# Interfaith Families through Conversion to Islam: Akan Muslims in Southern Ghana1

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## Abstract

This study explored family responses to a relatives' conversion to Islam in a country where Muslims are a minority. Fifteen Akans who embraced Islam in Ghana were interviewed. Target families were primarily Christian or followers of the customary Akan religion. My interviewees lived in the majority-Fante area on Ghana's coastal south. Family background questions focused on ethnicity, religious composition, and affluence. Questions about family response focused on rituals like naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals, but also on expressive and instrumental support. Instant adaptation, ongoing disruption, and sometimes a transition from disruption to adaptation emerged as familial patterns of response to Muslim conversion. Findings are contextualized in the far-reaching religious transformation of Africa over the past century; the increasing fragmentation of families where state-funded safety-nets are disappearing or non-existent; and the need for more study of Muslim-minorities who primarily live outside of Southwest Asia and North Africa.

## Background

In the last century, the growth of Muslim populations has become a notable phenomenon in many societies where the group had been small and invisible (Pew Forum 2010; Smith 2010; Samwini 2006; Westerlund 1999). Muslims have always appeared in a society as a religious minority of some sort, and often as immigrants too. Muslim immigrants often married locals (Mazrui 1994; Levtzion 1994; Curtis 2009; Levtzion 2000), but they also stimulated conversions which eventually produced indigenous Muslim communities (Wilks 1989; Wilks 2000; Levtzion 2000). Members of the earliest indigenous Muslim communities also transformed their families of origin into interfaith families. Typically, the interfaith families produced by conversion go unnoticed. Also, Muslims living in Muslim-minority countries attract less scholarly attention than those living in Muslim-majority societies. Yet, the study of such interfaith families may reveal strategies for managing the religiously plural social spaces (McCarthy 2007) that are created when Muslims emerge in previously non-Muslim communities and countries.

Ghana is a Muslim-minority country, and many Ghanaian Muslims are also religious minorities in their extended families (Samwini 2006). As such, Ghana provides an excellent opportunity to learn about interfaith families created by conversion. This paper will focus specifically on families which contain Muslims, Christians and followers of traditional African religions. However, Ghana is ethnically diverse. So, resource limitations require that this paper only focus on one collection of Ghanaian ethnic groups – the Akans.

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At first blush, one might expect conversion to Islam among Akans in Ghana to be a conflict-ridden affair because Christianity predominates among them. Most Westerners are familiar with the pervasive idea that Christianity and Islam are inherently incompatible (Huntington 1996). Generally, the two religious identities are constructed as mutually exclusive.[2] Furthermore, centuries of contact between Muslims and Akan political elites have never produced a Muslim emperor or king, as happened among some other ethnic groups in the region.[3] Nevertheless, today Ghana has Akan Muslims whose families of origin remain primarily or significantly non-Muslim. Research on these families is meaningful beyond the Akan, and even beyond Ghana. The research is relevant wherever family fragmentation contributes to social problems, and where Muslim-minority populations are gaining indigenous converts.

With a country's social service capabilities stretched thin, knowing about factors that might increase the homeless and socially marginalized population is important. Like Ghana, many societies hold a negative public image of Muslims. Indeed, many Ghanaians seem to associate Muslims with violence and poverty (Weiss 2007), as do many Sub-Saharan Africans in general (Pew Forum 2010). Therefore, it does not seem far-fetched to think that conversions to Islam might result in familial conflict. Such conflict could leave Muslims at the margins of their birth families, and recipients of inadequate social services. At the extreme, such conflict could result in more homelessness and related social problems.

**Demographic Changes in Ghanaian Religion**

European Christians first settled among Fante Akans in Elmina (and nearby Cape Coast) over 500 years ago. Yet, Christianity only spread among the southern indigenous people in the last 150 years. In 1960, the first politically independent census of Ghana was taken. At that time, nearly 24 percent of the population had converted to Christianity (Samwini 2006). Meanwhile, at least 600 years of Islam had only produced a small Muslim population, and most Muslims were in the far north of what became Ghana. Only 7 percent of Ghanaians were Muslim in the 1960 census. Forty years later, both groups had grown at the expense of traditional religions. In the 2000 census, 69 percent of Ghanaians were found to be Christian, and 16 percent were Muslim (Weiss 2007). Fertility, migration and conversion each play a role in Ghana's expanding Muslim minority.

However, because of the recent emergence of Muslim communities among non-immigrant groups[4] in Southern Ghana, this study is focused on conversion. Again, an outside observer might expect conversion to present challenges to family functioning and unity. For example, Akans who convert to Islam could abandon matrilineal[5] practices in favor of the patrilineal descent accepted among most Muslim populations. Converts would likely refuse to make blood sacrifices to nature spirits and ancestors. Most would spurn traditional divination practices, and some would spurn all forms of divination. Whether new Akan Muslims do any or all of these things, the mere introduction of additional ambiguity in kinship practices is the concern. The "family safety net" may be unlikely to perform its function when rites are not observed and obligations are in doubt.

Hence, a central concern of this study is that some Akan families might margin-

alize their Muslim members. They could fail to invite or acknowledge Muslim members during marriages, naming ceremonies, and funerals. Families could block a Muslim's access to elder-hood, headship or chief and queen-mother positions (where applicable). Families could even take extreme measures to disrupt or undo the conversion by withdrawing all instrumental and expressive support. Clearly, some families would fragment if such was the response to conversion. Other families might continue with family life little changed after a conversion. This range of reactions must be considered because Ghanaian families are under tremendous strain today, and neither a welfare state, nor NGOs, nor public charities are sufficient to meet the needs of shunned family members.

**Tensions between Ghanaian Muslims and Christians**

Ghana has several Muslim communities, and some have very distinct Islamic doctrines, practices, and authority structures.6 Prior research has already shown that intra-religious "conversion" among Muslims can disrupt family stability. Wilks (1989) found that when Muslims from Wa embraced Ahmadiyya Muslim doctrines, they were not allowed to marry women from families of the traditional Muslim backgrounds. Bari (2009) documented how Tijani and Wahhabi-oriented youth among the Sisala clashed with their traditional Muslim parents over burial rituals. However, this research says nothing about inter-religious conversion and conflict.

Only Samwini (2006) documented the Ahmadiyya Muslims' campaign against Christians in Ghana. Fante Muslims first invited the Ahmadiyya to Ghana in 1921. As suggested above, the Ahmadi's focus was on transforming the Ghanaian Muslim community. However, after about 50 years (and some violent encounters) the Ahmadis shifted most of their attention to Ghanaian Christians. Since the 1970s, their activities have contributed to a state of heightened tension between Muslim and Christian Ghanaians who had never clashed before (Samwini 2006). Ghanaian Muslims and Christians now openly preach against one another. They even hold public debates between religious leaders. Today, the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Ghana is based in Salt Pond, a town in majority-Christian Fante-country. In this highly charged context, it is logical to expect tension to follow conversion to Islam from a Christian, or even a traditionalist family.

**Methods**

My data was gathered over several trips to Ghana. I conducted structured interviews in English and in Fante with one of two different translators who also helped me identify and contact participants. The study began with my first trip to Ghana in the summer of 2009. I stayed for 2 months, and conducted 10 interviews while in the country. After returning to the U.S., I renewed my study of the literature on Islam in the region. Another trip to Ghana in 2010 lasted for 2 months and produced 5 interviews.

In the midst of all this scholarly activity and teaching, I also married into an inter-ethnic Ghanaian family at the level of my wife's father's compound. At the extended-kin network level, hers is also an inter-faith family consisting of Muslims and Christians. Discussions with my new in-laws, as well as personally experiencing a Ghanaian Sisala/Hausa7 wedding, provided unique insights and even added questions about "mates" to this study. However, my experiences were concentrated in the more Christian-identified South, with very short trips to the more Muslim-identified North.

Ghana's sheer diversity mandates that my findings be viewed in the context of an exploratory study. My findings are the most relevant to the Fante coastal area between Accra and Elmina. I spent most of my time, and primarily interviewed residents of, this coastal strip.

The findings reported here are based on individual interviews8 with Ghanaians who converted to Islam. Interviewees were asked background questions on their geographic origin, ethnic identity, family's socio-economic status indicators, and family members' religious identities. Then they were asked questions dealing with traditional African family life events, especially weddings, naming ceremonies, and funerals. Each was probed to elicit actual family reactions, and then family reactions expected by the interviewee if a particular event were to occur—like the interviewee's own funeral.9 Additional questions focused on instrumental and financial support. Questions directed the interviewee to compare family life before conversion to Islam with family life after conversion.

*Socioeconomic Status*. Reckoning class, status, and religion in Ghana can be difficult, but important for a study like this. In the lands that became Southern Ghana, there was historical resistance to social elites converting to Islam. For example, Ashanti emperor Osei Kwame was deposed in 1798 because it was feared that he would convert and then "establish the Koranic law for civil code of the empire" (Diouf 1998:31). This king was highly involved with Muslims and died mysteriously in 1803 (Robinson 2006). Similarly, in an informal discussion with one of my informants, I was told a story about a Fante princess who embraced Islam in the late 1700s. She was cast out of the village by her royal family, and did not return while alive. However, she had many daughters who have given her line of the family a large number of descendants. Because Fantes are matrilineal, this royal family is now majority Muslim. Yet, the Muslims are reluctant to ascend to chief or queen mother positions because the occupant must perform traditional customs which conflict with their understanding of Islamic piety (oral interview). If these examples indicate a general tendency, embracing Islam may be difficult for members of elite Akan families due to community pressures.

Yet, lineage is not the only door to high status positions in Ghana. By graduating from university and landing a professional job, one can enhance or maintain family prestige. For that reason, I asked each respondent how many people in the family had earned a university degree. If none had a university degree, I asked how many had completed secondary school. I also asked respondents to classify their families by income. It is not culturally appropriate to ask a specific dollar amount. Therefore, I had interviewees specify their family financial standing in relation to "the average Ghanaian family" (i.e. richer, poorer, or in the average income range).

*Family Religion*. Until two centuries ago, many polities that commanded respect beyond their own borders were Muslim-ruled, if not majority-Muslim. In those days, when West African people embraced Islam they were joining a trans-continental network of respected scholars, traders, rulers, artisans, and warriors. In that era, becoming Muslim could easily be associated with becoming more "civilized" (Diouf 1998; Hunwick 2006) in the eyes of West Africans. Muslim political and economic standing, at that time, would have lent an air of credence to this notion.

However, as growing European hegemony undermined the economic vitality

and political influence of Muslim societies across the globe, they experienced downward structural mobility; Ghana's Muslims included. Over the past 100 years, the overall image of Muslims in Ghana has been stigmatized through an association with violence, illiteracy, and poverty (Pew Forum 2010; Weiss 2007; Samwini 2006). By no means is this the only image, though, as Ghana always has an Islam-affiliated northerner serve as vice-president.

While the prestige of Islam was declining, becoming Christian in West Africa was increasingly becoming associated with being "civilized" because of the association of Western models of Christianity with the narrow conception of progress that is believed to be rooted in "superior" European cultures (Triaud 2000). During British rule, and after decolonization, Christianity spread much more rapidly in Ghana than Islam did. This suggests that if there is a religious status hierarchy in Ghana, Christianity holds the most esteemed position. The general dominance of Christians among the Ghanaian political, economic, and social elite also lends credence to this notion.

Since there is probably a religious status hierarchy in Ghana, it seemed important to note whether a convert's family was inter-religious, traditionalist, or Christian before he embraced Islam. One might expect an inter-religious family to be fairly accepting of additional conversions. Thus, the more Muslims already in the family the less conflict was expected after a conversion.

**Findings**

At the time of the interviews, all respondents lived in the southern Coastal areas between Elmina and Accra, which I call Fante-country. Indeed, as Table 1 shows, all but two of my respondents were in solidly Fante families. They tended to have two Fante biological parents and all-Fante extended families. The two respondents who were not specifically Fante still had Akan mothers. One respondent was Ashanti, and another had only an Akan mother (although neither Ashanti nor Fante). In one sense, then, this empirical data reflects Akan families with a heavy focus on Fantes.

Table 1 also shows that most respondents' families either were poor, or occupied a middle socioeconomic rank. Less than half of these Akan families were inter-religious at the time of conversion. That is, the family was not entirely of one faith. In only six of these inter-religious families, were there Muslims in the family before the respondent converted. Therefore, most respondents in this study were the only Muslims in their families at the time of conversion. One respondent, though, was a special case. His fiancée converted with him, and this occurred during the traditional marriage process.10 The families in which Muslims already existed usually had only one or two other Muslims. However, one respondent reported that there were 4 other Muslims in his family when he converted, and another said that his family was half Muslim and half Christian when he converted.

Table 2 shows how the interviewees' families responded to Islamic conversion. Two modes of response emerged for the 15 families involved in this study: adaptation and disruption. Adaptation was characterized by the family implementing an effective way of managing religious differences to keep everyone in the family. The Muslims remained participating members of the family with equal standing, and they were still invited to naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. If they needed financial or in-

strumental assistance, the Muslim converts knew that their non-Muslim relatives would help them. Alternatively, a family could be disrupted after a member converted to Islam. The family could break off relations. They could evict the convert from the family compound. They could stop inviting him to family rituals such as naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals, or even block him from attending if he found out such events were happening. Finally, the family could withdraw the financial and other instrumental support which most Ghanaians still need from their relatives.

Initially, these responses seemed mutually exclusive, but some families responded in both modalities at different times. This process would begin with disruption. Then the family would adapt after some time had elapsed. The possibility of transitions required me to reckon the duration of each family's response. While some families changed their response within less than a year, others took several years, and still others remained disrupted up to the time of the interview. The possibilities are represented in Table 2.

The most common response was adaptation. Nine families immediately provided a supportive atmosphere for conversion. In three cases, a family member even facilitated the conversion. For example, in one inter-religious family the respondent's older brother converted to Islam first, and then began teaching the religion to all of his siblings. Prior to that, the whole family had been followers of the traditional Fante religion. In two families, non-Muslim relatives encouraged my interviewees to embrace Islam. In one case, it was because of the dreams he had been having. In another, the interviewee's traditionalist mother was asked to encourage him to become Muslim by a woman with marital interests in him.

| **Table 1: Interviewees and Their Families (N = 15)** | |
|---|---|
| **Ethnicity** | |
| Fante | 13 |
| Other Akan | 1 |
| Mixed | 1 |
| | |
| **SES** | |
| Poorer | 7 |
| Average | 5[a] |
| More Affluent | 4[a] |
| | |
| **Family Religion** | |
| Christian | 5 |
| Traditional | 3 |
| Mixed | 7 |
| | |
| **Muslims in Family** | |
| Respondent only | 9 |
| <2 others | 4 |
| >2 others | 2 |

[a] Note: One respondent is counted as both average and affluent because of his parents' divorce and his subsequent change in class position during childhood. The respondent's father was affluent, but not paying alimony or child support. His mother was of average-income.

| **Table 2: Nature and Duration of Family Response to Islamic Conversion** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Adaptation** | **Disruption** |
| Never | | |
| Less than a year | | 1 |
| 1-5 years | | 1 |
| More than 5 years | 10 | 3 |

These families chose to compromise on how to do family rituals. For example, Muslim naming ceremonies are done in a distinctly Islamic idiom. Unlike Fante naming ceremonies, they do not involve liquor. Also, most interviewees of adapted families mentioned that all of their relatives could attend and watch the naming ceremony, but non-Muslim relatives could not substantively participate in the religious ritual. Instead, the Muslim community would conduct the rituals. In addition to watching, though, the convert's family could enjoy the socializing, food, and festivities that accompany such events. Naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals are all performed in a distinct manner by Akans who have become Muslim. Nevertheless, the differences are surmountable. Most of my participants' families adapted to being interreligious. The conversion disrupted neither the unity nor functioning of the family.

Some families were initially disrupted, but did not remain in that state. One family took less than a year to transition from partially disrupted to fully adapted. The convert's father was initially "happy to see his children praying," but soon encountered resistance from extended kin. As it turned out, the convert's eldest brother had learned to use the Bible, a generally respected book, to explain Islam to Fante people. So, he showed his father Biblical evidence to support Islam. The father used this same evidence to bring the extended family into a conciliatory position. This respondent reported that, when he later got married and had children, his extended family members were there. While he only had one Muslim wedding, he had nine children, each followed by a naming ceremony. Another transitional family's reaction was described by the convert as "terrible in the beginning." He said that they only relented once it became known to the whole family that some of their ancestors had been Muslim. The fact that there once were "Muslims in the family" allowed the family to accept his conversion as a "reversion."

The final case of a transition from disruption to adaptation took five years, and resulted in many more conversions within the family. This family had been solidly Christian before my interviewee converted, and (more importantly) affluent. When the young man converted in 1985, he was immediately put out of the family and accused of joining "the wicked people." He had to survive on his own, and with whatever support the Muslim community could give him. Five years later, his family saw him "dressed well" and participating in a big parade marking the end of Ramadan. This precipitated a change of heart by his relatives. They "laid a red carpet" before his feet, and then invited him to the family house where the elders gave him their blessings. While the elders in his family remained Christian until death, 10 of his siblings converted to Islam after he was allowed back into the family fold in 1990.

Many of his old friends also converted after 1990. Friends, called "mates" or

"colleagues" by most Ghanaians, are such an important part of a person's support network that they fit the anthropological definition of "fictive kin." Despite a lack of blood or legal ties, the expectation of sharing among mates can be as strong as that between other kin. Conversion of a young man to Islam can disrupt shared recreation time involving alcohol and pursuing women. Yet, this interviewee reported that over 100 of his mates have embraced Islam since 1990. This was unquestionably the most dramatic transition from disruption to adaptation. Indeed, no matter how it is defined this family adapted to having not just a Muslim, but to having a sizable Muslim contingent.

For three of my interviewees, more than five years after their conversion, the families showed no signs of adapting to the presence of a Muslim member. One of these families is the most salient because the convert is known all over Southern Ghana – as is his story.11 His affluent uncle had paid for his secondary schooling and then sent him to a Christian seminary school. This uncle had also found him a wife and facilitated his becoming the preacher for a well-to-do church community. Then, the church procured a nice apartment for him in an exclusive neighborhood. It also gave him a business to run. Focused on faith in Christ as the only path to God, his preaching soon featured regular attacks against Islam and Muslims. As a result, he was invited to participate in public debates against Muslim preachers in several southern cities and towns. At some debates he won Christian converts, but at others the Muslims gained converts. The 10th debate ended when my interviewee converted to Islam. After such a dramatic conversion, his uncle led the family in rejecting him; the church reclaimed his flat and his business. The final blow was when his wife, who remains Christian, divorced him.

Still able to draw a crowd because his story is well-known, this new Mallam12 is now debating against Christian preachers. However, his family-situation is difficult. He lives alone in a small apartment, and the only people he can call family are his fictive kinfolk in the Muslim community. At the time of the interview, he was also struggling to gain custody of his son. His wife remained hostile to Islam, but he wanted the boy to be raised as a Muslim.

Four of the five cases in which conversion disrupted the family involved affluent or middle class families. The single case in which a poor family was disrupted was short lived, and it involved devotees of the traditional Fante religion instead of Christians. Within less than a year, the poor family had adjusted to being inter-religious. Meanwhile, in all 4 affluent cases, the family disruption lasted at least five years. One family transitioned to adjustment after 5 years, and even produced additional converts, but in three affluent families no transition has occurred. Nearly all of these interviewees' relatives stopped inviting them to family rituals. They also are unwilling to extend instrumental and expressive support. For one interviewee, though, his traditionalist grandmother and Muslim aunt continue to maintain ties with him. If the rest of the family were to press the matter, this situation could fragment the family or totally isolate the Muslim convert. Overall, though, these three families have not been able to modify their identity and rituals to integrate a member who became Muslim.

**Conclusion**

This study found two kinds of Akan family responses to Muslim conversion: adaptation and disruption - with transition from disruption to adaptation as a special combination of the two. Adaptation was the typical response for these families. This

usually meant that no family members resisted the conversion, and sometimes they even assisted it. It also meant that naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals continued to be attended by family members of all faiths. Non-Muslim relatives could not substantively participate in Muslim relatives' rituals, but this compromise was accepted. Both instrumental and expressive support continued to flow across religious lines within these families. If quantitative research should find this to be the typical response, then if Muslim conversion continues there is hope for a peaceful religious pluralism in the future. This would mitigate the chances of religious violence erupting as an epiphenomenon of inter-ethnic and political tension. As Mazrui (1994:123) concludes "on the whole, religion in sub-Saharan Africa is probably divisive mainly when it reinforces a pre-existing ethnic differentiation." In Ghana, the perceived confluence of religious and class differences may be a problem.

Disruption was concentrated among the affluent families, and lasted the longest among them. When disruption occurred among poorer families it was short-lived. The poorer families that were disrupted, and even one affluent family, transitioned to an adaptation response. This was facilitated by direct efforts to explain Islam to family members who lacked knowledge of the faith, or as an unintended consequence of other actions.

Conversely, the notion that a religious status hierarchy in Ghana would be relevant to conversion was not supported by this study. Christian families did not seem to react to Muslim conversions as a threat to family status. Indeed, one Christian mother told her son that he probably should become Muslim because of his dreams. The man whose Christian family said that he had "joined the wicked people" seems to be balanced by such a case. What undoubtedly remains a concern for Western readers, though, is the converse scenario. That is, readers may wonder how Muslim families respond to their children embracing Christianity or some other faith.

Perhaps this is why McCarthy (2007) has suggested that members of inter-religious families gain rare civic skills that religiously diverse societies need. This is especially relevant in places like Southern Ghana (or even the United States), where widespread Muslim-Christian interaction is a recent phenomenon, and where negative stereotypes about Muslims abound (Samwini 2006; Weiss 2007). More than one African country has seen religious tension exacerbate social conflicts. Ghanaians have an opportunity to avoid such problems. They can systematically observe successfully adapted inter-religious Akan families, and then share the lessons gleaned with other Ghanaians through television, film, music, and schools. Indeed, the successes in Ghana could help produce a model of peaceful coexistence for other countries whose religious demography is producing conflict.

Despite the challenges with some affluent families, the findings of this study primarily paint a positive picture of how Akan families adjust to Muslim conversion. However, the study limitations must be borne in mind. Because they are based on qualitative data and a convenience sample, these findings cannot tell us anything about the prevalence of disruption and adaptation. Only rigorous survey data collected from random samples can provide generalizable information on prevalence.

Also, this study is limited to male converts. A female interviewer was not available, and an un-related male cannot easily interview female Muslims. Yet, it is important

to know if families react differently when females convert. Like most societies, Ghana is patriarchal. Hence, males are generally allowed more autonomy than females are. The conversion of a female could be a greater challenge for families that have less tolerance for daughters acting independently. Also, among the matrilineal Akan groups, the children born to a female member of the family remain in the lineage. So, if female converts raise their children as Muslims, the family can expect to have more Muslims within one or two generations. Such a possibility could raise special fears among Akan people.

Finally, there is the issue of who reports on family behavior. Muslim converts have their own subjective experience of their family's responses. The non-Muslim segments of these families might construct altogether narratives. Future studies should address such shortcomings.

**Notes**

1. This research was facilitated by the Morehouse Pan-African Global Experience (MPAGE) during the summers of 2009 and 2010. I would also like to acknowledge my Ghanaian collaborators: Rilwan "Ambassadar" Adamu, Fakiratu "Fikira" Adamu-King, and Issahaku Suleiman.

2. See Murata & Chittick (1994) to understand how Christians can also be Muslim.

3. Contact between Muslims and traditionalist ruling families of the ancient Sahelian states (e.g. Ancient Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and the Hausa states) produced many conversions among the nobility. This is why Muslim-ruled polities have a 1,000 year-old history in West Africa (Levztion 2000; Wilks 2000).

4. Historically immigrant populations are prominent among Ghana's Muslims. The Hausa are known to have immigrated from Northern Nigeria and Niger in recent centuries, and their language is a kind of lingua-franca for many Muslim communities in Ghana. The Fulani are a historically nomadic people with roots typically considered to be in the Senegambia region. The Wangara were originally traders coming from Ancient Mali, which is North and West of Ghana.

5. Especially relevant, here, is the extent to which children belong to their mother's or father's family. Family belonging has ramifications for child naming, child care, schooling fees, marriage ceremonies, and more (Billingsley 1968)

6. The three self-conscious and bureaucratically-organized Muslim communities in Ghana are the Tijaniyya (originated in North Africa but indigenized in West Africa during the 1800s), Wahhabiyya (originated in Saudi Arabia), and Ahdmadiyya (originated in British-ruled India). A fourth group is neither self-conscious nor bureaucratically-organized, but can be called the Suwarian community – named after the scholar whose interpretation of Islam has facilitated Muslim minorities to live peacefully in the forest belt and along the coast for centuries (Wilks 2000). Suwarians may be found among the oldest Muslim communities around Wa and Gonja, as well as among the Wangara of Elmina and Cape Coast. The Tijani are noted for interpreting Islam in a way that is only slightly in conflict with traditional African culture and spiritual practices. Like Suwarians, they may use amulets to ward off evil, exorcize witches, organize elaborate funerals, and battle evil spirits. The Wahhabis and Ahmadis are noted for their near-wholesale rejection of traditional African culture and spirituality, which they tend to see as synonymous with idolatry or paganism (Samwini 2006).

7. The Hausa homeland is in Northern Nigeria and Niger, but some Hausa families

have been in present day Ghana for several centuries. Samwini's (2006) observations suggest that the Hausa have probably been the single most influential ethnic group in the Ghanaian Tijani Muslim community. My personal experiences in Ghana suggest that Hausa is a lingua-franca for many Muslims in Ghana, and that Hausa culture has been quite influential among Muslims, too.

8. Three respondents insisted on being interviewed at the same time. So, some of the dynamics of a focus group may have affected their responses. However, their responses to my questions did not reveal any pattern of conformity. To the contrary, each of them told unique stories, even to the point of making statements like "Well, it was not like that for me. Here is what I experienced…"

9. Talking about one's own death is not seen in problematic terms for most observant Muslims. It is rather a topic that one is encouraged to reflect upon frequently. This keeps one's actions in this world contextualized in their meaning for the next world: paradise or punishment.

10. Traditionally, a marriage in Ghana can take months, or even years, as the groom and his family purchase and deliver traditional gifts to the bride's family, and finally save up enough money to pay the bride-price. Also, Muslims have an additional payment that is called the mahr or bride-gift. Unlike bride-price, which goes to the bride's father, the Islamic mahr goes only to the bride.

11. While other stories have been changed to maintain the anonymity of the interviewee, this man's story is told and retold all over Southern Ghana. Indeed, he asked that I tell his story to as many people as possible. He is trying to raise funds to support his continued preaching.

12. A titular honor given to Muslims who are especially learned in the religion.

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