Fante Marriage, Kinship, Hospitality, and Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana

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Abstract

Hospitality is a value of service that is offered to the other person as a guest who could be a relative or a complete stranger. Among the Fante people, values of hospitality are also meant to forge alliances between individuals and families for the good of the general society. Based on social observation, couple interviews, and kin focus groups at eight towns, this paper discusses the complexities of marriage-based kin relations (affine relations) among the Fante people of Ghana. These relations arose out of mixed marriages between the couples' Christian and Muslim families. It also examines the extent to which highly cherished hospitable virtues are maximized by marriage-based kin of Christian-Muslim families for the promotion of Christian-Muslim relations in communities.

Keywords

Sub-Saharan Africa, Christianity, Islam, Kinship, Hospitality, Christian-Muslim Marriage

The contribution of marriage-based kinship of the Fante people to Christian-Muslim encounters in Ghana cannot be overemphasized. The Fante people, located mostly in the Central Region, are part of the Akan which constitutes one of the largest ethnic groups in Ghana.[1] The Fante—and so, all the Akan people—have developed a time-tested kinship system (derived from consanguinity, marriage, and adoption) which is the foundation of their social organization and relationship. G. K. Nukunya, the eminent Ghanaian Professor of Sociology at the University of Ghana, opines that kinship "is the superstructure on which the very fabric of Akan society is built."[2] The kinship system prescribes status and roles to members in particular relationships such as marriage, lineage, or clan. The Akan people, like many African people, are noted for their strong kinship ties.

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[1] R. K. Aboagye-Mensah, *Mission and Democracy in Africa: The Role of the Church* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1994), 18.

[2] G. K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1992), 11.

This paper discusses, specifically, marriage-based kinship—also called affinal kinship—and its implication for Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. Among the Fante people, affinal kinship is often a product of the marriage of a couple of the same faith group. For instance, a marriage of two Catholics brings Catholics of different families into affinal kinship. It could also be a product of a marriage between a couple of different religious backgrounds, as for instance, a Muslim and a Christian. A marriage of a Christian and a Muslim inevitably brings two great traditions of faith (Christianity and Islam) into a covenant of marriage. It also attempts to reconcile their teachings of marriage, divorce (and relatedly, separation or annulment), and even inheritance. Among the Fante people, such marriage, importantly, also brings Christian and Muslim families into kinship relationships. Three types of marriages are recognized by Ghanaian law, all of which bring Christians and Muslims into affinal kinship: Customary Marriage (Registration Act, 1985 (PNDCL 112), which is now Part One of the Marriages Act 1884–1985; Muhammadan Marriage for Muslims, which is Part Two of the Marriages Act 1884–1985 (CAP 129); Ordinance Marriage of 1884 (CAP 127), now Part Three of the Marriages Act 1884–1985). Christian-Muslim marriage is a perfect example of the marriage of disparity of cult (mixed marriage) in both Christianity and Islam. It is not normally encouraged and it is also considered extraordinary in both Christianity and Islam. Two kinds of Christian-Muslim marriages are covered by this paper: Christian-Muslim marriage officiated by a religious leader; and Christian-Muslim customary marriage officiated by family head.

In this paper, I will demonstrate that the substance of Christian-Muslim relations among the Fante people extends beyond the interaction of Christian and Islamic theological claims and includes essential indigenous socio-cultural values. That is, socio-cultural values shape Christian-Muslim relations as much as, if not more than, religious values and faith commitments. I will also examine indigenous Fante values of hospitality associated with affinal kinship, demonstrate their contribution not only to the promotion of sound interpersonal relations between Christians and Muslims, but also in the development of fertile social environment for peaceful religious co-existence in Ghana.

I have used a mix-approach. Information about the Fante and the Akan indigenous values were obtained from available literature, which included books and articles in libraries, archives, and local newspapers on the Fante (Akan) customary laws and traditions. Official documents such as constitutions, handbooks, working papers, and profiles of Christian and Muslim groups, organizations, and denominations were also used. The main instruments, employed in fieldwork, were observation and interviews of Christian-Muslim couples and Affinal kin focus groups in eight towns in the Central Region of Ghana: Oguaa, Abura, Kotokoraba Zongo, Agona Nyakrom, Gomoa Assin, Ekumfi Essarkyir, Gomoa Kokofu, and Ekumfi Ekrawfo. These towns were selected because of their significant number of Christian and Muslim populations. The focus group interviews of affinal kins were designed to require information on the beliefs and attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics of religious people as they relate with their kin who belong to other religions. One-on-one interviews were conducted with four selected Christian-Muslim couples from each town. The respondents were randomly selected from Christian and Muslim groups in all the selected villages and towns.[3] Participant observation of interactions, actions, reactions, and behaviors of Christian and Muslim affinal kins were done. As

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[3] Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education and Social Science* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992), 72.

a native with sufficient knowledge of the social context under study, I was able to give meaningful, insider-based, and informed interpretations of the behaviors observed. I, however, acknowledge the possibility of my native status influencing my perspective.

This study focused on Christian-Muslim relations among the Fante people of the Central Region of Ghana. Christian groups selected for this study included mission churches (Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian) and Indigenous churches (the Musama Disco Christo Church, the Twelve Apostles' Church, Pentecostal churches, and charismatic churches). Muslims came from both the mainstream or orthodox *Ahlus sunna wal Jamāʿ* and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement. The study was conducted from June 2018 to October 2021 as part of a broader research into the contribution of Akan indigenous values to the promotion of interreligious dialogue in Ghana.

Akan Kinship by Marriage/Affinal Kinship

According to the Fante people, marriage establishes a relationship between the couple that also extends to their families. A Fante (Akan) marriage is a social contract whose ultimate purpose is to bring families together. It could be said to be an alliance of the spouses' families, in which alliance the spouses represent their families. Describing marriages of the Akan people, the British ethnographer R. S. Rattray states: "It is perhaps almost a platitude to state that marriage in Ashanti is not so much a contract between individuals directly concerned, as one between the two groups of individuals whom they represent."[4] Rattray's description of Ashanti marriage as a social contract between families is also true of all Akan ethnic groups such as the Fante located along the coast of the Central Region. In the case *Yaotey v. Quaye*, the judge of the High Court pointed out the dissimilarities between the marriage of the English people and customary marriage in Ghana when he noted, "Now, one peculiar characteristic of our system of marriage in Europe and other places is that it is not just a union of 'this man' and 'this woman'; it is a union of 'the family of this man' and 'the family of this woman'."[5] In his classic definition of customary law of marriage, Legon W. C. Ekow Daniels, the eminent professor in the Faculty of Law of the University of Ghana, indicated that this affiliation or alliance evolves out of the four families (maternal and paternal families of each of the spouses). Daniels' definition defines indigenous marriage as "the union of, or a contract between, a man and a woman to live as husband and wife, during which period there arises an alliance between the two-family groups based on a common interest in the marriage and its continuance."[6]

These statements about customary marriage sum up the indigenous marriage as one in which a man or a woman marries, not to have ties with only their spouse, but also their families. It is for this reason parents play an active and major role in the choice of the partners for marriage, though the consent ultimately rests with their children. Even though the choice of spouse by the individual is almost every time accepted by the families, there are occasions when they are rejected for various reasons—which include family history of blood affinity, dangerous health disorders, and conflicts with the other family, as well as ethnic differences. It is interesting

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[4] R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 126.

[5] Ghana Law Reports 573 (Accra: General Legal Council, 1961), 597.

[6] W. C. Ekow Daniels "Laws Relating to Husband and Wife in Ghana" in *Integration of Customary and Modern Legal Systems in Africa*. A Conference held at Ibadan on 24th -29th August 1961 (Ibadan: University of Ife Press, 1971), 354.

to note that religious background is rarely accepted as a factor in customary marriage. However, instances in which a man ought to marry a woman in a particular category cannot be ruled out entirely, thanks to some conservative families and religious denominations.[7] To buttress the need for an alliance of families, the Akan is not permitted to marry from their blood-related kin-group, be it lineage or clan.[8] Ultimately, this prohibition is meant to encourage marriage with people from other kin-groups with the view of establishing ties of friendship and even strong relations with others outside the immediate environment; this ensures peaceful co-existence.[9]

Christian-Muslim Marriages Among the Fante

Even though Christian-Muslim marriages are permitted, they are not particularly encouraged by either religion in the communities. Two types of Christian-Muslim marriages could be found among the Fante people. First, I observed Christian-Muslim marriages that are officiated by a religious leader, such as a pastor or an imam, on behalf of their religious traditions. For such marriages, the couples have fully satisfied the conditions set in place by the Christian denomination and Muslim sect, which justifies a dispensation for a mixed marriage. For Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Catholic partner must make two promises: that he or she would not face any difficulty in practicing their faith; that children of the marriage may be brought up as Catholics.[10] As far as Muslims are concerned, religious compatibility seems to be a major reason for the impediment in Islam. However, it is not "an absolute condition that a couple be of the same religion."[11] Jabal M. Buaben, a former senior lecturer of Islamic Studies at the University of Birmingham, notes that the Christian partner would have to dispel the fear that the Muslim partner would not eventually renounce their faith when they marry a non-Muslim.[12] The faith of the children of mixed marriages is also of concern to Muslim scholars. In view of this, Buaben notes, further, that children born in mixed marriage must be raised as Muslims.[13]

Usually, Christian denominations ensure that such Christian-Muslim marriage celebrations are preceded by the performance of the customary rites of marriage and registration in accordance with the Ghanaian law of Ordinance Marriage in view of the monogamous nature of Christian marriage. In the same way, Christian-Muslim marriages officiated by the licensed Imam must be registered within one week with the relevant District Assembly in accordance with the Ghanaian Law on marriage. Muslims would normally prefer such marriages to be registered in accordance with the Mohammedan Ordinance to be recognized as Islamic marriage.

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[7] Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana*, 41.

[8] Eva Meyerowitz, *The Akan of Ghana: Their Ancient Beliefs* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1958), 29.

[9] Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana*, 41.

[10] The Code of the Canon Law (Can. 1125 §1) https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib4-cann998-1165_en.html#CHAPTER%20II.

[11] H. 'Abd al-'Atī, *The Family Structure in Islam* (Chicago: American Trust Publications, 1977), 137-138.

[12] Jabal M. Buaben, "A Comparative Study of the Islamic law of inheritance and the Fante customary law of inheritance." A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Birmingham for the Degree of Masters of Arts, (1985), 21.

[13] Glory Dharmaraj, & Jacob Dharmaraj, *Christianity and Islam: A Missiological Encounter* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 247.

However, in Ghana, it often happens that such couples, even Muslim couples, would opt for the Ordinance Marriage to avoid the possibility that the male partner marry another woman.[14]

Second, I also identified Christian-Muslim customary marriage in fieldwork. This marriage involves Christian and Muslim partners; however, the marriage is conducted neither under the Christian rites and regulations nor under the rites of Islamic marriage. It is usually recognized as customary marriage under Customary Marriage Law, registered or not. The majority of the Christian-Muslim marriages I observed (96.5 percent) could be classified under customary marriage law. According to the data we received, the proliferation of customary marriages among the Fante is due to the fact that most marriages are neither registered nor officiated by religious organizations. Customary marriage is the preferred marriage for couples who want to avoid the demands of temporal impediments put in place by their religious traditions. Such marriages are also less expensive as compared to marriages officiated at the church or mosque.

Furthermore, the Ghanaian law stipulates that any marriage which is not registered with the relevant District Assembly is considered and treated as a customary marriage. Under customary marriage, the Christian and Muslim partners marry under the Customary Law of Ghana officiated by their *ebusuapanyin* (the family head) and not a religious leader. As such, the marriage is arranged according to the dictates of indigenous or customary laws of the Fante people. Even though the partners are a Christian and a Muslim, their marriage is a customary one and so is guided solely by indigenous customs and traditions. The spouses remain Christian and Muslim and often are regular members of their respective religious communities. For example, one man I interviewed noted that "our marriage is not recognized by our religious communities, yet my wife is still an usher in Ekumfi Ekrawfo Methodist Church and I am also a regular attendant at the Mosque here."[15]

It is interesting to note that although the Christian and Islamic traditions do not encourage Christian-Muslim marriages (and they offer various impediments to these mixed marriages, especially concerning the religious upbringing of the children), the Fante indigenous society permits and facilitates such marriages. For the indigenous Fante society, traditionally, religious background is not a determining factor in the appropriateness of the marriage. Furthermore, interreligious marriage does not pose a problem in indigenous Fante society because customs and tradition clearly stipulate the spiritual affiliation of both partners and their children. Fante custom stipulates that a person, male or female, belongs to the religion of their father.[16] Religion is one of the important cords linking a person to their father. And many fathers are not ready to let go of this association to their children. In fact, fathers do not take it kindly when that religious association to their offspring breaks as a result of conversion or marriage. There are cases when fathers have disowned children for denouncing their religious tradition.

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[14] Some Fante couples, though Muslims and usually educated ones, do not accept the possibility of their spouse marrying a second or third wife.

[15] Couple A at Ekumfi Ekrawfo, interviewed on April, 3, 2021

[16] K. A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti: A Study of the Influence of Contemporary Social Changes on Ashanti Political Institutions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 1.

Hospitality: Indigenous Akan, Christianity, and Islam

Akan hospitality is one of the cultural virtues which have survived the onslaughts of foreign influences. The virtue of hospitality in Akan society is largely described in the context of generosity, which is expressed in unconditional sharing. It is this quality of hospitality which sustains the kinship system whether by blood or by marriage. Rev J. Yedu Bannerman, retired pastor of the Methodist Church of Ghana and director of the Methodist Museum of Ghanaian Indigenous Life at Ampia-Ajumako in the Central Region, opines that the value of hospitality among the Fante people lies in the readiness to render a service to any human being, in particular one's kinfolk.[17]

Professor G. F. Kojo Arthur, Associate Professor in the Educational Foundations and Technology Division, Marshall University and a former director of the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Systems, notes that the Akan term *akwaaba* (which literally means "welcome to this place") is an expression of hospitality, greeting, and reception. *Akwaaba* encourages the Akan to treat all their visitors with love, warmth, friendliness, and generosity.[18] Arthur contends that *akwaaba* offers a welcome that goes beyond merely permitting others to share personal space. Rather, it indicates a welcoming that focuses on the human person and offers them full acceptance. Thus, apart from inviting others to share personal borders, *akwaaba* also calls on the individual to deeply affirm people whose place of birth, language, culture, and religion are different from their own. *Akwaaba* enjoins humanity to do more than just open their doors to others. It compels every person to make unlimited opportunities available to all. Arthur concludes that the high importance of *akwaaba* to the Akan is evident in the many different *adinkra* symbols used to express it. The Akan are also encouraged not only to show hospitality to each other but also, in a unique way, to outsiders or complete strangers.[19] The Rt Rev Peter Akwesi Sarpong (an Oxford University-trained anthropologist and the Metropolitan Catholic Archbishop Emeritus of Kumasi) notes that it is also an important Akan custom to offer hospitality even to strangers.[20] For both Arthur and Sarpong this hospitable attitude to outsiders is expressed, in a unique way, in practices associated with ancestor worship. The Akan of Ghana believe that an ancestor passes by in the person of a stranger and, therefore, a stranger should be given kind and warm treatment.

At this point it is important to note that hospitality is also an essential virtue for both Islam and Christianity. The patriarch Abraham to whom both Christians and Muslims associate is depicted as a family man of hospitality in both Christian and Muslim traditions. In the Book of Genesis, we read about Abraham's unique gesture as an extraordinary host, even to strangers (Gen18:1 − 33). Abraham demonstrates a high level of hospitality as he receives three visitors to his tent. He feeds the visitors and gives them shelter, not knowing that they were angels of the Almighty God. By this act, Abraham laid a foundation for a theology of hospitality which plays a significant role in interreligious dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the contemporary world.

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[17] J. Yedu Bannerman, *Born to be a Pioneer: Memoir* (Accra, Ghana: CEFIKS, 2003), 45.

[18] G. F. Arthur, *Cloth as Metaphor: Re-reading the Adinkra Cloth Symbols of the Akan of Ghana* (Legon (Ghana): CEFIKS, Inc., 2001), 92.

[19] Peter Sarpong,"Aspects of Akan Ethics" in *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* Vol.4, No.3, (1972), 40-44.

[20] Peter Sarpong, *Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 56.

In the same way, a Qur'anic story also depicts Abraham as the one who welcomes strangers and accords them hospitality (Q 11:69–73*)*. His initial fear of the visitors is due to an Arabo-Islamic tradition that states that a stranger who refuses hospitality is an enemy, not a guest.[21] In the end, the visitors did not only accept Abraham's hospitality, but they did bless him. The similarities between the accounts of the story in the Bible and the Qur'an are striking.[22] Both narratives indicate that hospitality is, first and foremost, a duty towards others, and a way of living in which we are constantly reminded of human diversity.[23]

Akan Hospitality, Communal Interdependence, Social Relationship

Akan hospitality is meant not only to be a generous act but also to promote communal interdependence and to foster kinship ties including those of marriage. It is a hospitality that is grounded on an Akan concept of personhood that is understood in communal and relational terms. An individual, according to Akan society, is a person in so far as he lives to advance the course of the society. That is why all hospitable values are essentially also social and communal. This Akan understanding of a person vis-à-vis hospitality is in line with John Mbiti's famous statement in relation to the African: "I am because we are, and since we are therefore, I am."[24] Mbiti's statement encapsulates African hospitality in its entirety.

Many Akan proverbs also express this communal aspect to life which is extended in various acts of generosity. An Akan proverb, for instance, states that "One log does not make a bridge." This proverb means that individuals by themselves alone cannot do anything substantial. Bridges help people to cross over to the other side of the river for safety. Support and help from others are constantly needed for individual and communal progress. Thus, the proverb also encourages teamwork as a necessary ingredient for the continuity and progress that society needs. This concept of teamwork is all the more needed in the world today where we are made to believe that our differences are a liability to humanity.

However, differences ought not always be liability; they could also be an asset. Differences in human societies mean different talents and histories, different scriptures, different spiritualities and practices. These differences also point humanity to the need to grow together and win together. To grow and advance together as a community, we need to teach, advise, rebuke and correct each other. Other Akan proverbs that explain the value of hospitality, communalism, and interdependence are: "Wealth comes by working together" and "one stick of the broom can be broken, but all the sticks put together cannot."[25] All these Akan proverbs have one thing in common: they capture vividly the communal and interdependent spirit of Akan society. No human society can function, prosper, and survive without cooperation and mutual support.

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[21] Joseph Ellul, "The Stranger who visited Me: The Concept of Hospitality in Islam" in *Journal of Ethics and Social Science* https://www.oikonomia.it/index.php/en/2014-05-31-23-52-11/febbraio-2014/48-oikonomia-2014/febbraio-2014/182-the-stranger-who-visited-me-the-concept-of-hospitality-in-islam

[22] Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 96.

[23] Mona Siddiqui, "Divine Welcome: The Ethics of Hospitality in Islam and Christianity" in *Religion & Ethics* https://www.abc.net.au/religion/mona-siddiqui-hospitality-as-welcoming-in-gods-name/12503800

[24] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: The Chaucer Press, 1969), 106.

[25] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 106.

Much needed cooperation and interdependence take place in the house or family, in the clan, and also in the whole community. On the contrary, unhealthy competition among social members undermine societal cohesion. Thus, Akan values of hospitality are communal values. They include sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, exercising restraint, and reciprocal obligations. They are meant to ultimately unite the people and ensure peaceful co-existence.[26] These values are also cherished values of both Christianity and Islam. A person is not just a Christian or Muslim or even "an individual of human parentage"[27] but also one "demonstrating in their decisions,"[28] activities, and achievements a satisfactory sense of responsibility to society.

The high value placed on hospitability by the Akan people is meant to promote a network of social relationships for the advancement of human life and friendship, as well as enhancement of their continual survival. Thus, the people believe that one of the best ways to uphold human life, common humanity, and unity is a well-developed network of human relations grounded on essential values of hospitality within the community. An improved Christian-Muslim encounter is an invaluable aspect of various networks of relationship. Christians and Muslims are expected to be good at interpersonal relations based on the values of indigenous hospitality, reception, and encounters, as well as the magnanimous deposits of faith they both have in their respective religious traditions.[29]

Consequently, the Akan social systems and hospitable values are structured with the purpose of promoting human relations. Essential among the hospitable values are greetings, reciprocal sharing, and deeper associations. It is highly recommended that greetings, for example, are exchanged when individuals encounter each other. Greeting represents friendliness, promotes social interactions, and expresses willingness to associate at a very deep level. People are warmed, honored, and feel respected when greeted.[30] Greeting, significantly, shows indigenous decency and customary decorum that goes deeper into the fabric of the personhood. Greetings are exchanged with words and handshake; some greetings are *Mekyia wo* (I salute you), *nantsew yie* (goodby), *yɛbehyia bio* (we will meet again), *akwaaba* (welcome), *ebusua ho tse dɛn*? (how is the family?), *wo ho tse dɛn?* (how are you?). Akan greetings ask about the wellbeing of the individuals and their families. They sometimes also send regards. In all these, indigenous values of hospitality are reminding Muslims and Christians of their own religious values of hospitality, and also underscoring their importance. At the same time, Christian and Islamic values of exclusion and intolerance are consequently de-emphasized or even erased even in Christian-Muslim marriages.

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[26] Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996), 35.

[27] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 46.

[28] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 48.

[29] Christian Abraham Ackah, *Akan Ethics*: *A Study of the Moral Ideas and the Moral Behaviour of the Akan Tribes of Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1988), 56.

[30] Arthur, *Cloth as Metaphor*, 92.

Marriage-based Kinship, Hospitality and Christian-Muslim Encounters

I will discuss in this section the results of the interviews conducted with Christian-Muslim couples and focus groups from eight towns. The couples responded to questions relating to how and where they met, what are the main challenges they are facing as Christian-Muslim couples, and how their relationship with affinal kin is faring. The focus group interviews of affine members sought answers to questions relating to their acceptance of Christian-Muslim marriages, their relations to their affinal kin, and whether they will permit their children to marry partners from other religions.

Participants demonstrated adequate knowledge of the indigenous Akan marriage and unanimously agreed that marriage is meant to establish a bond between the Christian and Muslim spouses and to initiate and bring about a union between the families and lineages of the spouses.[31] The marriage union begins a highly regarded relationship of affinity between the Christian and Muslim families of the spouses. These families are four in all: the two families of the wife (her mother's and father's families) and two families of the husband (his mother's and father's families). It is clear that the concept of in-law is given a much broader connotation to cover a large number of people and not only the parents of the spouses. The affinal kinship is a true kin relationship comparable to kinship by blood relation or putative ancestor. The marriage-based kins, consisting of Christians and Muslims, are enjoined by indigenous customs to treat one another as true kin with commensurate privileges and obligations.[32]

It must be stated that the marriage-based kinship (affinal kinship) usually evolves from interreligious marriages such as Christian-Muslim marriages, where often two Muslim families and two Christian families of the spouses become kin relatives and are bound by customs to engage each other. It also evolves from intrareligious marriages such as Muslim-Muslim marriages and Christian-Christian marriages. The multi-religious, large lineage, and family linkages are the main reasons almost every Akan marriage brings Muslims and Christians into marriage-based kinship. This mixed-marriage and its attended affinal kinship are highly regarded models of interreligious relations and dialogue as they break down any barrier religious traditions put in place and occur at the level of the family and in the spirit of dialogue of life (*Dialogue and Proclamation*, Paragraph 42).[33] This relationship enables Muslims and Christians to share essential values of hospitality enjoined on them by indigenous customs and traditions. In other words, the indigenous value of hospitality is here underscoring the values of hospitality found within Christianity and Islam, values that are often "inactive" without the indigenous values. Conversely, the indigenous values de-emphasize many Christian and Islamic interpretations that may exclude others or produce intolerance of the religious other.

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[31] G. P. Hagan, "An Analytical Study of Fanti Kinship" in *African Studies Research Review*, Vol. 5 (Legon: University of Ghana, 1967), 39.

[32] Kwesi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 24.

[33] The dialogue of life is "where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations" (Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* [https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html]).

The discussions from the focus groups made up of Christian-Muslim affinal kins in the eight towns highlighted the good relationship existing between the affinal families in three ways. First, in the group at Kotokoraba Zongo, a participant noted, and all participants agreed, that at home "we look beyond our religious differences and engage each other daily in a compound house bequeathed to us by our common grandparents."[34] Here, by virtue of their marriage-based kinship ties, Christians and Muslims are able to consolidate their personal relationships by supporting each other in time of need with emotional, financial, and spiritual support.

Second, Christian-Muslim affinal kins join and offer gifts to one another at the celebration of their unique religious festivals such as Christmas and Eid. For instance, the resident imam of the Abura Tijaniyya Mosque, Sheikh Kweku Mensa, acknowledged that "every year during *Eid Adha* we receive a sheep and a bag of rice from our Christian affinal kins. We also present food stuffs to them during Christmas."[35] In all, I observed that though the practice of reciprocal sharing is essential virtue in Christianity and Islam, it is a sign of solidarity which is also highly encouraged by indigenous Fante customs and traditions. I also observed at Cape Coast that Christian and Muslim affinal kins come together to celebrate indigenous cultural festivals which are meant to celebrate communal values at the family level. Activities organized to mark the celebration of the Fetu Afahye (festival of the Oguaa traditional area) each year bring together Fante Muslims and Christians from all walks of life. Among other things they, as members of the various Asafo Companies (indigenous armies), engage in drumming and dancing in accordance with indigenous cultural performances. The highlight of the celebration of the festival is the riding in palanquins of twenty-one chiefs of the villages in the Fetu traditional area through the principal streets of Cape Coast (from Mfantsipim Senior High School to the Jubilee Park) on every first Saturday of the month of September. Beyond the festivities, a Muslim affinal kin also noted, which was unanimously agreed by participants in groups discussions at Abura, that: "we share meals and drinks on Sunday to climax the festival in the family house."[36] Thus, by virtue of the affinal kinship Christians and Muslims gather to celebrate their union as a family.

Third, it came out of the focus group conversations the reasons for which conversions from Christianity to Islam and Islam to Christianity are uncommon among the Fante people. Discussions revealed that marriage-based kinship is a major contributing factor to the low rate of conversions. Good, positive relationship between Christian-Muslim couples and affinal kins appears to undermine all efforts at conversions. There is no urgency for conversion when affinal Christians and Muslims can access each other's valuable religious and spiritual assets in their daily encounters. Muslims and Christians are not being excluded or included *because* of their religion. There is no social reason to convert because the social capital is given at the level of indigenous and cultural identities.

Just as the stranger is welcome, made to feel at home, and given the necessary assistance with the best possible hospitality, it is fitting that Christian and Muslim affinal kins offer one another this invaluable indigenous courtesy and civility when they are bonded by marriage-based kinship. By welcoming one another generously, Fante Muslims and Fante Christians would also be recognizing, in a unique manner, the special obligation, which, according to Pope Paul VI,

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[34] Group discussion at Kotokoraba Zongo, interview, May 25, 2021.
[35] Group discussion at Abura, January 30, 2021.
[36] Group discussion at Abura, interview, October 16, 2020

"binds humanity to make ourselves the neighbor of absolutely every person, and of actively helping him when he comes across our path."[37]

Christian-Muslim Marriages, Kinship, and Challenges

The research also sought to find out the main challenges Christian-Muslim couples and their affinal relatives face in relation to the marriage. As a result, research questions to couples included: What are the major challenges you face as a couple before, during and after marriage celebration? What are the difficulties you encounter in terms of your dealings with the affinal relatives? It came out from interviews that issues of Christian-Muslim marriage should not be reduced to whether or not a dispensation will be granted by the local leadership of the religious traditions. After all, most of these marriages take place outside the confines of the religious bodies and within the laws of Ghana concerning customary marriage. Responses of couple interviewees revealed real challenges which confront the couples of Christian-Muslim marriages. Most of the couples mentioned liturgical challenge as the biggest challenge they faced in their marriage preparations.

Of the thirty-two couples interviewed, twenty-six acknowledged that their marriage arrangements had met with unforeseen liturgical challenges. A couple at Gomoa Assin noted: "we were frustrated by the burden of choosing which of the liturgical rites would be adopted. My Muslim family wanted an Islamic rite; John's Christian family looked for the Christian rites."[38] This liturgical challenge could be one of the reasons the couples settle, often, on customary marriage. Another challenge noted from the interviews was the complaint about the difficulty in accessing pastoral care and support for their marriages. The observation of a Gomoa Kokofu couple sums up the view of all couples: "We don't even know where to go for pastoral care. Kwame often goes to his pastor and I go the Mosque."[39] I realized that although constant pastoral support, counsel, and encouragement are very much needed from both Christian and Muslim communities, just as in all marriages, the question that often arises is how might Christian support make the Muslim partner feel their religious rights have been infringed upon, and vice versa? Such pastoral problems could be resolved by a collaboration among Muslim and Christian marriage counselors.

The interviews also revealed that inadequate knowledge of both religions as a hurdle for Christian-Muslim marriages. All couples agreed that for Christian-Muslim marriages to succeed there is the need for adequate exposure to critical issues of marriage such as divorce and inheritance. Although the teachings on marriage in Christianity and Islam have a lot in common, there are obvious differences which cannot be ignored during marriage counselling. A major concern of the couples was the faith of their children. Children of mixed marriages, including Christian-Muslim ones, are often torn between the two faiths, unable to determine where exactly they belong, which adversely affects their sense of spirituality. This is usually the case when both partners remain in their respective religions.

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[37] Pope Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*), December 7, 1965, 27.
[38] Couple B at Gomoa Assin, interviewed April 2, 2021.
[39] Couple A, interviewed at Gomoa Kokofu, April 15, 2021.

Discussions of focus groups consisting of affinal relatives also sought to identify some challenges they face with Christian-Muslim marriages. The research sought responses to questions such as:

- Do you accept Christian-Muslim marriages? If "yes," why? and if "No," why?
- How would you describe your relationship with Christian-Muslim couples and your affinal relatives?
- What are the challenges you encounter with Christian-Muslim couple?

Responses revealed that it is not always the case that Christian-Muslim marriage is able to bridge the differences between the families. Mutual acceptance and cooperation are often difficult to come by among the marriage-based kins which often spill over into the marriage. Some of the Christian-Muslim marriages are left to themselves because of a lack of support from their affinal kin folks. Lack of family support for Christian-Muslim marriages among the Fante people is a major reason for the high rate of divorce noted in such marriages.

It must be noted that even though the Fante (Christian or Muslim) is enjoined by indigenous customs and traditions to recognize marriage-based kins as such, not all Fantes are able to practice the customs associated with this type of kinship. It is very common to come across Fante parents who would refuse to accept and treat their marriage relatives as true kin. This rejection of affinal kins, often, takes place when the relationship involves people of completely different culture, even religious backgrounds. A couple at Ekumfi Essarkyir noted in an interview that "some affinal Christians and Muslims still refuse to acknowledge their marriage and welcome us,"[40] as stipulated by customs. Thus, instead of bridging the gap already existing between Christians and Muslim families, marriages and affinal kins often deepen the acrimony between Christians and Muslims in the local community.

The rejection of the marriage-based kinship, at times, begins at the initial preparations for the marriage. Affinal kins, especially in-laws (Christians and Muslims), may not accept the marriage from the beginning but may be unable to voice out their misgivings. Cultural and religious differences are some of the reasons for their refusal to accept such marriages. Some Christian and Muslim families do not accept easily their adult children marrying from the other religious organization for religious reasons put forward by their various denominations and sects. It is also common to come across Christian and Muslim families, who, motivated by cultural and religious differences, reject such Christian-Muslim marriages and even refuse to associate with the couples. Some Muslim families also recognize Christian-Muslim marriage based on Qur'an passages such as Surah 2:41, Surah 2:91, Surah 3:3, or Surah 5:5, which seem to permit as valid marriage between a Muslim man and a woman of any of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book—Christians and Jews and other revealed religions). In relation to marriage with people of scriptural religions, a prominent Qur'anic commentator, Ibn Abū Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 996 CE), states that: "God has forbidden intercourse with unbelieving women: but marriage with a scriptural woman [a women from among the People of the Book] is permitted."[41]

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[40] Couple D at Ekumfi Essarkyir, interviewed November 2, 2019.
[41] F. H. Russell & A. M. Suhrawardy, *First Steps in Muslim Jurisprudence Consisting of Excerpts from Bākūrat-al-Sa'd of Ibn Abū Zayd* (London: Luzac, 1906), 15.

However, Fante Muslims who belong to the Mālikī school of jurisprudence refuse to recognize mixed marriages. The Mālikī school rejects a marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, not even Jewish or Christian women. It prohibits mixed marriages and refers to it as an error (*makrūh*) that must be prevented from taking place.[42] However, not all Fante Muslims agree with outright rejection of mixed marriage, arguing that the Prophet Muhammad married three women who were not Muslims. He married a Coptic Christian, Mārya, and two Jewish women, Ṣafīyyah bint Ḥuyayy and Rayḥānah bint Zayd. Nashāh bint Rifāʿah, a Jewish woman, lived with family of the prophet.[43] It is not known whether these wives remained non-Muslims after their marriage ceremonies.[44]

Nevertheless, no verse of the Holy Qur'ān explicitly supports the opinion that Muslims must marry non-Muslims or even People of the Book. Though Islamic traditions permit men to marry from the people of the Book such as Christians and Jews, women are unequivocally forbidden. This prohibition is based on a Qur'anic verse which states that "men are in charge of women" (Surah, 4:34) and so a Muslim woman married to a non-Muslim man will find it difficult to be fully committed to her religious beliefs and practices. Thus, whoever wants a Muslim wife must convert to Islam.[45] It must be noted that way before the rise of Christian and Islamic conservative and fundamentalist movements among the Fante people, mixed-marriages were rather normal and relationships between marriage-based kin were highly promoted. The initial reluctance to accept such marriages often lingers after the marriage ceremony, setting the bad tone for the affine relationships that will ensue between the families.

Conclusion

I have examined Christian-Muslim dialogue in the context of Christian-Muslim marriages among the Fante people of Ghana. This study concludes that marriage-based kinship between Christians and Muslims plays a significant role the peaceful co-existence of the people of Ghana. Furthermore, the indigenous socio-cultural values such as hospitality constitute the engine that drives the Christian-Muslim encounters in marriage-based kinship in Ghana—and not necessarily Islamic and Christian values and beliefs. It is noted that interpersonal relations for communal interdependence are a productive ground for peaceful religious cooperation in Ghana.

Fante customary marriage sets in motion true kin relation between families. Among Christian-Muslim couples, the marriages establish affinal kinship relations between Christians and Muslims of four different families of the spouses. The dynamics of marriage-based/affinal kinship that evolved out of indigenous marriages, including Christian-Muslim marriages, have been thoroughly discussed in this paper. The marriage between a Muslim and a Christian brings together Christian and Muslim families in an affinal kinship strengthened by the values of hospitality that indigenous customs and traditions stipulate. The indigenous virtue of hospitality

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[42] F. H. Ruxton, *Maliki Law: A Summary from French Translations of Mukhtasar of Sidi Khalīl* (London: Luzac, 1978), 106.

[43] W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 68.

[44] Buaben, "A Comparative Study of the Islamic Law of Inheritance and the Fante Customary Law of Inheritance", 21.

[45] Dharmaraj & Dharmaraj, *Christianity and Islam: A Missiological Encounter*, 248.

consolidates Christian-Muslim relations with communal values of greetings, sharing, and reciprocity. Although Christian-Muslim marriages are often not encouraged by Christianity and Islam, they engender amicable Christian-Muslim relations at the personal, family, and societal levels *through the indigenous value of hospitality*. Even though not all Fante people are readily able to welcome total strangers because of economic and social constraints, Muslims and Christians should endeavor to offer one another hospitality and expect to be treated as well as possible; it is their right and it aknowleges not only their common humanity but also their marriage-based kinship.

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