and Traditionalist Encounters in an African Town*, (Suffolk and Rochester: James Currey 2017), 1-2. For instance, Martha Frederiks critiques the methodological approaches used in studying Muslim-Christian relations in Africa. Frederiks (2010:262) states that "Whiles the topic 'current trends in Christian-Muslim relations in Africa' might seem to be self-evident, the question needs to be asked: which Christians, which Muslims and which Africa are we talking about?". For further reading see Martha T. Frederiks, "Let Us Understand Our Differences: Current Trends in Christian-Muslim Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Transformation*, 27,4, (2010): 261-274

narratives are heavily influenced by scholars like Samuel Huntington, whose “Clash of Civilizations” theory.⁵⁹ However, it has been widely criticised, particularly for its relevance to Africa. Critics have labelled it as “irrelevant”, “the clash of ignorance”, and “the myth of the clash of civilizations”.⁶⁰ While Muslim-Christian conflicts do occur in Africa, not all violence is rooted in religious differences.⁶¹ In highly religious societies, these differences do not always lead to conflict. Many African regions demonstrate peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians without large-scale violence.⁶² Thus, while it is important to study religious conflict in Africa, it is equally vital to explore contexts where different religious groups coexist peacefully.

Benjamin Soares critiques the focus on conflict-driven narratives in studies of Muslim-Christian relations in Africa, emphasising that such an approach overlooks the rich and varied interactions that have occurred between these religious communities over time. By assuming fixed religious boundaries and static social orders, many of these studies fail to capture the fluid nature of religious identity and practice in African contexts. In regions where Muslims and Christians coexist, the interactions often involve dynamic exchanges, such as conversion, rejection, borrowing, and appropriation of each other’s practices, rather than mere tolerance.⁶³ This challenges the simplistic notion of religious tolerance and highlights the complexity of interreligious engagements.

Soares therefore advocates for a comparative study of religions that goes beyond treating them as isolated or rigid systems. His argument aligns with Ali Mazrui’s concept of Africa’s *Triple*

⁵⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); “If Not Civilizations, What? Paradigms of the Post-Cold War World”, *Foreign Affairs*, 72, 5, (1993):186-194.

⁶⁰ John Voll, “African Muslims and Christians in World History: The Irrelevance of the “Clash Of Civilizations”, in edited by Soares, *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, 17-38; Edward W. Said, “The Clash of Ignorance”, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/clash-ignorance/>. Accessed:16/07/2024; Chiara Bottici and Benoit Challand, *The Myth of the Clash of Civilization*, (London: Routledge, 2012), and also Fouad Ajami, “The Summoning: ‘But They Said, We Will Not Harken’”, *Foreign Affairs*, 72, 4, (1993), 2-9. Riley Quinn explores the diverse reactions and criticisms of the book in detail in *Samuel P. Huntington’s The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (London: Routledge/ Macat International Ltd, 2017).

⁶¹ Some of the factors influencing these tensions include institutional changes in response to social shifts and political influences, which do not directly affect Muslim-Christian relations. For detailed studies see for example Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Akintunde E. Akinade, *Christian Responses to Islam in Nigeria: A Contextual Study of Ambivalent Encounters*, (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Isidore U.C. Nwanaju, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria. A Historical-Theological Reflection upon Mutual Coexistence of Christians and Muslims*, (Nijmegen: Katholieke Universiteit, 2004).

⁶² Nolte, Ogen, and Jones, *Beyond Religious Tolerance*, 1-2

⁶³ Soares, *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, 1-3. For additional critique and reflections on methodological and theoretical approaches to the subject, see Benjamin Soares, “Reflections on Muslim–Christian Encounters in West Africa”, *Africa*, 86,4, (2016): 673–97.

Heritage, which explores the intricate interplay of African, Islamic, and Western cultural and religious influences. Both Soares and Mazrui stress that Africa's religious landscape is one of negotiation, adaptation, and coexistence, where peaceful competition and mutual influence shape the religious and cultural dynamics across the continent. This perspective broadens the understanding of religious coexistence in Africa, moving beyond conflict-centric narratives to emphasise the everyday realities of interreligious interaction.⁶⁴

Following Benjamin Soares's call for more comparative studies, Brian Larkin and Birgit Meyer explored the dynamics between Pentecostal and reformist Islamic groups in Ghana and Nigeria. They introduced the concept of "image mirroring" to describe how these religious traditions, often seen as adversaries, reflect each other in their practices and actions. Rather than focusing solely on conflict or antagonism, Larkin and Meyer emphasised the striking similarities in the ways these two religious groups mediate their faith through comparable forms, rituals, and practices. This innovative comparative framework highlights the shared strategies used by both Pentecostal and Islamic reformist movements, despite their theological differences.⁶⁵

Since their study, numerous scholars have adopted and expanded on this approach to examine how different religious traditions engage with each other.⁶⁶ This process of appropriating and replicating practices across religious boundaries, often with creative adaptations, can be understood through the lens of "imitation" as discussed by sociologist Gabriel Tarde. Tarde's concept of "imitation" highlights how ideas and behaviours are transmitted and reproduced across social and religious groups. In this context, it captures the ways religious groups in West Africa borrow, modify, and innovate upon each other's practices, contributing to the dynamic and interconnected nature of religious life in the region.⁶⁷ This study conceptualises these modes as techniques of coexistence in a Mausean sense.⁶⁸ However, it extends beyond the notions of imitation and appropriation to explore the diverse daily practices (or techniques) that actively shape coexistence in urban spaces.

⁶⁴ Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1986).

⁶⁵ Brian Larkin and Birgit Meyer, "Pentecostalism, Islam, and Culture: New Religious Movements in West Africa", in: edited by Akyeampong, *Themes in West Africa's History*, 286-312.

⁶⁶ These works include Marloes Janson and A. Janson and Akintunde Akinleye, "The Spiritual Highway: Religious World Making in Megacity Lagos (Nigeria)", *Material Religion*, 11:4, 2016: 550-562. There have also been several studies on the Islamic group NASFAT (Nasrul-Fatih Society of Nigeria) in this regard.

⁶⁷ Gabriel Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1903)

⁶⁸ See Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the body", *Economy and Society*, 2:1, (1973): 70-88

Marloes Janson's exploration of the religious landscape in Lagos, Nigeria, provides a rich account of how Islam, Christianity, and Yoruba religion intersect and influence each other in this urban environment. Her study underscores the fluidity of religious boundaries, illustrating how individuals and communities in Lagos frequently engage in "religious shopping" where they participate in practices from multiple religious traditions. This phenomenon of syncretism is a practical and adaptive response to the complexities of urban life, where diverse religious traditions coexist and offer different forms of spiritual and material support.⁶⁹

Janson also highlights that religious syncretism in Lagos is not just a blending of beliefs but a lived reality that manifests in rituals, festivals, and daily practices. She provides examples of people who navigate between religious systems, choosing aspects that best suit their needs at any given moment. For instance, someone might attend a Christian church for a healing service, participate in an Islamic prayer session, and consult a Yoruba priest for protection or divination. This syncretic engagement challenges the notion of fixed religious identities, showing that in cities like Lagos, religious pluralism is fluid and pragmatic, shaped by the demands of modern urban life.⁷⁰ She further indicates that religious groups in Lagos compete and cooperate for urban spaces, reflecting broader socio-political and economic dynamics. Her work challenges rigid religious categorisations by emphasising the fluid, adaptive nature of religious practices in the city, where boundaries are blurred and identities are continuously negotiated.⁷¹

Similarly, the edited volume, *Beyond Religious Tolerance*, examines the intricate coexistence of Muslims, Christians, and traditionalists in Ede, southwestern Nigeria. It highlights how these groups interact and negotiate religious differences that move beyond mere tolerance to forms of collaboration, mutual respect, and shared practices. The book emphasises the complex, dynamic nature of religious coexistence in African contexts.⁷² Also, J. D. Y. Peel offers important insights

⁶⁹ Marloes Janson, *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Islam, Christianity, and 'Yoruba Religion' in Lagos, Nigeria*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1-14, 184-192. Detailed discussion of the concept of religious "religious shopping" is done by Barbara Rohregger, "Church Shopping" in Malawi: Acquiring Multiple Resources in Urban Christian Networks", In: edited by Carolin Leutloff-Grandits, Anja Peleikis, and Tatjana Thelen, *Social Security in Religious Networks: Anthropological Perspectives on New Risks and Ambivalences*, (New York: Berghahn Books), 146-63.

⁷⁰ Marloes Janson, "Unity through Diversity: A Case Study of Chrislam in Lagos", *Africa* 86, 4, (2016): 646-72.

⁷¹ Janson, *Religion Crossing Boundaries*.

⁷² Nolte, Ogen, and Jones, *Beyond Religious Tolerance*. There is also an earlier work on the same subject in Ede by Insa Nolte, Rebecca Jones, Khadijeh Taiyari, and Giovanni Occhiali, "Research note: Exploring Survey Data for Historical and Anthropological Research: Muslim-Christian Relations in South-West Nigeria", *African Affairs*, 115, 460, (2016): 541-561.

into religious coexistence among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. Through a comparative and historical approach, he examines the interactions between Christianity, Islam, and Orisa-Religion. Peel explores the dynamics of syncretism, where elements of these religions blend, as well as cases of competition and conflict, revealing how these traditions influence and respond to each other across different contexts.⁷³ In the Ghanaian context, Sarbah and Acquah have respectively explored similar interreligious phenomena, particularly in the Central Region. Their works focus on how African Indigenous religions serve as mediators, playing a crucial role in bridging and facilitating interreligious relations between different religious communities. This highlights the integrative role of indigenous belief systems in fostering coexistence among various faith traditions in Ghana.⁷⁴

The above studies indicate the need for a recalibration of methodologies and frameworks for studying religious encounters in plural settings.⁷⁵ Hence, relational approaches offer a more nuanced analysis of the lived experiences of religious adherents, moving beyond traditional methodologies like interfaith dialogues, which are often criticised for being elitist and overlooking the everyday realities of ordinary people.⁷⁶ These studies also emphasise the importance of comparison in understanding coexistence, as it highlights the complexities and subtleties inherent in cultural and social phenomena.⁷⁷ These complexities of everyday religious encounters—such as pollution, ritual performances, and socio-spatial (re)ordering—offer critical insights into religious coexistence. By incorporating these dimensions, the study of religious interactions moves beyond

⁷³ John D.Y. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016). Peel had earlier explored this theme in his *Religious Encounters and the Making of the Yoruba*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).

⁷⁴ Cosmas C.J.E. Sarbah, “A Critical Study of Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana in the Central Region of Ghana. With Special Reference to Traditional Akan Values”, PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2010; Francis Acquah, “The Impact of African Traditional Religious Beliefs and Cultural Values on Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana from 1920 through the Present: A Case Study of Nkusukum-Ekumfi-Enyan Area of the Central Region. PhD Thesis, University of Exeter, 2011. A similar discussion is made by Elizabeth Amoah, “African Indigenous Religions and Interreligious Relationships”, paper presented at Westminster College, Oxford, autumnal IIC2 lecture, October 22, 1998. <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/3224/3224.pdf>. Accessed on 3rd October, 2023.

⁷⁵ See discussions on the subject by scholars in the special volume edited by Marloes Janson and Birgit Meyer, “Studying Islam and Christianity in Africa: Moving Beyond a Bifurcated Field”, *Africa*, 86,4, (2016):615-697; and also Benjamin F. Soares, “Notes on the Anthropological Study of Islam and Muslim Societies in Africa”, *Culture & Religion*, 1, 2, (2008): 277–85.

⁷⁶ Discussions include works by Martha T. Frederiks, *‘We have toiled all Night’: Christianity in The Gambia 1456-2000*, (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003); Benjamin F. Soares, “Reflections On Muslim-Christian Encounters in West Africa”, *Africa*, 86,4, (2016): 673–97; Akintunde E. Akinade, *Christian Responses to Islam in Nigeria: A Contextual Study Of Ambivalent Encounters*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); and Thomas Albert Howard, *The Faith of the Other: A History of Interreligious Dialogue*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021).

⁷⁷ Peter van der Veer, *The Value of Comparison*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 2-21

elite dialogues, formal interactions, and theological debates. Instead, it emphasises the lived experiences and everyday realities of ordinary people. This relational approach provides a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how diverse religious groups interact and navigate shared spaces in their daily lives, thus highlighting the importance of context and human experience in interreligious dynamics.

Lived religion emphasises how religious beliefs and practices are integrated into everyday life, moving beyond institutional or abstract theological understandings. It focuses on how religion is experienced through daily routines, personal interactions, and community dynamics, all within specific social, cultural, and historical contexts.⁷⁸ This approach also reveals how lived religion interacts with political issues of tolerance and intolerance, offering valuable insights into social inclusion and exclusion. By focusing on lived experiences, the study provides a more grounded understanding of religion's role in shaping and being shaped by, the political landscape.⁷⁹

Lived Religion, Pollution and Daily Ritual Performances in Urban Spaces

Urban spaces serve as critical sites for diverse encounters, but they also experience various forms of pollution and contamination due to complex social interactions. These issues can lead to denunciations, scapegoating, social instability, and heightened perceptions of risk, thereby challenging social cohesion. To address these challenges and foster coexistence, ritual performances and socio-spatial (re)ordering become vital.⁸⁰ Rituals play a central role in expressing religious identities and managing differences. The way rituals are performed and their meanings can reveal much about the dynamics of religious coexistence.⁸¹ These dynamics influence how ritual performances shape and are influenced by social and spatial arrangements.

⁷⁸ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion: Context and Practice*, (New York: New York University Press, 2021); Nancy T. Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, (Oxford and NY: Oxford University Press, 2006); Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Birgit Meyer on the notion of “mentalistic approaches” to the study of religion in: “An Author Meets her Critics”, 208-235. Other relevant studies on lived religion include Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, (Durham: Yale University, 2010); *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

⁷⁹ R. Ruud Ganzevoort and Srdjan Sremac (eds.), *Lived Religion and the Politics of (In) Tolerance*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁸⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005/1984); Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994)

⁸¹ Max Gluckman (ed.), *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966).

Consequently, lived religious encounters and diverse ritual interactions in urban settings have significant implications for social cohesion and conflict. They determine how religious groups claim and contest public spaces, and how these spaces are regulated by both secular and religious authorities. This regulation of religious differences not only affects community interactions but also informs urban planning and policies, thereby impacting the spatial distribution of religious communities.

Rituals function as mediums for connecting with other-than-humans, emphasising that the world extends beyond human interests.⁸² In urban spaces, these rituals intertwine with economic, political, cultural, and social dynamics. For example, Soares introduces the concept of “prayer economy”, which refers to the exchange of spiritual services such as prayers, blessings, and guidance for material goods, money, or social capital. This concept indicates how such ritual exchanges shape social structures, religious authority, and community interactions.⁸³ Rituals play a crucial role in negotiating and maintaining religious authorities and boundaries, which are often linked to broader social status and political power. Therefore, within interreligious contexts, the practices, authorities, and boundaries of rituals are continuously navigated and renegotiated, reflecting the dynamic interplay between religious identities and social structures.⁸⁴

Ritual performances can both provoke and mediate conflict, often stemming from concerns about pollution, contamination, ritual contestations, noise nuisances, and related human rights discussions.⁸⁵ As significant sites for interreligious encounters, rituals enable adherents of

⁸² Frederique Apffel-Marglin, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011),6

⁸³ Benjamin F. Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town*, (London: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), see esp. 127-209. Also, Simone describes marabouts (akin to itinerant preachers) in African cities as having the ability to fix many things. They usually belong to an extensive network of economic and political connections that have significant reach, facilitating economic opportunities. See for example Simone, *For the City Yet to Come*,41-44

⁸⁴ Marianne Moyaert, *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries: Explorations in Interrituality*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). Moyaert introduces the concept of “interrituality” to describe the dynamic and often fluid interactions between different religious rituals. This concept challenges the notion of rigid and fixed ritual boundaries, suggesting instead that these boundaries are constantly negotiated and redefined.

⁸⁵ For example, encounters between Charismatic Christians and other religious traditions have led to Pentecostal-Charismatic discourses such as “demonization” or “diabolisation” and Pentecostal “political spiritualities”. These discourses advocate for a “complete break with the past”, as well as Pentecostal cleansing and “territorialisation” of urban public spaces. Relevant studies in this area include, but are not limited to, those examining these dynamic interactions. See for example Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil*; Birgit Meyer, “Make a Complete Break with the Past”: Memory and Postcolonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*,28, 3, (1998): 316-349; Rosalind Hackett, “Discourses of Demonization in Africa and Beyond”, *Diogenes* 50, 3,(2003): 61–75; Ebenezer Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria*, (London: Zed Books, 2018); Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*, (Chicago and London:

different faiths to engage with each other's practices. These interactions can lead to conflict or cooperation, shaping how religious communities perceive and interact with one another.⁸⁶ Therefore, examining these ritualistic encounters offers valuable insights into the dynamics of coexistence and the negotiation of religious boundaries within urban spaces.

To understand the dynamics of inter-ritual encounters and coexistence, it is essential to focus on everyday practices. For instance, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau explores how ordinary activities—like walking, talking, cooking, and reading—are sites of agency and creativity, allowing individuals to negotiate and subvert dominant power structures.⁸⁷ He differentiates between “tactics” and “strategies”. He indicates that “strategies” are methods used by institutions and power structures to exert control. “Tactics” on the other hand, represent the creative, often subtle ways individuals navigate these strategies, finding space for agency and resistance within the constraints of daily life.⁸⁸ De Certeau emphasises that individuals transform

Chicago University Press, 2009); Ruth Marshall, “Dealing with the Prince over Lagos”: Pentecostal Arts of Citizenship, In: edited Mamadou Diouf and Rosalind Fredericks, *The Arts of Citizenship in African Cities: Infrastructures and Spaces of Belonging*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 91-114; Ruth Marshall, “Power in the Name of Jesus: Social Transformation and Pentecostalism in Western Nigeria 'Revisited'”, In: edited by Terence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan, *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa*, (London: Macmillan, 1993), 213-246; Matthew A Ojo, *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006); Adedamola Osinulu, “The Road to Redemption: Performing Pentecostal Citizenship in Lagos”, In: Diouf and Fredericks, *The Arts of Citizenship in African Cities*, 115-135.

⁸⁶ In Ghana, for instance, this engagement revolves around contestations of Pentecostal ‘noises’ and the Ga tradition that bans noise-making during a specific period of the year. These cultural politics and Pentecostal contestations of the urban space and the public sphere have further been analysed within the legal framework of human rights. Studies in this context highlight the legal dimensions and implications of such encounters. See for instance Seth Tweneboah, *Religion, Law, Politics and the State in Africa: Applying Legal Pluralism in Ghana*, (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2000), 46-82; Kwabena J. Darkwa Amanor, “Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in Ghana and the African Culture: Confrontation or Compromise?” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 18, (2009):123-140; James Amanze, “Conflict and Cooperation: The Interplay between Christianity and African Traditional Religions in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”, In: Cephas N. Omenyo and Eric B. Anum, *Trajectories of Religion in Africa*, (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), 281-304; Justice Arthur, “The Drum Wars: The Clash of Religious Groups in a Cosmopolitan City”, *Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora*, 3, 1, (2017):21-35; J.K Asamoah-Gyadu, “African Traditional Religion, Pentecostalism and the Clash of Spiritualities in Ghana”, In: edited by Stewart M. Hoover and Nadia Kaneva, *Fundamentalisms and the Media*, (London and NY: Continuum, 2009), 161-178; J.K Asamoah-Gyadu, “To Drum or not Drum”: Traditional Festivals, Christianity and Clashes over Religious Silence in Ghana”, *Trinity Journal of Church and Society*, 15, 2, (2005):106-116; Abamfo Atiemo, “Fighting for the Gods: Tradition, Religion, Human Rights and the Modern Nation-State in Africa- A Ghanaian Case Study”. In: Omenyo and Anum, *Trajectories of Religion in Africa*, 233-247; Abamfo O. Atiemo, *Religion and the Inculturation of Human Rights in Ghana*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Marleen de Witte, “Accra’s Sounds and Sacred Spaces”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32, 3, (2008): 690-709; Rijk van Dijk, “Contesting Silence: The Ban on Drumming and the Musical Politics of Pentecostalism in Ghana”, *Ghana Studies*, 4, (2000):31-64.

⁸⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002 (1984), xvi-xxi

⁸⁸ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 51-55

spaces through their everyday practices, including rituals, thereby carving out meaning and agency in urban environments and other socio-spatial contexts.⁸⁹

The impact of everyday practices on inter-rituality and coexistence is influenced by Erving Goffman's concept of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman analyses how individuals manage their public personas during social interactions using a theatrical metaphor. He adopts a dramaturgical framework, likening everyday social interactions to theatrical performances, where individuals act as performers on a stage (the social setting) for an audience (other people).⁹⁰ In this framework, individuals craft specific impressions in the minds of others through their behaviours and actions, which Goffman refers to as "performances". These performances are tailored to meet the audience's expectations and the context of the interaction, shaping how individuals navigate their identities and relationships within inter-ritual contexts.⁹¹

By combining insights from everyday practices with social interaction analysis, one can gain a deeper understanding of how rituals are shaped and how coexistence is negotiated in urban spaces. This approach highlights the dynamic and creative processes through which individuals and groups engage with one another, adapt to their environments, and collaboratively create shared meanings and practices in their daily lives. Such a framework underscores the importance of lived experiences in shaping religious interactions and the intricate ways that coexistence is constructed within diverse urban contexts.

In Ghana and much of West Africa, everyday socio-spatial encounters encompass not only religious performances but also engagements with concepts of evil, as understood within local cosmologies and moral frameworks. Communities frequently confront and navigate experiences related to witchcraft, sorcery, and malevolent actions, which can generate feelings of unease and conflict, thereby affecting social cohesion. As a response, various rituals and practices are employed to counteract or mitigate perceived evil. This perspective offers an understanding of an individual's subjective experiences and highlights the intersection of religion with broader societal issues in daily life.⁹²

⁸⁹ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92-131

⁹⁰ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Science Research Center, 1956), 1-10

⁹¹ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 11-46

⁹² William C. Olsen and Walter E. A. van Beek (eds.), *Evil in Africa: Encounters with the Everyday*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015); Simone, *For the City Yet to Come*, 171-173

Rituals in social spaces do not occur arbitrarily; they are deeply rooted in the history and significance of those spaces. Socio-spatial rituals intertwine the past, present, and future, assigning specific meanings to particular locations.⁹³ This connection emphasises that rituals are inherently linked to their physical contexts and cannot be viewed as detached events. Instead, they should be understood within the material and topographical settings in which they take place.⁹⁴ Ritual actions shape their surroundings, while the location influences the nature of the practices performed. Sacred spaces are not pre-existing but are created through interactions, intentions, and memories. In contexts of religious plurality, these rituals implicate the “religious other”, leading to either social cohesion or contestation.⁹⁵

The concepts of “crossing” and “dwelling” as articulated by Thomas A. Tweed, describe key dimensions of religious encounters. “Crossing” refers to the movement of religions across various boundaries, while “dwelling” illustrates how these practices enable individuals to establish a sense of place in the world. This framework underscores the dynamic nature of religious life, emphasising that practices and lived experiences are not static. Instead, they engage in continuous processes of boundary-crossing and placemaking, reflecting the complexities inherent in religious practices and interactions.⁹⁶

Common Ground: A Socio-spatial Concept for Studying Religious Plurality and Coexistence

Religious coexistence in diverse urban environments like Madina is a multilayered phenomenon that transcends simplistic definitions. It involves complex everyday interactions among different faith communities, revealing layers of complexity that challenge normative understandings. To effectively unpack the complexities of everyday interreligious encounters and practices of coexistence in urban settings like Madina, I propose to use the **common ground**

⁹³ Walter van Beek, “Shrines and Sacred Places in Two Traditional West Africa Religions”, in edited by Paul Post, Philip Nel, and Walter van Beek, *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities: Space and Ritual Dynamics in Europe and Africa*, (Trenton, NY: African World Press, 2014); 53-70; Mogomme Masoga and Philip Nel, “Sacred Space and the Ritual of the Anthill, Southern African Perspective”, in edited by Post, Nel, and van Beek, *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities*, 71-87.

⁹⁴ Claudia Moser and Cecelia Feldman (eds), *Locating the Sacred: Theoretical Approaches to the Emplacement of Religion*, (Oxford and Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2014), 1-12

⁹⁵ Gerd Baumann, “Ritual Implicates ‘Others’: Rereading Durkheim in a Plural Society”, In edited by Daniel de Coppet, *Understanding Rituals*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 97-116

⁹⁶ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 82-83, 105-110; 123-163. See also Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking” in *Poetry, Language, and Thought*, (New York: Harper and Row, 2001/1971), 143-159. For Heidegger, “dwelling” goes beyond mere physical habitation; it involves living in harmony with the earth, sky, divinities, and mortals, and creating spaces that nurture our being in the world.

framework. This framework is grounded in my ethnographic history fieldwork conducted in Madina West (Zongo II) from 2017 to 2020, with additional insights from 2021. It serves as an epistemological tool to explore the nuanced intricacies of how diverse religious communities interact, negotiate, and coexist within shared spaces. It provides a broad understanding of the dynamics at play in these multifaceted environments.

I define common ground as a shared urban social space marked by ambiguous ownership and an intractably contested character, which enables it to shift fluidly between being recognised as a legal public space, assumed public space, or an appropriated public space, depending on prevailing socio-political conditions.⁹⁷ It is a social space that fosters diverse social contacts and interactions. It consists of various *fields*, which I interpret through a Bourdieuan lens.⁹⁸ In this study, I focus on three specific case studies—marketplaces, lorry parks, and football parks—observing and interpreting them as *religious fields*. The common ground closely resembles the concept of public space, normatively described as “all areas that are open and accessible to all members of the public in a society”, but are not the same. The public nature of these spaces is derived from their openness and accessibility which allow individuals and groups to freely enter, use the space for their intended purpose, and either participate actively or observe passively. Ideally, access to public spaces is not dependent on membership in specific groups, such as political or religious

⁹⁷ Land ownership in the Ghana operates under a dual system of customary and statutory regulations. About 80% of land is held under customary ownership, managed by traditional authorities such as chiefs, clans, or families, while the remaining 20% falls under statutory control, managed by the government and subject to formal registration. The main categories of land include customary land (held in trust by traditional leaders), state land (acquired by the government for public use), vested land (jointly owned by the state and traditional authorities), and private land (owned by individuals or entities, available for purchase or lease). See for example, *The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana*, (Accra: Assembly Press, 1992), 156-162; and Osmanu Karimu Azumah and Sendawula Noah, “Land Rights in Ghana”, *Open Journal of Social Science*, 11, (2023): 20-32.

⁹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu defines a field as a structured social space or network of relationships in which agents (individuals or institutions) and their social positions are located. Each field operates according to its specific logic, rules, and forms of capital. Fields are arenas of struggle where individuals and groups compete for various forms of capital and power. Bourdieu's concept of a field emphasises the relational and dynamic nature of social spaces, where power and capital are constantly contested and negotiated. Fields are dynamic and agents within fields compete for recognition, prestige, and other forms of symbolic capital. This competition is not just about economic resources but also about cultural legitimacy and social status. For detailed studies see for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, edited with introduction by Randal Johnson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 4-10; 11-21; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996/1984), 226-256; Patricia Thomson, “Field”, in edited by Michael Grenfell, *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 67-81

communities, nor should it be limited by factors such as language, physical or mental ability, or geographic mobility.⁹⁹

This study, however, adopts a non-normative view of public spaces—here referred to as the common ground—focusing on the diverse encounters, both linguistic and behavioural, that occur within them. The use of the common ground reflects distinct legal, political, and social conceptions, and such spaces may, in practice, be privately owned or contested. Although they may appear open and accessible, their use can be temporally restricted or subject to private control. My ethnographic fieldwork in Madina’s three social spaces reveals that ownership of these areas is frequently contested by private individuals rather than vested in the state or community, thereby complicating conventional notions of public space. Thus, while all common grounds are shared social spaces, not all shared social spaces qualify as public; some occupy the more ambiguous category of common ground.

Additionally, public space is often conceptualised through a secular lens, particularly within modern Western societies. This framing emphasises neutrality, inclusivity, and the minimisation—if not total absence—of religious influence, reflecting broader secularisation processes in governance and public life. However, applying this secular conceptualisation to contexts such as Madina is problematic. Madina presents a complex entanglement of the religious and the secular, where the boundaries between the two are frequently blurred. To address these complexities, I employ the concept of common ground, which better captures the legal, cultural, and social particularities of Madina. Unlike public space, common ground does not claim public ownership but functions as a shared social arena in which diverse encounters unfold, shaped by contestation, cultural practices, and everyday interactions. This concept also accommodates the fluid interplay of religious and secular dimensions within these spaces.

Modernity and secularism have traditionally established a binary distinction between the sacred and the secular, the religious and the profane, and the spiritual and material aspects of life, often compelling individuals to choose between these dichotomies.¹⁰⁰ However, the common

⁹⁹ Anthony M. Orum and Zachary P. Neal, *Common Ground? Readings and Reflections on Public Space*, (New York and London: Routledge: 2010), 1-2

¹⁰⁰ Hans-Joachim Sander, “In Search of Pastoral Power: Religious Confrontations with Thirdspace”, in edited by Ulrich Winkler, Lidia Rodríguez Fernández, and Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Contested Spaces, Common Ground: Space and Power Structures in Contemporary Multireligious Societies*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill and Rodopi, 2017), 3. See a detailed discussion of this dichotomy by Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1987).

ground framework challenges this rigid separation by recognising the entanglement between humans, objects, and spiritual forces within social spaces. It allows for the fluid interaction between the secular and the sacred, acknowledging that urban spaces are not merely physical environments but are also imbued with spiritual and cultural significance. Through these interactions, religious adherents construct their own habitus and practices of coexistence, navigating the complex interplay of both realms.¹⁰¹

The common ground framework also recognises the influence of religious and government institutions in shaping religious coexistence, acknowledging the power dynamics at play. It considers how institutional policies, regulations, and interventions can either facilitate or hinder coexistence. In this context, the framework draws on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, which examines how urban spaces, populations, and practices are governed and regulated.¹⁰² The negotiation processes within this framework involve both internal reflections and external interactions as individuals reconcile their religious identities with the realities of coexistence while navigating institutional and social constraints.

The common ground can also be understood as a shared mental space, where the inhabitants of social spaces collectively assign meaning and purpose toward building a sense of community.¹⁰³ This involves shared beliefs, values, understandings, or interests held by individuals and groups

¹⁰¹ Bourdieu introduces the concept of habitus to explain how individuals internalise the norms, values, and dispositions of their social class, which then guide their behaviours and tastes within various fields. The habitus is shaped by one's position within the social structure and influences how one navigates and perceives different fields. For more this see for instance Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 126-225; Pierre Bourdieu and Roger Chartier, "Habitus and Field", in *The Sociologist and the Historian*, trans. by David Fernbach, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 51-66; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2013/1977), 72-86; 159-197; and Michael Grenfell, "Working with Habitus and Field: The logic of Bourdieu's Practice," in *Cultural analysis and Bourdieu's Legacy: Settling Accounts and Developing Alternatives*, edited by Elizabeth Silva and Alan Warde (London: Routledge, 2010), 14-27; Karl Maton, "Habitus", in Grenfell, *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, 49-65

¹⁰² *Governmentality*, a concept developed by Michel Foucault, refers to the strategies and techniques used by governments to shape and regulate citizens to align with governmental policies. It is essentially the "art of government" that governs not only through state policies but also through mentalities, practices, and rationalities. Foucault's governmentality focuses on the dispersed, networked, and often subtle ways in which populations are managed. The term itself blends "government" and "mentality", emphasising that governance extends beyond formal policies to include cultural norms and practice. Foucault also introduces the idea of "pastoral power", which traditionally operates within religious institutions to guide individuals, whereas governmentality applies this conduct within political institutions. Thus, the "government of men" involves the guidance of individuals by both religious and political entities. For further discussions on the concept see Michael Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, edited by Michel Senellart, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xiii-xix; 108-110, 115-130; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, edited by Michel Senellart, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2-25; and also Jonathan Xavier Inda (ed.), *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

¹⁰³ Robert Harvey, *Sharing Common Ground: A Space for Ethics*, (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1-2

who interact daily. It represents a point of agreement or consensus that enables effective communication, cooperation, and collaboration among these diverse parties. However, common ground does not eliminate differences; instead, it accommodates the production of differences through varied religious practices and boundary-making. These shared mental spaces, along with the distinctions marked by diverse ritual performances, foster what can be termed “an etiquette of encounter”, making interactions less ethically risky and less prone to conflict. Hence, the idea of “shared” does not imply sameness but rather the mutual respect and recognition of differences that enable coexistence.¹⁰⁴

The concept of the common ground also considers the dynamic interplay between history and social spaces by recognising their mutual influence. Urban centers like Madina serve as primary nodes of these historical processes, embodying inherent plurality and acting as catalysts for historical change. Therefore, this dissertation examines the historical evolution of the three religious fields under study, by focusing on how their socio-spatial transformations and continuities have shaped practices of coexistence. By tracing these historical changes, it becomes possible to understand how religious and social practices adapt and interact within these evolving spaces.

Social spaces shape discourses and are, in turn, shaped by them. They play a central role in interactions among people, cultures, religions, ideologies, and politics, embodying histories, memories, and social dynamics that affect both the advantaged and the disadvantaged. Therefore, focusing on the common ground entails examining these interactions through Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad, which posits that space is not a passive container but an active social factor. According to Lefebvre, social processes both create and are created by spaces, highlighting the dynamic relationship between social practices and spatial configurations.

The spatial triad, which explains “the production of space”, consists of three components: *spatial practice* (perceived space), which refers to the physical routines and interactions that shape everyday experiences; *representations of space* (conceived space), denoting the conceptualised spaces created by planners and technocrats, such as maps and models, that organise spatial practice; and *spaces of representation* (lived space), encompassing the symbolic, emotional, and imaginative dimensions of space as experienced by individuals and communities. Lefebvre’s

¹⁰⁴ Paul Hedges, “Texts as Places of Sacred Meeting: Towards an Ethic for Comparative and Interreligious Readings and Transgressions”, in *Contested Spaces, Common Ground*, 18-32

central thesis asserts that space arises from the interplay of social relations, power dynamics, and economic processes, functioning as both a means and a product of social action.¹⁰⁵ These three spatial concepts are interdependent and dialectical, allowing for a phenomenological and experiential exploration of the religious fields examined in this study.

Social spaces are shaped not only by spatial practices, representations, and lived experiences but also, by the rhythms and cycles of everyday life, a concept Henri Lefebvre refers to as *rhythmanalysis*. This approach examines how temporal patterns—such as daily routines, seasonal changes, and social interactions—both influence and are influenced by space. Rhythmanalysis underscores the role of movement, the body, and sensory experiences in shaping spatial dynamics. By focusing on these temporal elements, rhythmanalysis provides a framework for understanding the interplay between time, space, and social practices, offering deeper insights into the dynamic nature of socio-spatial production and its effects on social life.¹⁰⁶

The common ground framework is significant for its broad approach to studying religious coexistence, moving beyond the simplistic notion that everyday devotional practices in urban spaces merely reinforce religious boundaries and ideological fault lines.¹⁰⁷ In Madina’s multicultural and multi-confessional context, this framework effectively promotes meaningful intercommunal and interreligious interactions. It examines “the politics of encounter” in urban spaces by exploring various dimensions of encounters—political, psychological, economic,

¹⁰⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26-33, 38-39; Christian Schmid, “Henri Lefebvre’s Theory of the Production of Space: Towards a Three-Dimensional Dialectic”, in edited by Kanishka Goonewardena Stefan Kipfer Richard Milgrom Christian Schmid, *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, (London and NY: Routledge, 2008), 27-45; and Christian Schmid, “The Trouble with Henri: Urban Research and the Theory of the Production of Space”, in edited by Łukasz Stanek Christian Schmid and Ákos Moravánszky, *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture*, (England: Ashgate, 2014), 27-47; Rob Shields, *Spatial Questions: Cultural Topologies and Social Spatialisations*, (London: SAGE, 2013), 23-26; Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 160-161; Stuart Elden, “There is a Politics of Space because Space is Political Henri Lefebvre and the Production of Space”, *Radical Philosophy Review*, vol. 10, no 2, (2007): 101–116; Chris Butler, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life And the Right to the City*, (London and NY: Routledge, 2012), 45, 81-84; and Benjamin Fraser, *Toward an Urban Cultural Studies: Henri Lefebvre and the Humanities*, (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 34.

¹⁰⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 1-9; 15-28; Dawn Lyon, *What is Rhythmanalysis?*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 2, 11-14, 19-44; Andy Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 74-75; Yi Chen, *Practising Rhythmanalysis: Theories and Methodologies*, (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 1-18

¹⁰⁷ See for instance Mario Apostolov, *The Christian-Muslim Frontier: A Zone of Contact, Conflict or Co-Operation*, (London: Routledge, 2003); Eliza Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line between Christianity and Islam*, (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

cultural, and security—and how these shape the religious fields in this study.¹⁰⁸ Rather than framing these interactions as binaries, the framework interprets them as characteristics of the field, manifesting through social contact, competition, conflict, cooperation, and coexistence. By incorporating aspects such as everyday encounters, religious negotiations, and the entanglement of humans, things, and spirits, the common ground framework offers a nuanced lens for understanding religious coexistence in urban settings like Madina. It deepens our insight into the lived experiences and challenges of fostering peaceful interactions among diverse religious communities.

A Historical and Ethnographic Study in Common Grounds: Methodology and Positionality

This study adopts an ethnographic history approach to examine three socio-spatial case studies in Madina, referred to as religious fields. These fields include the lorry parks at Zongo Junction, the Jamaica marketplace, and the football parks at Libya Quarters. Ethnographic history is an interdisciplinary method that combines anthropological and historical methods to explore historical and contemporary phenomena, such as plurality and coexistence. This implies that a variety of sources were utilised in the completion of this study, grounded in the belief that historical sources inherently contain varying degrees of subjective bias. Thus, the use of ethnographic history helps to minimise these inherent biases by integrating multiple perspectives and methods such as archival data, oral history, images/photographs, dresses, biographies of interlocutors, and edifice of deities, among others. Thus, ethnographic history emphasises people's lived experiences, traditions, and everyday practices within their historical contexts.¹⁰⁹ So, it offers a broad understanding of how these spaces function as common grounds in Madina.

The importance of methodology lies in the intimate connection between what is studied and how it is studied.¹¹⁰ It is for this reason that this study employs the ethnographic history approach

¹⁰⁸ The “politics of encounter” in urban settings has been discussed in detailed by for example Andy Merrifield, *The Politics of Encounter: Urban Theory and Protest under Planetary Urbanization*, (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2013). The book examines how urban spaces interact with political encounters and social movements, and emphasises cities as arenas for resistance and engagement. It demonstrates how urban environments act as stages for political actions and social protests, especially amid global urbanisation. Merrifield explores the complex relationships between urban theory, political activities, and social movements, and stresses that encounters within cities are crucial in driving both resistance and change.

¹⁰⁹ Discussions on ethnographic historical studies include works by John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), Steven Feierman, “The Comaroffs and the Practice of Historical Ethnography”, *Interventions*, 3:1, 2001: 24-30, Walter Gam Nkwi, *African Modernities and Mobilities: An Historical Ethnography of Kom, Cameroon, C. 1800-2008*, (Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2015).

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Thomas, “History and Anthropology”: In edited by Allan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer, *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 272

to examine the common grounds in Madina, aiming to understand and critically analyse people's everyday lives through the historical context of these social spaces and the unfolding present events within them. By examining the social history and development of these spaces, this approach provides foundational insights into their evolution and spatial forms, revealing their sociocultural, ideological, political, economic, and religious underpinnings.¹¹¹ Furthermore, this study presents these common grounds as anthropological places, challenging their normative classification as “non-places”.¹¹²

The study utilised a range of historical data, including archival materials and newspapers, and oral and biographical histories sourced from several key institutions and persons. Documents from the Public Records and Archives Administration Departments (PRAAD) in Accra, Kumasi, and Koforidua, along with materials from the Mahyia Archives in Kumasi, were integral to the research process. In Accra, files such as ADM 11/1, RG 3/5, and CSO 21/1 provided rich information on various topics, including local and migrant chiefs, “stranger” communities, market bylaws, witchcraft, Ga festivals, interethnic relations, land issues, and the management of lorry parks. Archival data from the Koforidua archives included files like ADM/KD 29/6, which details the zoning and allocation of spaces for new migrant communities during the late colonial period. Similarly, files ARG 2/15 and ARG 2/2 from the Kumasi Regional Archives provided insights into market development and Zongo affairs, especially concerning chieftaincy issues. These archival sources were invaluable in offering a broad historical background that allows for a deeper understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics of the common grounds in Madina.

The study also incorporated a review of state newspapers sourced from the Institute of African Studies Library on the University of Ghana campus, specifically *Daily Graphic*, *Ghanaian Times*, and *The Mirror*, from the early to mid-1990s. This period was characterised by tensions between the newly established Madina community and the La people, whose land became the site of this

¹¹¹ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 1-2, 34-38

¹¹² See for instance Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe, (London: Verso, 1997), 51-53, 77-79. The notion of “non-places”, developed by French ethnologist Marc Augé, contrasts with what he terms anthropological “places”. “Non-places” are transient and functional spaces that do not serve as meeting points and do not build common references for a group, meaning they lack histories, identities, or relations. In these spaces, individuals remain anonymous and isolated, as people do not reside in them. Examples include motorways, shopping malls, hotel rooms, airports, and railway stations. In contrast, anthropological “places” are spaces where people can meet others with whom they share social references—places of histories, identities, and relations. These spaces empower the identities of the people who use them.

new development. By analysing these newspapers, the research gained additional insights into the social, political, and economic dynamics that shaped interactions between these communities during this transformative time. The newspapers provided contemporary perspectives on land disputes, community relations, and the broader implications of urbanization in Madina.

Oral histories were collected from La (Ga) chiefs and queen mothers, as well as migrant chiefs and their representatives in Madina. These oral accounts explored significant topics such as stools, land, migration, settlement, and biographical histories of key personalities. In Ga society, as in other ethnic groups in Ghana, stools symbolise not only authority and leadership but also continuity and a deep connection to the ancestors. Most importantly, they also provide an insight into how these stools are intertwined with land ownership and the broader historical narratives of settlement, migration, and identity in the community. These histories offered valuable insights into the cultural and political dynamics that shaped the common grounds in Madina. The biographical histories, on the other hand, offered personal perspectives on key historical events and provided valuable insights into leadership styles, family lineages, and cultural diplomacy in Madina. Figures such as Dagadu and Seidu Kardo emerged as prominent cultural brokers who played pivotal roles in mediating between the Ga and migrant communities, as well as postcolonial governments. Their biographies reveal the complexities of leadership within multicultural urban spaces like Madina and illustrate how they navigated the tensions over land and negotiations over community relations amidst diversity. These oral and biographical histories thus provide critical insights into the evolving political and social dynamics of Madina.

I began my ethnographic work with a preliminary field study of the three common grounds between July 2017 and January 2018. This initial phase involved introducing myself to the gatekeepers of these spaces and gaining insight into the key dynamics shaping everyday encounters. I immersed myself in the common grounds from May 2018 to August 2019, and again from January to early December 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic led to lockdowns and social distancing. I returned to the field once more from July to August 2021. My ethnographic practice also required a significant degree of personal reflexivity, including an examination of my positionality and its effect on the research. Earlier in this study, I discussed my relationship with Larry and my experiences with his friends, noting how the launch of the *Madina Project* offered me a new perspective. My identity as a Christian presented both challenges and opportunities during fieldwork, prompting me to adapt and be inventive in my approach. I will revisit this subject

below. As a result, the narratives, representations, and historical interpretations in this study are shaped by the various periods of fieldwork and the numerous encounters I experienced.

My ethnographic practice involved both day and night observations. The night-time in the common grounds proved particularly revealing because it helped to uncover various aspects of religious coexistence, including night soundscapes, informal networking, Municipal Assembly operations, and ritualistic activities. My night routines extended from 7 PM to 3 AM. During the day, I engaged in participant observations, which included attending funerals and religious night vigils at the football parks, as well as similar rituals at the Jamaica market. I also interacted with individuals at the lorry parks and marketplaces. Additionally, I occasionally acted as a mediator in conflicts between bus conductors, passengers, itinerant preachers, and traditionalists.

I conducted oral interviews with a diverse range of individuals, including drivers, station masters, market vendors, market executives, itinerant preachers, imams, pastors, footballers, commercial sex workers, and both religious and non-religious community members who frequent these common grounds. Additionally, I interviewed government officials, politicians, school administrators, police officers, family heads, and chiefs. These open-ended interviews facilitated extended conversations and included auto/biographical narratives. All participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring they had spent more than two years in the community and were over 17 years old. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the broader history and social dynamics within the community.

Furthermore, I engaged in socio-spatial mapping of the common grounds, tracking visual representations of how religious practices, interactions, and policies influence and are influenced by these spaces. This process helped identify patterns, conflicts, and opportunities for promoting religious coexistence. I collected and analysed everyday images, such as religious posters and inscriptions, to understand how they were received and interpreted by the community. Similarly, I examined religious relics, dressings, and other artefacts, including deities, mosques, and church buildings. These visual objects elicit responses and generate “ecological discourses”, which are sometimes perceived as “offensive”.¹¹³ For instance, images serve as vital witnesses that provide

¹¹³ W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Ato Quayson, ‘Kobolo Poetics: Urban Transcripts and their Reading Publics in Africa’, *New Literary History*, Volume 41, Number 2, 2010:413-438; Quayson, “Signs of the Times”; and Christiane Kruse, Birgit Meyer, and Anne-Marie Korte (eds.), *Taking Offense: Religion, Art, and Visual Culture in Plural Configurations*, (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2018).

historical evidence that aids in understanding the history of a specific area and people in a certain period, particularly in the context of Madina.¹¹⁴

To better connect with my Muslim interlocutors, I temporarily grew a long facial beard as a gesture to build trust. However, this decision led to challenges from the Christian community to which I belong, where I was given various nicknames such as “academic Osama”, “Osama Bin Laden”, “Saddam Hussein”, “Mallam”, “Alhaji”, “radical Muslim in the making”, “a soon to be Muslim convert”, along with facing some antagonism. Throughout my fieldwork, I maintained detailed field notes of my observations and experiences, reflecting on them later to gain deeper insights into the dynamics of the common grounds.

One significant hurdle I faced was the initial reluctance of people to engage with me. Many mistook me for a journalist and were apprehensive despite my preliminary visits. This mistrust stemmed from a corruption scandal exposed by investigative journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas on June 6, 2018, which led to a general wariness towards media professionals.¹¹⁵ My identity as a researcher became conflated with that of a journalist, resulting in suspicion and hesitance among the community. To mitigate this issue, I switched from using a digital camera to a phone for taking pictures, as the camera seemed to exacerbate their fears. Despite these efforts, my colleagues Rashida Alhassan Adum-Atta, Khauthar Khamis, and I encountered a threatening incident at the lorry parks when a passerby, fearing he had been photographed, attempted to seize our cameras. I also encountered two separate confrontations at the Jamaica marketplace during the evening hours.

In conducting this research, I ensured strict adherence to all research ethical protocols. These protocols serve as essential guidelines that govern the conduct of research, ensuring that participant’s rights, dignity, and well-being are protected.¹¹⁶ Full transparency about the research and its intended outcomes was communicated to participants, allowing them to make informed decisions regarding their involvement. Key ethical issues, such as voluntary participation,

¹¹⁴ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, (Reaktion Books Ltd, 2001).

¹¹⁵ The Pulse Newspaper, “5 ways Anas’ ‘Number 12’ exposé has impacted Africa”, <https://www.pulse.com.gh/sports/football/5-ways-anas-number-12-expose-has-impacted-africa/8lm8c2r>; Piers Edwards, “Ex-Ghana FA boss’ lifetime Fifa ban reduced to 15 years”, <https://www.bbc.com/sport/africa/54481895>; “Number 12: When Greed and Corruption Become the Norm”. Premiered on June 6th 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Number_12:_When_Greed_and_Corruption_Become_the_Norm, Accessed, 17th November, 2020.

¹¹⁶ Nico Nortjé, Retha Visagie, and J. S. Wessels (Eds.), *Social Science Research Ethics in Africa*, (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019).

confidentiality, and anonymity, were thoroughly addressed. Participants were assured that their identities would be protected, with pseudonyms used to maintain anonymity. Additionally, explicit permission was sought for every image captured during fieldwork to respect the participant's privacy. These measures were carefully implemented to uphold the integrity of the research process while safeguarding the privacy and rights of all individuals involved.

Itineraries of Chapters in the Study

This section outlines the various chapters of the dissertation, serving as a roadmap for understanding the overall discussions presented in the study. The dissertation is organised into five main chapters, along with an introduction and conclusion. Each chapter addresses a specific aspect of socio-spatial phenomena relevant to the study's conceptual framework by presenting a central argument. Although each chapter can be read independently, it is advisable to read them sequentially to fully understand the dialectical relationship between coexistence and practices of coexistence within the common grounds.

In Chapter 1, the dissertation examines the historical development of Madina, focusing on its historical evolution and early tensions with the La Nkwantanang community, which contributed to Madina's rapid expansion and the marginalisation of its host community. Chapter 2 addresses land tenure relations, governance, and ownership issues affecting each common ground, highlighting how ordinary inhabitants perceive these spaces. Chapter 3 investigates the history of the lorry parks at Zongo Junction, analysing daily interactions and practices of religious coexistence within this setting. Chapter 4 shifts to the Jamaica marketplace, detailing its historical development, daily religious practices and rituals of coexistence. Chapter 5 examines the history of the football parks at Libya Quarters and explores these football parks as sites of religious encounters, emphasising everyday religious interactions and practices of coexistence. The dissertation concludes with reflections on religious plurality and coexistence through the common ground framework and also assesses its applicability beyond Madina.