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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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Summary

This dissertation emerges from the *Madina Project* and investigates the intricate dynamics of coexistence within shared urban spaces in Madina West, Accra. In an era marked by heightened global interconnectedness and the complex entanglement of religious and secular matters—often giving rise to tensions and conflicts—this study examines how diverse communities in a rapidly evolving neighbourhood like Madina navigate their daily interactions. Through a socio-historical and ethnographic analysis, the research explores the modalities of coexistence within urban spaces that are continuously negotiated and contested.

Urban spaces in Madina, such as marketplaces, lorry parks, and football parks, serve as arenas of daily encounters for people from varied ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds. These public spaces not only foster social cohesion but also present possibilities for exclusion and contestation. The continuous interactions within these spaces are mediated by different techniques of coexistence, including *unfriendly tolerance*, *performative dissent*, *social distancing*, *deliberate forgetfulness*, and *complete avoidance*, among others. These nuanced mechanisms reveal the complexity of navigating religious and social diversity in shared urban spaces.

The central argument of this dissertation is that religious coexistence in Madina's shared urban spaces is primarily shaped by material relationships, while religious convictions—rooted in the theological teachings of respective traditions—play a secondary yet influential role. These theological perspectives act as additional layers that influence material relationships rather than serving as their foundation. Therefore, daily coexistence in Madina is driven by pragmatic considerations that are shaped by the realities and contingencies of economic, social, cultural, and political factors.

This dissertation further demonstrates that coexistence in Madina's public spaces is inherently fluid, marked by continuous boundary crossing, negotiation, and the constant remaking of social and religious identities. It reveals how urban spaces—such as marketplaces, lorry parks, and football fields—extend beyond their economic functions to become vital nodes of social, cultural, and religious exchanges. Within these vibrant arenas, shared knowledge is produced, even as distinct identities are simultaneously negotiated and differentiated.

Also, the study indicates that historical forces including migration patterns, socio-political transformations, and urban development have profoundly shaped Madina's religious landscape and the evolving nature of coexistence. By tracing these historical trajectories, the research

illuminates how the past continues to influence present-day interactions, boundary-making processes, and the delicate balance between unity and difference.

Through this nuanced exploration, the dissertation contributes to broader discourses on religious pluralism, social cohesion, and urban history and anthropology. It challenges simplistic narratives of conflict and peace, thus revealing the complex and dynamic ways in which different religious and social communities negotiate diversity and coexistence. In doing so, it offers fresh insights into the art of living together in a rapidly diversifying urban environment.