

Butinage

The Art of Religious Mobility

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5 Mobility Intertwined: Migration, Kinship, and Education in Ghana

In this chapter, we discuss how complex patterns of geographic mobility serve as an underlying structure for religious mobility in Ghana and how mobility along geographic, familial, and educational lines may go hand in hand with changes in religious practices. Over the last two decades, scholars have increasingly addressed the role of religion in the context of migration and mobility. Geographic relocation, international migration, change of residence within a country or even within an immediate neighborhood – in other words, changing a person’s living conditions – has a bearing on their religious practices and belongings. Scholars have commonly observed how, to quote Afe Adogame, “religion is largely at the pivot of immigrants’ sense of individual and collective identities, and immigrant communities serve as focal points for religious and social networks” (Adogame 2003, 24). Scholarship in migratory – mostly Western – contexts discusses how religion becomes a key social institution, which offers an enclave of familiarity and empowerment where tensions between integration and group distinctiveness and cohesion are worked out.¹

To adopt a schematic and somewhat simplistic perspective, it appears that two avenues for religious engagement are open to the migrant.² The first involves persisting in their former practices and affiliations, using them to form a safe haven of familiarity and stability in the face of changing circumstances. Such religious continuity can be taken to prove the transnationalization of religion, which is closely associated with the age of globalization whose hallmark is the circulation of individuals and ideas around the globe. The second entails adapting to the new setting by assuming an alternative religious affiliation. As we have seen with regard to rural-urban mobility in Kenya, geographic mobility challenges the smooth continuity of religious practices: just as some individuals may assert their faith in the face of new cultural settings, others might

be inspired to rethink their religious practices and even to jettison their old religious affiliation in favor of a new one (Chen 2005). Such religious mobility may be encouraged by a feeling of liberation from former social constraints and by the intent to uncover their “authentic” self in the migratory context (Griffith 1997). It may also act as a coping strategy, a means for integration, or simply a response to newly encountered temptations. At times, such religious butinage is prompted by pragmatic considerations or mere necessity, as when moving to an area where their former denomination is not practiced. For some, geographic mobility can provide an opportunity to “take a breather” or abandon their religious involvement altogether (Bibby 1997). In the context of global migration, our exchanges with practicing Christians who have been living abroad for long periods of time show that living in a less religious setting, or in a setting where their own religion becomes a minority, strains their faith and may result in a religious crisis.

In fact, we believe that both options – geographic migration as resulting in withdrawal into “identity asylums” or as facilitating linear “religious transits” from one well-defined site to another – fail to exhaust the complex reorientations of identity that occur in the new setting. More often than not, the migratory moment is not finite, but proves to be only one moment within a wider pattern of circular or return migration (Newbold 2001; Duany 2002; Droz 2002a, 2016). In the previous chapter on Kenya, where rural and urban lives are strongly interwoven (Droz 1999), we saw how it is common to maintain a rich yet geographically well-demarcated religious identity. Thus, some people may consider themselves members of their family’s traditional religious denomination whenever they stay in their rural home. When in the city, however, they might keep a different affiliation and set of practices. Interestingly, such identity compartmentalization is widely accepted.

Despite evidence to the contrary, religious mobility within migratory contexts is frequently portrayed in terms of unidirectional movements, an image strengthened by a common depiction of the migrant as disempowered and passive, led by push and pull factors such as political hazards (for example, armed conflicts and violence “at home”) and geo-economic considerations (for example, attractive employment conditions in the host setting). In fact, far from being the “victim” of external forces, the migrant can also be an active agent, taking responsibility by shaping their own life trajectory (Monnier and Droz 2004). While mobility trajectories may take place within a single religious worldview, the possibility of coming into contact with similar religious systems allows the migrant to actively engage with and negotiate between the familiar and the new, infusing a worldview with novel, borrowed, and adjusted content.

Research in Ghana was conducted in 2014 by Rey, who had already studied the transnational Ghanaian diaspora during her doctoral work in Switzerland (2007–10) and in Ghana (2010). She later extended her fieldwork to the Ghanaian diaspora in Canada (Toronto, 2013–14) and narrowed down her focus to religious mobility. In 2014, she returned to Accra to expand her study. Most of the interview examples presented here derive from this latter field research period, where Rey drew on previously established contacts from religious – mostly Pentecostal-charismatic – networks using the snowball method. At the same time, she expanded her research to new religious territories and visited other Christian denominations as well as mosques. In order to limit biases caused by the choice of religious entry points, she also identified some of her interviewees in public places, including markets, streets, and public transportation.

Religious Pluralism in Ghana

Long before the Abrahamic religions made their way to the coast and the northern part of what is now Ghana, the ancient Gold Coast had been home to a wide repertoire of religious traditions. The plurality of spiritual entities in Akan and other West African cosmogonies were the outcome of encounters with, and incorporation of, “foreign” traditions over the course of history, in which human migrations, trade, conflicts, and wars all played a role. This process continued during and after colonial times. The emergence of the figure of Mami Wata – a “water spirit” whose multiple traits are often associated with wealth – offers an excellent example of the emergence of a new, syncretistic entity, with local variations and a plurality of discursive, ritualistic, and artistic expressions, along the Guinea Gulf (Drewal 2008; Jewsiewicki 2003) and, eventually, the Ghanaian diaspora (Rey 2013a). Indeed, the process of invention, appropriation, and re-signification of spiritual entities and their associated practices is at the heart of the creative “vitality of paganism” (Mary 1998).

The gradual penetration of Islam and Christianity into the region since the fifteenth century meant not only the dissemination of new religious systems but also the arrival of new power configurations and cultural technologies, such as books. One major expression of this new power, to take a Foucauldian perspective (Foucault 1984), was the definition of new religious boundaries and principles of differentiation based on the idea of “faith,” alongside their concomitant practices. Christian and Muslim institutions, which rely on the idea of exclusivism in religious affiliation, practices, and beliefs as well as clear universal categories of

“religion” (Horton 1971), spread through the construction of churches, mosques, mission dispensaries, and schools (Graham 1971; Skinner 2013). This expansion led to a sharper differentiation between religious identities, with consequences ranging from the destruction of indigenous shrines to peaceful cohabitation and cross-fertilization between religious practices. In the nineteenth-century Ashanti Kingdom, for example, “Muslims lived under the hospitality of infidel kings, who generally were praised by Muslims for their benevolence toward the believers” (Levtzion and Pouwels 2000, 3). The Ashanti King (*Asantehene*) Osei Tutu Kwame recognized both traditional and Muslim remedies and healing rituals (Owusu-Ansah 2000). Ghana’s contemporary medical pluralism (Krause 2006) seems to be rooted in that particular political history. At the same time, traditional Ashanti authorities also perceived external ideologies advocated by European missionaries and orthodox Muslims as a threat to the internal peace of Ashanti society, which strongly relied on indigenous religious mediation (Müller 2013).

Nowadays, Ghana is a country with significant religious pluralism, which has continued to diversify over recent decades. For example, in his book *The Lies That Bind*, Ghanaian-American thinker Kwame Anthony Appiah (2018, 66) describes traditional Ashanti ancestral worship as “taken by most people – Asante Catholic bishops and imams included! – to be perfectly consistent with having other confessional allegiances, with being Muslim or Christian.” While northern Ghana is considered to be predominantly Muslim and southern Ghana predominantly Christian, a long history of migration and proselytism has created a complex religious tapestry. Besides Islam, Christianity, and indigenous ritual systems, other religious traditions – such as Buddhism and Hinduism (Wuaku 2009) – have also gained presence, albeit a more modest and less visible one, contributing to religious cross-fertilization. But even within the country’s three principle religious traditions, Ghana has experienced great religious diversification associated with new developments within these religions themselves: most notably, the expansion of Pentecostal-charismatic movements and reformist Islam throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Kaba 2000; Larbi 2001). In the case of the former, the pluralization of the religious field is further enhanced by schismatic tendencies nurtured by institutional competition and the hope for social mobility through church planting (Rey 2019). In southern Ghana, ever since the 1990s we have witnessed a resurgence of indigenous ritual practices, which often go unnoticed in official statistics (Müller 2013).

On the public and political level, religious pluralism is supported by councils and institutions, such as the Ghana Conference of Religions

for Peace. On the level of individual practitioners, religious boundaries can be overcome through conversion, intermarriage, or an interplay of religious practices (for example, Islamic or Christian and indigenous ritual practices). Thus, writing on Christianity in Ghana, Elizabeth Graveling recognizes this tendency for mobility by assessing that “very few people attend only one denomination of church throughout their life; most switch at least three times” (Graveling 2010, 207). And yet, peaceful religious coexistence is not always guaranteed, and tensions between religious groups do sometimes emerge. Within both Christian and Muslim conservative circles, a change in religious affiliation can have dramatic consequences, even resulting in becoming distanced from family. Beyond the psychological distress that such estrangement entails, it often has a bearing on access to material resources. Notably, in Ghana as in other places, the Pentecostal injunction to “break with the past” (Meyer 1998) often implies severing ties with extended family, which, due to the “pagan” nature of kinship-related indigenous rituals, is seen as a point of entry for demonic influences.³ Traditionalists have been responding to the breaking of customary religious rituals by members of other religious groups with sanctions and protests, which at times escalate into outright conflict (Van Dijk 2001).

Religious Trajectories: Intertwined Kinship, Migration, and Educational Strategies

Prior to studying religious mobility in Ghana, Rey’s (2013b, 2018) ethnography of African migrants in Switzerland highlighted the strong appeal of charismatic diasporic churches. For many participants in African-led church services, migration from Africa to Europe coincided with a change in religious affiliation. People who had been Presbyterians, Catholics, Adventists, or Methodists in Ghana turned to charismatic or Pentecostal groups upon arrival to Switzerland. This move was often preceded by a period of active butinage within the new country, involving both visits and temporary engagement with multiple churches. Such intense mobility, however, tended to attenuate over time, ending with an affiliation with a single church that most fitted the migrant’s preferences, even though occasional visits to other churches were never completely abandoned. Rey further noted that most migrants paid little attention to the question of their own religious mobility. For most of them, changing affiliations was not an issue per se and was not conceived in dramatic terms. Rather, it

was simply a response to the new social context and an alternative to integrating into a local “white” church belonging with their original denomination (see Fancello and Mary 2010). Social, cultural, and linguistic barriers, as well as networking opportunities, proved to be much more significant factors in migrants’ religious trajectories than institutional continuity or prior familiarity with formal church doctrine. These findings support the premise that migration and religious mobility often go hand in hand.

In Ghana, too, geographic mobility is very commonly intertwined with religious mobility. There, geographic mobility (for example, from a village to the city) often implies other types of mobility, such as mobility within kinship systems or educational mobility. Mobility within kinship systems includes any change in an individual’s household unit, for instance, due to marriage and work opportunities, as well as any circulation within a multisited kinship structure. In the Kenyan context, Droz and Sottas (1997) observed that the multisited nature of family structures supports mobility strategies both at the individual and collective levels, opening opportunities for accessing various resources. In Ghana, multisited kinship structures are also common and open new perspectives for family members, in particular for the youth. Educational mobility similarly constitutes a frequent motivation for geographic mobility – within or outside family household networks – at an age when individuals are particularly prone to religious conversion and change in religious affiliation. Religious mobility thus appears to be embedded in a broader set of mobility patterns involving geographical, kinship, and educational dimensions, as we will present throughout the following case studies.

Anita: From the Village to the City

Anita’s parents live in Ghana’s Upper East Region, where she grew up as a Muslim. As the daughter of a pious *hajji*,⁴ back in the village her religious education and identity were confined to Islam. Anita never set foot in a church until she first visited her family in Accra as a high school student. While in the city, she accepted an invitation from her sister’s friend to visit her charismatic church. There, Anita says, she was “touched by the message,” and once she returned to her parents’ home, she refused to recite the Islamic prayers. Worried, her parents questioned her, but she refused to explain the motivation for her decision. After finishing high school, in 2012, she moved to Accra, where she lived with her maternal aunt and studied business and marketing. She converted to Christianity at the same charismatic church she visited several months earlier and

became a full member. She received her Christian name, and her sister and aunt, both of whom have also converted to Christianity, recognized her by her new name, “Anita.” Her parents, however, continue to use her Muslim name, “Amina,” as she did not reveal her conversion to them. According to Anita, her parents would not tolerate her choice and, should they discover her conversion, would stop funding her studies in Accra, putting her in a precarious situation. She noted that, compared to other families around her, her parents – especially her father – are less tolerant toward conversion to other religions. While some families in the Upper East Region accommodate members of different religions without conflict, Anita attributes her father’s intolerance to his strong attachment to Islam, his piety, and his status as a *hajji*. Yet, she suggested that she would reveal her new religion to her parents once she completed her studies and no longer depended on them financially.

Anita’s strategy for coping with her diachronic religious mobility while preserving kinship relationships and ensuring her parents’ financial support relies on a concealment strategy, where each religious affiliation is mobilized in a geographically distinct context. In the north, she is still perceived as a Muslim, albeit non-practicing; in the south, she evolves within her new identity as a charismatic Christian. Her case is not exceptional, though strategies for coping with such a situation vary. As conversion to Christianity often occurs among Ghanaian Muslims moving to study in larger cities like Accra, their families may react in different ways. As we were later told by a leader at the Assemblies of God in Ghana, in some cases, the church would take over and sponsor students who were disowned by their families due to conversion to Christianity. In other cases, church leaders would pragmatically advise the students to be cautious about announcing their conversion to relatives, proposing instead to wait for the right moment. Anita’s story shows how geographic mobility may facilitate religious change, especially in social settings that impose strict institutional religious loyalty, while regarding diachronic religious mobility – certainty into a completely different, Christian, territory – as transgressive.

More broadly, Anita’s trajectory is illustrative of a broader trend, which contributed to the continuous growth of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Ghana over the last decades: migration from rural regions to large urban environments (Fancello 2006). In cities, these churches, whose size and organizational structures range from small “prayer cells” to megachurches, offer a tightly knit social environment that recreates a sense of community and even family, as exemplified by support to dispossessed students: a particularly meaningful experience for migrants who feel disoriented in the new urban setting.

George: Moving along Kinship and Educational Lines

George is a retired minister at a large Ghanaian Pentecostal denomination. We first met at the launching event of his denomination's new mission program. In our successive meetings, George recounted his twenty-odd years of experience as a church program manager, overseeing evangelization throughout the country, including in the countryside. While his church's modes of operation developed over time through new evangelization techniques, George argued that the general attitude toward other religious groups and practitioners has remained essentially unchanged since he entered the congregation. In a religiously diverse country like Ghana, many religious practitioners share the idea that they should avoid aggressive proselytization. George explained that his preachers are very careful about not insulting other religions when they go on a mission (for example, in villages), and they do not criticize "fetish priests" and their "idols" directly. "Jesus came for fetish priests, too," he said. Yet, he admitted that some Pentecostal or charismatic preachers "lack wisdom" and criticize idols and indigenous ritual practices, which inevitably creates tensions between born-again preachers and followers of traditional religions.

George's own acceptance of Pentecostalism, back in the late 1960s during his high school days near Accra, was itself the result of mission activities, which have brought him to renounce his Muslim faith. And yet, George was not born a Muslim but was brought up Christian in a family of mixed religious traditions. His father was a Fanti traditional chief in the Central Region. As part of his duty, he participated in religious ceremonies whenever needed, be they Christian or Islamic, and performed all the traditional rituals associated with his status. Like other chiefs in Ghana, he was closer to customary rituals than to any monotheistic faith; yet, he did not perceive them as religious. After his death, he had a traditional funeral, without any church involvement. George's mother, by contrast, was a Methodist. Although she did not go to church on a regular basis, George attended church services with her from time to time. Things changed when George moved to his maternal uncle's household in the Central Region to attend middle school. His uncle and cousins were all members of the Muslim Ahmadi community. When George's uncle asked him to convert to Islam, George accepted and, as long as he remained in his uncle's home, performed all the Islamic prayers and duties. After graduating from middle school, George left the Central Region to live in the Greater Accra region, where he attended high school. There, he met born-again Christians,

converted, and became a member of the Pentecostal church where he would eventually minister.

As in Anita's case, the intertwining of geographic and religious mobility is obvious in George's trajectory. However, George's case is even more striking due to his mobility between households within the same kinship structure as well as his educational mobility, both of which have induced a diachronic butinage. George's decision to convert to a new religion when integrating into a new household might be considered in terms of respect toward his hosts within the nexus of family hierarchies and multisited kinship systems. Indeed, beyond George's case, we observed such a pattern of temporary religious mobility on several occasions. The young and mobile family member would adopt the religious practices of their elder and more senior host, with such temporary conversions making household routine more harmonious by having all household members follow a single religious code of conduct. Such were also our observations in Kenya.

In addition, we note how George's diachronic religious mobility is also linked to his educational trajectory. At each step of his formal studies, he shifted to another religion. His case points to the intersectionality of geographic, educational, and religious mobility. In the Kenyan context, Droz (1999; Droz et al. 2019) showed how geographic mobility and aspirations for socioeconomic advancement, together with religious mobility, are drawn upon in the context of individual quests for self-accomplishment. In George's trajectory, too, the three dimensions have intertwined, following his schooling trajectory. His educational projects required him to change geographic location, and the resulting shifts between households stimulated religious mobility.

Due to the historical intertwinement of specific religious practices with Ghana's formal educational system, religious mobility can also be related to adaptive educational strategies. George's conversion to Pentecostalism in the late 1960s happened at the dawn of a historical decade, when the Pentecostal-charismatic movement in Ghana was about to strike roots in university campuses and beyond (Gifford 2004a; Van Dijk 2001). Since then, major Pentecostal churches have continued to be active in (higher) education. In recent years, Ghanaian Pentecostal denominations (for example, the Assemblies of God) launched their own university programs, teaching "secular" subjects such as information technology (IT) and business administration. Thus, the intertwining of conversion to Pentecostalism and educational trajectories relates to the broader context of a changing educational landscape and new proselytizing strategies.

The analogy between kinship and religious belonging, which is a common trope used by many religious groups (Sharma 2012; Bonsu and Belk 2010), also carries implications for how education and religious mobility are interlaced. By using a kinship terminology (“brothers” and “sisters”), some religious groups may imitate the pattern of mobility within kinship structures. The church thus assumes the role of a “surrogate family,” with its own parental hierarchy, obligations, and redistributive system, creating a sense of familiarity that may facilitate religious mobility toward charismatic churches. This pattern is strengthened by scholarship schemes, which churches sometimes offer to selected members. Thus, they assume the educational funding function that is usually associated with family. Such surrogate kinship may ease shifts from one religious system to another. In the same way that mobility within multi-sited families may result in religious mobility toward the host’s religious practice, so might educational mobility intertwine with religious mobility. We observed such a pattern in a Pentecostal university offering “secular” bachelor’s programs (for example, in business and engineering) in Kofuridua,⁵ where Muslim students regularly participated in Christian prayers, at least for the duration of their studies at the Pentecostal campus.

Unlike Anita, George’s successive conversions did not cause major troubles for his family relationships. Tolerance toward religious mobility is common in Ghanaian families and is sometimes explained in terms of preexisting religious diversity within the family. One interviewee, a leader of an Ahmadi community, elaborated on the movement’s teaching whereby there should be no coercion in religious matters, which, according to him, explains why Ahmadi families often show a high degree of religious pluralism. Similarly, a young ambulance driver from Kumasi described how each of his siblings had been baptized in a different church. He had chosen to become Catholic, like his parents, but his four sisters decided to be baptized in four different churches: the eldest in the Church of Pentecost; the second in the Methodist Church; the third in the Presbyterian Church; and the youngest, who recently turned eighteen and was thereby granted religious autonomy by the family, was recently baptized in a charismatic church. The family’s parents have been accommodating, believing that religious affiliation is a choice that must be made by the children themselves. To illustrate what was for him self-evident, the young driver said: “If you like fufu,⁶ you cannot force your child to like and eat fufu.” This quotation illustrates how some families are reluctant to intervene in their members’ religious decisions and impose their religious identities as a kinship obligation. Such a view is further supported by popular wisdom about the obvious character of

the existence of God, which is explicit in the Akan proverb “*obi nkyere akwadaa Nyame*” (“nobody can teach a child about God”). While the belief in God is perceived as self-evident, the fufu metaphor highlights the relative tolerance toward diverse religious affiliations within the same family – as if it were a question of personal culinary taste – as accommodating the practice of butinage.

Abraham and Grace: When Religion and Kinship Overlap

The family’s attitude toward religious mobility may also depend on the type of religious affiliation taken up by its members and the position that they occupy within a religious institution. Some religious contexts – like the Catholic or Ahmadi communities in Ghana – seem more porous than others and serve as a lenient basis for diachronic mobility. Other institutions conceive religious mobility as more transgressive and tend to enforce severe sanctions on their members who cross boundaries, sometimes to the effect of jeopardizing an entire kinship system. Such a strict stance is evident in the case of Abraham and Grace, two committed members of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Abraham’s father converted to Jehovah’s Witnesses in order to marry Abraham’s mother, who became a member in her youth, following her parents’ conversion. As Jehovah’s Witnesses only allow marriage within their own community, the couple and their four children – Abraham has three sisters – joined the community in Accra. Grace, by contrast, came from a Catholic family in the Volta Region, where she grew up and lived until moving to the capital. When Abraham and Grace first met, she worked as a secretary at a foreign embassy, while he was employed in an export company in the city of Tema, right outside Accra. At that time, he was seeking to extricate himself from his family’s grasp and was therefore living at his employer’s home. He met Grace in the street, and they began to meet regularly and soon fell in love. When Grace got pregnant, they announced it to her family, who suggested they should marry. Abraham, however, knew that his parents would not accept the marriage, both because sexual intercourse before marriage is forbidden among Jehovah’s Witnesses and because Grace was a Catholic. Indeed, his parents informed the church leaders, who then summoned Abraham to clarify his situation. He confessed to his actions and consequently lost his position as a ministering servant within the church.

Even though Abraham’s parents reproved his marriage with a Catholic woman, he and Grace still decided to get married. Despite Jehovah’s Witnesses’ view that marriage should be carried out either in the church or in a traditional way, Grace and Abraham did both. They first

got married in Grace's village, close to the town of Hohoe, according to Ewe customs, and then got married at the Catholic Church. Nobody from Abraham's immediate family attended the wedding, which they opposed on religious grounds. Abraham's best man thus symbolically filled the role of his family, inviting some of his own family members as a substitute. Yet, Abraham felt an urge to restore relations with his family, and only Grace's conversion to Jehovah's Witnesses, after their marriage, succeeded in partly relieving the tensions with Abraham's family. The couple integrated into the community, and Grace became a very active church member, while Abraham was allowed to pray with the congregation again. Abraham improved his relationship with his parents, although he felt that his father was still upset with him, suggesting that their relationship has changed forever. Abraham argues that it is "normal" that his family was absent from his wedding, because he had committed a sin and had to pay for it. Grace's conversion also had an impact on her own family, as it resulted in religious mobility among some of her family members. For example, Grace's younger sister had been living in Accra and was hosted in the couple's house. During her stay, she became a committed Jehovah's Witness, to the delight of her hosts. Yet, since her return to the Volta Region, she did not visit Jehovah's Witnesses again and instead went back to the Catholic Church – to which most of her family members were affiliated.

Abraham's departure from Jehovah's Witnesses had been forced on him due to his religious transgression. And yet, his role in the story was not entirely passive, and his actions show how individual religious practitioners may at times risk defying church rules. Indeed, even in contexts where institutional norms strictly prohibit religious mobility or intimate relationships with nonbelievers, people might not comply, but seek to balance their various commitments, roles, and interests. In the final analysis, transgression and rupture are sometimes perceived as the "right" thing to do, as they allow one to pragmatically balance conflicting commitments in a given situation (Daswani 2013; Lambek 2010). Unlike Anita, Abraham and Grace enjoyed financial autonomy, which significantly lowered their degree of dependency on their families and allowed them to temporarily sever ties with them. Nevertheless, in order to restore their relationships with Abraham's family, Grace had to convert to Abraham's faith and become a committed member of Jehovah's Witnesses. Religious mobility helped the couple resolve a crucial dilemma: Abraham's Catholic wedding and Grace's subsequent conversion to the Jehovah's Witnesses allowed them to find a way through this complex situation, despite incompatible family expectations and religious obligations.

In a neighboring West African context, Katrin Langewiesche (2003) analyzed religious boundaries in Burkina Faso. She observed that these boundaries have a strong discursive nature and tend to be much more porous in practice than in theory. While both individual practitioners and religious institutions emphasize the role of fixed and bounded religious identities, these boundaries are crossed more often than these discourses suggest. Other authors referred to similar practices in other West African countries, such as the “religious shoppers” in Nigeria (Janson 2016) and, to a lesser extent, the occasional socially or practically motivated mobile practitioner in Mali (Soares 2016). These observations are also relevant to our case study in Accra. And yet, the institutional factor remains important, as not all religious groups offer a similar degree of tolerance toward religious mobility. Rupture in social relationships, including kinship ties, is one of the most common patterns exhibited by strict religious institutions in sanctioning departing members.

One reason why religious mobility may have a transgressive character from an institutional point of view lies in the conflict between different normative practices and prohibitions across religious institutions. In hindsight, the most problematic element for Abraham with regard to his own religious trajectory was linked to the fact that he had to take communion at his Catholic wedding. According to him, because the wedding was his own, he had no choice but to take communion, despite Jehovah’s Witnesses’ teachings that only certain God-chosen people, who remain virgin their entire life, may take communion and, even then, would do so only once a year. Those who know they are not among these chosen people and yet transgress this prohibition will draw a curse upon themselves. This teaching has brought about significant worries for Abraham, and he still prays to be forgiven for his transgressions. He is still struggling to deal with the gap between these two normative systems of practice that he has engaged in throughout his religious trajectory.

Additional Practices: Logics and Economies of Religious Mobility

Besides diachronic trajectories, religious mobility may also unfold through multiple concurrent practices within the same temporal frame, which we call synchronic mobility. Like in Kenya, Ghanaian religious practitioners tend to maintain a single main affiliation – their primary one, which we shall later term a “pivot” – while potentially incorporating secondary practices. We propose that these additional practices may be embedded in specific “economies” that carry implications for how religious mobility is enacted.

As in Kenya and Brazil, visiting other people's church is part of the social fabric of Christians in Accra, a practice that contributes to the consolidation of social ties among neighbors, friends, and relatives. Accepting such an invitation is a matter of courtesy, as is its reciprocal nature. At the same time, such invitations are highly ambiguous because, by inviting acquaintances to their congregation, church members show their institutional loyalty and commitment to "gaining new souls" in the form of new members. Still, church visits vary between denominations and congregations, with some stricter congregations showing reluctance to let their members wander elsewhere, even temporarily (Gez and Droz 2017). Besides responding to such occasional invitations, all our interviewees in Ghana admitted attending religious services outside their own community on specific occasions as part of their social obligations to take part in rites of passages such as weddings or funerals.

Anita, George, Abraham, and Grace all visit other religious communities on particular occasions. While Anita would go to Catholic services or to charismatic churches upon invitation, Abraham and Grace would not visit acquaintances' churches, as they stringently adhere to their church's exclusivist stance. During important social rituals such as funerals or weddings, they would attend ceremonies held by other religious communities, but will avoid active participation. For example, Abraham would not take communion if attending a funeral organized by his wife's Catholic family. By taking a back seat during such events, Abraham is not taking his cue only from Jehovah's Witnesses' exclusivist stance, but also from their teachings whereby, unlike the wider Ghanaian custom, funerals should not be celebrated in an extravagant fashion. For his part, George would also attend ceremonies related to various traditions within his multireligious family. He explained, moreover, that, due to his formal function in his Pentecostal church, he sometimes has to represent his congregation in religious events outside the church, mainly in other Pentecostal functions.

Mobility among religious and political leaders is also common in Ghana and highlights how the fragile balance between clearly delineated religious identities and the porousness of religious practices is a central component of the exercise of power in the country. The president of Ghana at the time we conducted our research, John Dramani Mahama (2012–17), hails from a multifaith family consisting of both Muslims and Christians, a fact that he often emphasized. Raised in the Presbyterian Church, he became a member of the Assemblies of God when he married his Pentecostal wife, who belongs to another ethnic group. With his roots in a religiously mixed family from northern Ghana and currently living in the southern capital as a member of the Assemblies of God,

the president's trajectory supposedly embodied the socioreligious ethos of the Ghanaian nation, united across heterogeneous cultures, regions, and religions. The quest for unity across religious boundaries also remains the main objective of such institutions as the National Peace Council, which brings together religious representatives and leaders from Christian, Muslim, and traditional organizations. In moments of national transition, such as after the death of President John Atta Mills in 2012 and the elections that ensued later that year, this council implores the nation to maintain peace.

When it comes to accommodating public life, religious authorities enter various compromises, which sometimes go against their own institutional directives. One example is the funeral of the Ahmadi Amir of Ghana, Abdul Wahab Adam, who died in June 2014. While the Ahmadi religious directive clearly states that the burial should immediately follow the person's death and remain modest, the Ahmadi organization in Ghana decided to concede exceptions to that rule. As the Amir was an important state official, the community leaders decided to organize a formal funeral and to delay the burial in order to give political and religious dignitaries time to arrive. This decision, which met with criticism within the Ahmadi community, illustrates how compromises are reached in order to accommodate the conflicting expectations of multiple religious and social groups, as well as the requirements associated with community representation in a diverse country such as Ghana.

Besides social logic and institutional strategies, synchronic religious mobility may also involve practical logic oriented toward the achievement of specific goals or the resolution of concrete life challenges. These may include overcoming misfortunes and seeking healing and fertility, achieving financial and social prosperity, or seeking protection or justice. While this kind of religious mobility may eventually engender new religious affiliations (Droz 2002b), it often unfolds synchronically and without impacting the person's official religious identity. Indeed, for many people, such practically motivated mobility, consisting of "consultations" with people of great spiritual power, is seen as separate from questions of religious affiliation.

A good illustration of such mobility is offered by the case of Mehdi, a Sunni Muslim born in Accra, whose parents immigrated from Benin. Every Friday, Mehdi goes to the mosque for prayer, and he insists that he is a practicing Muslim, showing the mark on his forehead (*zebiba*) as proof of his piety. Nevertheless, whenever Mehdi wants to address a specific problem, he turns to a Christian pastor. Mehdi explained that he first tried to address his problems through Islamic prayer, but as no positive change occurred, he visited a pastor for help, which, in his

experience, turned out to be more effective. Since then, he has been going to the mosque on Friday and to the church on weekdays (see Janson 2016). Despite these frequent visits to churches and even though he considers Christian prayers to be more effective, Mehdi claims that he has no intention of converting to Christianity. While Mehdi never consulted a local *juju* (fetish) priest about his problems, he would not rule out visiting one, for example, when accompanying a friend. In the months leading to our interview, he has been going to a church run by a female pastor from the northern part of Accra, whom he has been visiting with his sister who was worried about her pregnancy. The pastor prayed for her and, sure enough, Mehdi's sister gave birth to a healthy baby. When we interviewed him, Mehdi and his sister were intending to go back to the pastor and show her the baby so that she can pray for all of them. At times, Mehdi frequents another Christian pastor who would pray for his prosperity. His hope is that, one day, he could open his own business and achieve economic success.

This type of pragmatic religious mobility is supported by an “economy of blessings” (Rey 2015), which, in Ghana and beyond, underlies the religious landscape of Pentecostal prosperity theology (Heuser 2015). This economy involves an exchange between God and the religious practitioner, which is often mediated and regulated by religious specialists and institutions. Prayer, tithe, trust, intimacy, patience, as well as material goods are all central to this economy of blessings. To illustrate how this economy engenders religious mobility, we can consider the case of Kofi, a single young Catholic man, whose main dream has been to start a family. And yet, before marrying, Kofi said he would “need to do certain things,” that is, ensure his economic success. He disapproves of Ghanaians who start a family at a very young age, as he believes that their children are doomed to economic deprivation. Kofi explained that he would first need to establish himself financially, because he wants his children to go to school. In order to achieve this objective, he ambitiously runs several businesses in parallel, and he expects that his prospective wife will be just as entrepreneurial. Having arrived in Accra from the Ashanti Region some ten years before our encounter, following in the footsteps of his maternal uncle's son, Kofi studied and worked for four years in a pharmacy until he received authorization to open his own drugstore. Yet, lacking the necessary funds, he turned to odd jobs in the hope of saving enough money to open his own pharmacy in a few years.

One of Kofi's various occupations has been as a taxi driver, and it is through that job that he met the pastor of the charismatic church he now attends on specific weekdays. He usually goes there on Wednesday or Friday evenings, when the church offers all-night prayers. Once, that

pastor forgot his mobile phone in the car Kofi was renting. Even though selling the pastor's lost mobile phone could have been lucrative, Kofi decided to give it back. The pastor, touched by the young man's integrity, asked what he could give him in return. Kofi asked the pastor to pray for him every day. The pastor agreed and advised Kofi to remain virtuous and honest in the future. After that encounter, Kofi regularly returned to the pastor's charismatic church, until one day, the pastor offered him an old car, which he now uses for his work.⁷ Owning a car allows Kofi to save up money and to come ever closer to his goal of opening a pharmacy. As a short-term goal, he would like to buy a *tro-tro* (Ghanaian "coach" or transport vehicle) for intercity transport or a second car that he could rent out to another driver. Attending Catholic Mass every Sunday did not keep Kofi from visiting the pastor's charismatic church and offering generous financial contributions there, sometimes as high as 200 or 300 cedis.⁸ The pastor has become a trusted figure in Kofi's life, and Kofi regularly confides in him. For example, whenever Kofi has to travel outside Accra, he asks the pastor for spiritual guidance. Kofi believes in the pastor's spiritual powers, including his "gift of knowledge," and attentively follows his practical recommendations, which could range from caution in drinking certain types of filtered water to abstaining from certain journeys.

Kofi's relationship with the charismatic pastor involves the exchange of prayers, trust, and advice, as well as money and other material goods. It is representative of exchange practices that rely on a larger "economy of blessings," where God appears as the dispenser of wealth and other blessings. Yet, despite the importance of this religious involvement for his daily life and future projects, Kofi would not want to leave the Catholic Church, where he was baptized at the age of fourteen. His Sunday church attendance remains almost exclusively limited to his main affiliation with the Catholic Church. Like Mehdi, Kofi's synchronic religious mobility and multiple practices are temporally demarcated, with clear differentiation between his main affiliation and his additional weekdays practices.

Conclusion

Research on religion in Africa has had a tendency to explore Islam and Christianity along separate lines and to treat them as two distinct groups (Janson and Meyer 2016). Even in places where there is a long history of coexistence, such as Ghana, religious traditions, practices, and practitioners have rarely been analyzed as belonging to a "shared field of religious practices" (Dilger and Schulz 2013, 372). And yet, by

analyzing the dynamism of individual religious practice, we observe that circulation across religious boundaries, including between Christian and Islamic territories, is common in the Ghanaian capital, as in neighboring Nigeria (Janson 2016). Thus, one important feature highlighted by the Ghanaian case study is that religious territories visited by religious practitioners might not be confined to a specific religion (for example, Christian denominations). As rightly stated by Larkin (2016, 634), “the emphasis on difference [between religions] is that it makes it difficult to analyze this more thickly constituted religious and secular environment and to understand quotidian entanglements of everyday encounter.”

Therefore, we invite researchers to devote more attention to religious circulation across separate religious territories. On the institutional level, we can identify symbolic “bridges” (Birman 1996) between different religious spaces, which allow practitioners to overcome the often-transgressive nature of crossing religious boundaries. These bridges reduce the weight of institutional reluctance – or prohibition – regarding religious mobility by offering counter-discourses and counter-symbols. In Ghana, such bridges may, for example, include indigenous symbols, such as the *adinkra* symbols among the Ashantis,⁹ which carry particular religious meanings while being largely understood and shared by Ashantis across different religious groups. Such symbols are often painted, carved, and attached to houses, shops, and cars, and are part and parcel of the visual urban landscape. They may refer to “God” (for example, *Gye Nyame*¹⁰) without betraying a sectarian association with a stated religious group. These bridges may also rely on the borrowing of forms from other religions, such as the Pentecostalization of other Christian community practices or Islamic prayer (Obadare 2016). In Ghana, we were also told how some techniques were borrowed not only from other Christian denominations but also from other so-called world religions. Without downplaying the significance of historical differences between religions and their traditions (Peel 2015), we argue that long-standing entanglements and transmission of ideas facilitate mobility across institutional boundaries otherwise thought of as impassable.

While some bridges are part of the religious landscape, others imply widely shared ideas among Ghanaians, such as the belief that God is similar everywhere and that one can worship him through every religion. These unifying themes are common and are conveyed by popular musicians and other artists who lament the enmity between institutionalized religions. Such stances shed light on a comment shared by Mehdi, which carries a strong critique of the institutional prohibition of religious mobility: “Both pastors and imams hide the truth: there is only one God, to whom you can pray in different places.” In contrast

to such inclusive statements, distinct religious territories are elaborated through the various institutional stances toward members' propensity for religious mobility, which vary from a high degree of tolerance to strict prohibition, including sanctions against those straying from exclusive institutional loyalty. Even when subjected to such institutional prohibitions and even when risking their affiliation or kinship relationships, practitioners may still maintain their mobile behavior. In some cases, in order to avoid negative repercussions, religious mobility might be concealed. This sharp contrast between institutional prohibitions and de facto practice exposes the limitations of the authority of the religious elites. Indeed, addressing religious institutions alone does not do justice to the complex patterns underlying religious mobility in Ghana – hence the importance of reaching a conceptualization of religious mobility that would capture practice in the making and contribute to our critical reading of formal institutional prescriptions.

as this discussion is secondary to our interest in religious mobility, we avoid developing it.

- 23 For a critique of the term, see Crisp and Cowton (1994).
- 24 M-Pesa is a popular system for transferring money using cell phones. The derogatory term “M-Pesa pastors” derives from the emphasis, by some pastors and especially televangelists who subscribe to the prosperity gospel, on M-Pesa as a way for believers to send money to the church/pastor in exchange for blessings (Parsitau 2014, 246, 262, 285).
- 25 Winners’ Chapel is a Nigerian church advocating prosperity teachings. In Kenya, it has an ambivalent reputation – many believe that it is successful in contributing to congregants’ socioeconomic ascension, even as they suspect that the church draws its powers by being in league with evil powers.
- 26 It is worth mentioning that, in Ghana, similar rumors crop up about pastors from Nigeria. It is also alleged that some Ghanaian pastors owe their spiritual power to ungodly rituals performed in Nigeria.
- 27 In Kenya, it is largely considered unthinkable to sell a plot where a relative is buried: it would imply disowning one’s deceased ancestors (Droz 2011).
- 28 This phenomenon is not necessarily new, as Valeer Neckebrouck (1983) shows.
- 29 At the same time, schisms may also occur because founding a new ministry serves as a way for the founder to achieve self-accomplishment (Droz 2000a).

5 Mobility Intertwined: Migration, Kinship, and Education in Ghana

- 1 See, for example, Van Dijk 2004; Warner and Wittner 1998; Williams 1988; Warner 2000; Ebaugh and Saltzman Chafetz 2000; Sabar 2004; Van Dijk 1997; Adogame 2003, 2004.
- 2 This presentation is somewhat simplistic because the very transnationalization of religious congregations goes hand in hand with significant changes in religious practice and discourse. Ethnographic studies by Fancello (2006), Daswani (2015), and Rey (2019), for instance, document such transnationalization processes with regard to Ghanaian churches in Europe.
- 3 Such family ruptures add an interesting dimension to the common allusion to kinship terminologies within religious circles and within Pentecostal-charismatic circles in particular – whereby the church assumes the role of a spiritual foster family (see, for example, Sharma 2012; Bonsu and Belk 2010).
- 4 A Muslim who has completed a pilgrim to Mecca.
- 5 Kofuridua is a town situated between Accra and Kumasi in southern Ghana.
- 6 Fufu is a popular meal made using pounded cassava and plantain.
- 7 Like many other taxi drivers in Accra, Kofi did not own the car he drove, but rented it on a daily basis. Rental rates may reach 80 cedis per day (2014),

which is more than half of a driver's average daily income in Accra. Thus, owning a car is a significant step toward financial independence.

8 The equivalent of about 80 to 120 euros.

9 *Adinkra* are symbols often associated with Akan proverbs or moral values. They are worn on a person's clothes (for example, for funerals) and include brass or gold figures and other artistic creations. They now serve as an expression of Akan culture. Houses, shops, or pieces of furniture may also be decorated with *adinkra* symbols.

10 *Gye Nyame*, which literally means "except for God," is one of the most popular and widespread *adinkra* symbols in Ghana. It has an inherently trans-religious character as it speaks to Muslims, Christians, and Traditionalists. It is therefore an illustration of the cultural "bridges" that transcend religious boundaries within Akan society.

6 Religion and Mobility in Switzerland: A Most Private Affair

1 The questionnaires were administered from 2008 to 2009.

2 The authors also considered alternative medicine, such as Reiki and chromatology, as religious "resources" at the disposal of believers.

3 Exit is a Swiss association that assists people to end their lives by physician-assisted suicide. Its website can be found at <https://exit.ch/en/>.

4 Such division was demonstrated by Karl Polanyi (1944) with regard to the economy and by Michel Foucault (1972, 1976) with regard to madness and sexuality.

5 One appealing attempt at reconciling the two terms is proposed by Peter Hill et al. (2000). According to their suggestion, spirituality necessarily involves a search for the sacred, broadly defined by individuals themselves. Religion may or may not involve a similar objective and is necessarily complemented by two additional components not shared by spirituality: (1) a search for nonsacred goals (for example, identity, belonging, meaning, health, or wellness); and (2) a prescription of means and methods by which to search for the sacred that receives validation from an identifiable group. As Schlehofer, Omoto, and Adelman (2008) positively comment, this conceptual approach may help harmonize, rather than polarize, the two terms.

6 *Le secret* refers to a therapeutic practice in which a person recites – often over the phone – secret prayers transmitted over generations, which are supposed to cure burns and skin disease. It is widely known in the Catholic cantons of Switzerland and France (Jenny 2008).

7 Such a critical approach toward religious institutions is by no means new. Its most famous antecedent, perhaps, is the Christian Reformation, with

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