Teacher Identity, Positionality and (Mis) Representation of Religion in the Ghanaian School Contexts: Insider/Outsider Case Study Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Studies on teacher religious identity have been premised on the assumption that public schools are religiously neutral and if teachers' religious identities are acknowledged and properly accommodated, teaching will be better enacted. I conducted a qualitative case study of teachers in religiously affiliated public schools in Ghana to get a nuanced understanding of how they navigate tensions arising from complexities generated by their own religious identities, their schools' and that of their students. Using data from interviews, observations, and focus groups, my findings challenge existing notions of religious neutrality of public schools. In the Ghanaian context where the lines between secular and religious schools are blurry, teachers are (un)knowingly positioned as in(out)siders and their consequent pedagogical (in)actions are highly influenced by such (un)natural religious tensions in their schools. It is such issues emanating from teacher positionalities that I seek to highlight as ripe for qualitative inquiry.

KEYWORDS: Qualitative Research; Africa; Religion; Teacher Identity; School Ideology

Introduction

Teacher religious identity

Research on teacher religious identity has received limited attention in literature. White (2009) explains that "the majority of educational research assume that teachers are neutral agents of the state" (p. 864). Based on this presumed stoic teacher personality, educational research has focused on students' religious identities and how teachers are expected to manage their diversity. Previous studies have unearthed: perceptions of teacher positionality as problematic (Bryan & Revell, 2011; Kayaalp, 2016), teachers' lack of appreciation of how their religious ideologies influenced their (in)actions in their classrooms (Nelson, 2010), and others ascribing desexualized religious identities to teachers (Aydin, 2013; Sikes & Everington, 2003). Yet other studies have found that teacher religious identities influenced their teaching philosophies, curricular choices (Achituv,

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2013), and pedagogical commitments (Achituv, 2013; Akpan, 2018; Baurain, 2012; Ratsatsi, 2005; Wu & Ida, 2018; Yigit, 2018).

While these groundbreaking studies have in significant ways deepened our understandings of teacher religious identity, they have approached the issue from one vantage point - that schools are neutral and if teachers' religious identities are acknowledged and properly accommodated in the identity mix, teaching and learning will be better enacted and received. Again, teacher religious identity here is perceived as fixed. Thus, a Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, Indigenous Adherent, is expected to chart a course of a patterned behavior, so that their (in)action in any given situation is predictable. Perhaps, what has been the missing link is that most, if not all, research on religion in education done globally has for the most part been conducted in either sectarian schools (as in Levine, 2004; Schweber, 2006; Stambach, 2010) or in public schools (as in Chidester, 2003; Jackson, 1995; Kilinc, Tarman & Aydin, 2018; Lemu, 2002; Willaime, 2007; Yigit & Tarman, 2016). The underlying assumption with this dual categorization is that public schools possess religiously neutral climates whereas sectarian ones are insular and divine centered. Research has therefore been focused on examining "a fixed" teacher religious identity as enacted in different schools whether they be 'God-centered' [sectarian] schools or 'man-centered' public schools" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 13).

The challenge with this simplified dual categorization of schools is that, solutions prescribed for dealing with religion (such as faith bracketing (Cady & Brown, 2002)) is not workable in schools that are neither public nor sectarian. Religious education scholarship in Africa is replete with reports of religious monism, teachers bias and religious misrepresentations (Addai-Mununkum, 2017; Chidester, 2003; Matemba & Addai-Mununkum, 2017; Matemba, 2009). In such contexts where religious neutrality of public schools is not an ideal, teachers continue to wonder how to manage complexities arising out of their own religious identity, that of their school and students. It is for this need of gaining a nuanced appreciation of teacher religious identity and positionality that my research sought to answer: (a) how do teachers' positionalities impact their representation of religion? (b) How do they navigate tensions arising out of their identities, that of their schools and students?

Context:

Post colonial Ghana is religiously heterogeneous with the presence of Christianity (with all its varied forms and denominations), Islam (Sunni, Ahmaddiyya, Shia) and Indigenous Religion (IR)[†]. Owing to a history of the start of formal education, which is intricately connected to the spread of Western religions in Ghana, there exists a somewhat unusual partnership between the government and religious bodies in the provision of basic education (see Addai-Mununkum, 2017; Matemba & Addai-Mununkum, 2017; Stambach, 2010), as in the provision of healthcare (Olivier, Shojo, & Wodon, 2014). The dominance of Christianity is not only evidenced in population demographics, but also in the number of public schools with Christian affiliation. I argue elsewhere (Addai-Mununkum, 2017), that the presence of public schools with religious character, challenges our taken-for-granted assumptions of religiously nonaligned public schools and awaken the realization that our idea of religious pluralism as a natural outcome of public education is far more complicated.

[††] IR "is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans, and which is being practised today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of Africans, including individuals who claim to be Muslims or Christians" (Awolalu, 1976, p. 1).

With public schools exhibiting religious ethos, another layer of complication arises where teachers avow religions that may, or not, be same as that of their schools. Such is the situation of a teacher - Georgina (pseudonym). Georgina is a Christian belonging to the Assemblies of God denomination, teaching at a Sunni Islamic public school at a mid-Ghana community. She considers herself an *outsider* in her school for her religious identity.

Georgina is one of many teachers in classrooms across Ghana who consider themselves "*outsider*s" because they do not share in the faiths by which their schools are defined. In a similar vein, teachers who identify with the religions of the schools in which they teach, view themselves as "*insiders*"

Teacher Positionalities

Although works on positionality have been theoretically used in qualitative research, I am appropriating them in this paper to represent teachers in different school contexts. I must first clarify here that I attempt in this paper to avoid the epistemological trap of perceiving positionality as existing in two neat categories. I am inspired by the work of Schweber (2007) which challenges postmodern and post-positivist models of subjectivity and argues for a third space with varied possibilities. During my research, I felt myself in a similar position as Schweber – simultaneous insider-outsider. I considered myself as an insider in the sense of being a Ghanaian (cultural insider) and a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Christian. Hence, I was considered "part of us [them]" (as the Ghanaian parlance would say it) most of the time. However, since I simultaneously wore my research wig as an outsider from the US coming to observe and perhaps "misrepresent" schools in Ghana, some of my participants (like Georgina) considered me to be an *outsider* and were measured in how much information they divulged.

In appropriating positionality scholarship, I am again guided by my epistemological stance of constructionism to reject a dichotomous view of *insider/outsider*. My initial thought was to categorize all the teachers as either *outsider*s or *insider*s based on their schools' religious character, *vis-à-vis* their professed religious affiliations. However, as I gained a nuanced appreciation of teachers' religious identities, I was surprised by my over-simplification of a complex reality and the need to explore further. I therefore adapted Schweber's third category of *insider-outsider*, to Sarroub's (2002) term of *inbetweeness* to describe the positionalities of teachers. Thus, I categorize and explore teachers who are religious *outsider*s, religious *insider*s, and religious *insider-outsider*s.

Identity Theory

Writing from an African context, it is useful to emphasize that Western notions of religious identity do not map easily to Ghanaian perspectives. Religious identity in its Eurocentric sense is mostly used as one of many attributes to define a person. It is therefore possible for a person's religious identity to be obscured or made invisible, hence the call for teachers to "park" their religious identities outside of classrooms (Cladis, 2011; Halpern, 2017; Lelwica, 2008). Religion and the part it plays in the lives of Africans is far more complicated and hence somewhat incomprehensible to the average Westerner (Hackett, 2000). Thus, asking the typical African whether s/he is religious is more of a rhetorical question than a genuine inquiry. It is not unlike asking if a person is alive. Whereas a Westerner might be reluctant to paste a religious bumper sticker on his vehicle, the African will erect a huge signpost with religious inscriptions to display their religious identity (Behrend, 2011). Given this profound contextual difference, I draw from work of Holland,

Lachichotte, Skinner & Cain (2001) to frame this work.

      Working from a predominantly sociological orientation, Holland et al (2001) propose their concept of *figured world* to explain agency in a cultural world. They define figured world as:

      a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts and particular outcomes are valued over others. (p. 52)

This insightful proposition seeks to explain identity as existing in the realm of social organization and performance, and dependent on people "figuring out" how to relate to one another over time and across different place/space contexts (Urrieta Jr, 2007). Figured worlds are therefore "historical phenomena, to which we are recruited or into which we enter, which themselves develop through the works of their participants" (Holland et al., 2001, p. 41). I approached this work with an appreciation of schools as a social unit where teachers operate. Identity theorizing is thus key to understanding how teachers navigate their lives as in(out)siders, occasioned by their avowed, ascribed, or achieved religious identity (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, & Colwell, 2006).

Methodology

Design

This paper draws from a large study on religious representations in schools in Ghana. The entire study was designed and implemented from a qualitative case study methodological orientation (Eisenhardt, 2002; Yin, 2003). For this paper, the focus is on critical narratives of three participants situated within school contexts that generate complexities for their pedagogical (in)actions and professionalism. My initial exposure to the complexity of teacher religious identity led me to appreciate it as abstract, intangible, slippery, and amorphous, requiring skillful use of qualitative methodologies to untangle. Thus, I designed my study as a multiple case instrumental research aimed at exploring multiple bounded systems in order to understand how teachers navigate tensions arising out of their religious identities, that of their schools and students (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1994). The choice of case study is justified on the grounds that I sought to seek both "what is common and what is particular about the cases"(Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 438). In as much as I was interested in the cases themselves, my prime motivation was to get a nuanced understanding of complexities generated in schools occasioned by the presence of religious identities at play. Such instrumental use of cases comes highly recommended for qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Yin, 2003).

      By my choice of qualitative design and case study particularly, the study was limited by my inclusion and exclusion criteria. My use of purposive sampling technique limited other potential respondents who could have offered greater insights. For this reason, I followed the lead of qualitative researchers to aim for transferability (and not generalizability) of research findings (Shenton, 2004).

Participants

As a case study inquiry, the research was bounded at two levels; first is the case of school types and second, the case of teachers' religious identities. I conducted research in six schools, three of which were *mission-public* schools (all names used here are pseudonyms): a Catholic school (St. Andrew) with a majority of students being Christians (not necessarily Catholics), a Seventh-day

Adventist school (James White) with a majority of students being Muslims, and an Sunni Islamic school (Akwei Allah) with a majority of students being Muslims. The unique features of each of these schools make for an analysis that would treat them as distinct school types. The other schools were: an Islamic School with somewhat even distribution of Christians and Muslims (Naagode Allah), a wholly public school with majority Muslims (Obra) and a wholly public school with majority Christians (Dinpa).

From these schools I recruited 20 teachers, 6 principals and 67 students in this study. The breakdown of participants and their religious demographics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants and Religious Demographics

School	Akwei Allah	Naagode	James White	St. Andrew	Dinpa	Obra	Total
# of Teacher Respondents	1 Pentecostal Christian 3 S. Muslims*	2 Pentecostal Christian 2 S. Muslims	3 Christian (Catholic, Pentecostal & SDA)	2 Christians (Catholic & Pentecostal) 1 S. Muslim	1 Presbyterian Christian 1 S. Muslim	2 S. Muslims 2 Christians (Methodist & Pentecostal)	20
# of Student Respondents	7 S. Muslims 3 Christians	7 Christians 5 S. Muslims	6 Christians (4 SDAs & 2 Pentecostals) 5 S. Muslims	8 Christians (5 Catholics & 3 Pentecostals 4 S. Muslims	10 Christians 2 S. Muslims	5 Christians 5 Muslims	67
# Principal Respondents	1 S. Muslim	1 S. Muslim	1 SDA Christian	1 Catholic Christian	1 Pentecostal Christian	1 Presbyterian Christian	6

*Sunni Muslim

For my interest in this paper, I explore in greater detail, three of the teachers and treat them as cases (Stake, 1994; Yin, 2003) using a matrix of positionality, arising out of teachers' religious identities and the type of schools in which they work. To explain this typology, I present here: Paul Osei Bonsu, as an *insider*; Monica Agyapomaa, as an *outsider*; and Hamza Awudu, as an *insider-outsider*. I have chosen to highlight these three out of 20 teachers due to their positionalities in their schools and an interest I developed in the peculiarities of their stories.

Methods

I conducted the research for a period of one school term, which is three months in Ghana, during which I employed the qualitative methods of interviews and observations to generate data. I used semi-structured interviews and a set of 15 open-ended questions for focus group discussion. School principals were interviewed two times for an average duration of forty minutes. The interviews focused on their schools' religious ethos and their conflicting roles of promoting a religious tradition and managing religious diversity. I interviewed teacher participants on two or three occasions lasting an average of thirty-five minutes, engaging them on issues relating to their faiths, that of their schools and students. I conducted a focus group discussion for student participants during which issues about religious pluralism was at the center of deliberation. For all these deliberations, the persons of interest and the school contexts influenced the choice and flow of questions. While I asked all respondents similar questions, follow-up questions were largely occasioned by the information they shared.

I also used two forms of observations to generate data – school ethnographic observations and classroom observations. First, I observed the schools for religious practices - prayers, worship services; images - paintings, dressing, symbols; and general demeanor. I was interested in how the schools project their faiths, as well as their representation of other religions that they considered "non-normative." Specific event observations happened in classrooms where teachers taught religion and at worship events where "religious" services were held. I generated varied forms of data including audio recording of events such as speeches, songs, and classroom discussions. I also

generated some documents like copies of textbooks and students worksheets.

Most of the interviews and all of the focus group discussions were done in a Ghanaian language - Twi. Although English is the official language and medium of instruction in Ghana, research suggests that "the majority of Ghanaian middle school students (66%) never spoke English at home or did so infrequently" (Ampiah, 2011, p. 38). Since I am a native speaker of Twi, focus group discussion was conducted in Twi to optimize students' engagement. For teacher interviews, I asked participants to choose between Twi and English. Only four out of twenty teachers I interviewed opted to speak in English.

Owing to the sensitivity of religion as a category of difference, coupled with the potential victimizations that my subjects could suffer, stringent measures were implemented to guarantee the confidentiality. The research underwent rigourous IRB reviews and measures such as encryption and anonymization of soft data were implemented by me.

Analysis

I began data analysis with a translation and transcription of interview data. Since I am a native speaker with high fluency and advanced level writing abilities in Twi, translation and transcription was done simultaneously. Transcription software called F4 was used for both audio and video data. All the transcribed data together with others like pictures, notes and documents were organized with a qualitative analysis software - MaxQDA version 11. Due to the user compatibility of both softwares, transcripts were uploaded with their corresponding audio/videos. To ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings, I engaged another native Twi speaker to review my translations and transcriptions. There were few instances of disagreements over choice of words and those were settled by the involvement of a third person whose rulings settled such debates. Moreover, during analysis, sections of the interviews were replayed many times for confirmability purposes.

During analysis, I created three codes for teacher participants based on the theoretical paradigm of the study: those who shared in the defining religious ethos of their schools (*insiders*), those who did not share in the religion of their schools (*outsiders*), and those who did not fit in any of the categories (*not applicable*). Further analysis revealed that the categories were too simplistic given that the definition of insider/outsider is context driven (Schweber, 2007). Consequently, an iterative process of re-coding, regrouping, realignments and deletion of codes necessitated the creation of a fourth code - insider-outsider. I proceeded by dropping the third code of "not applicable" because they lacked enough data coherence to make a meaningful case. The three remaining codes were then examined alongside the schools religious characteristics. A teacher each from the three categories were selected based on the amount of data with relational connections to both the teacher and their schools.

Findings

I present three of my respondents as cases in this section. Paul Osei-Bonsu as an *insider*, Monica Agyapomaa as *outsider* and Hamza as *Insider-outsider*. I have assigned these descriptions based on their reported religious affiliations the type of schools they taught and how they positioned themselves within their schools religious climate. It is important to clarify that, respondents level of religiosity was not measured and my conclusions about their religious affiliations were purely dependent on what they disclosed to me. While their general outlook on life could have played an

influence their perceptions, my focus here is the highlight the connections of their religiosity to their pedagogical (in)actions.

Paul Osei-Bonsu - The Insider

At St. Andrew Catholic Junior High School, I met Paul Osei-Bonsu. A calm young man in his early thirties, he has taught at St. Andrew for eight years altogether. He appeared to be an easy going person since it did not take much convincing to enroll him in my study. Paul is a devout Catholic who attended Catholic schools up until high school, then by a strange circumstance he got admitted to a Seventh-day Adventist teacher training college. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree, and works as pianist and a choir director for a local congregation of the Catholic Church. In fact, it was his musical talent that got him his job at St. Andrew. Teacher hiring in Ghana is done by the state through its agency, the Ghana Education Service. Graduates from various teacher education programs are posted to schools where their expertise is needed and that was the practice when Paul graduated. He was originally posted to a school in a rural area, but the Catholic parish needed his services at his local congregation so the priest lobbied to have him reposted to St. Andrew. Paul thus enjoyed the opportunity to return to St. Andrew because he shares in the religious philosophy of the school. I describe Paul as an *insider* because he is a Catholic who teaches at a Catholic-affiliated public school.

As an *insider*, Paul was assigned to teach religion at St. Andrew even though his area of specialty is music. The decision to have Paul teach religion was influenced by his Catholic identity. He tells me the school management was not comfortable with a non-Catholic teaching religion in a Catholic school. Mr. Osei-Bonsu narrated how he was assigned to teach religion:

> …the one who was posted here was a Deeper Life member and he was to teach religion and you know once it is a Catholic school, they would never allow you [*Really?*]. No, it will never happen. If it is any other subject, eh? [*they would have allowed*]. But religion no [*they will not allow*]. …..If you take the history of Christianity it started from the Catholic Church, so almost all the denomination argue against the Catholic Church[‡].

Akin to Antoun's (2001) categorization of internal and external enemies, Christians other than Catholics are considered in this school as "internal enemies." They share some fundamental beliefs with the Catholic Church but being Protestants (and offspring of Protestants), members of other Christian denominations are perceived in St. Andrew as Russian[s] claiming to attend meetings at the Pentagon just to learn. No matter how genuine the intent is, [the school feared such internal enemies will misrepresent Catholicism] (Peshkin, 1988 [*Emphasis mine*]). The school managers therefore chose the lesser evil, make a Catholic non-expert teach religion instead of a non-Catholic professional religious educator. Paul also believes even if the non-Catholic teachers do not misrepresent Catholicism, they might use the opportunity in their classrooms to evangelize and convert students to their faiths, and the school was not comfortable with that either. To the contrary, the school management would perhaps be happy with Paul evangelizing in his class since that was the prime goal for missionaries' establishment of schools in Ghana (Debrunner, 1967).

Although somewhat a public school, all practices at St. Andrew have Catholic undercurrents. For instance, all students recite prayers like Hail Mary in the morning, Guardian Angel prayer at noon; celebrate Catholic festivals like Ash Wednesday, Lent, All Saints day; and hold occasional Mass services led by the local priest. The principal tells me their prime goal

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[‡] Words in parentheses are the emphasis of the author.

besides education is to introduce Catholicism to all the students in the school. Mr Osei-Bonsu did not vocalize it but it was obvious from my study that the school would not object to any form of proselytization. If it would be done, it must be done by a Catholic, seemed to be the belief.

This might have been a good gamble because Paul has built a metaphorical shield in his classroom to protect the Catholic Church from arrows thrown at it by internal and external enemies. His strategy has been to stop doctrinal debates before they get out of hand. He tells me:

> When it comes to teaching about the commandments, I have a problem because you know we Catholics have these statues in our churches but when we read the second commandment about idols, I receive ehh, a lot of questions from the students. Anytime I get to that topic, a whole lot happens but I don't go too much into it because it can take the whole term. We have so many people coming from different backgrounds so I tell them that is not important to me at that time so if they want they can continue debating after the class…….. You see these Adventists, they have so many Bible quotations to support their doctrines so I avoid the class being give and take.

Avoiding deliberation is Paul's strategy for shielding his Church from "embarrassment." This strategy appeared to work well for him.

Contrary to my perception of his teaching, Paul believes he represents all religions fairly. His defense was his choice to teach more topics in Islam than Christianity, as he argues:

> …although I am a Christian, when I started teaching I realized that I developed interest in Islam. I realized that most of the children were not interested in that section. Most of the students are Christians and there are certain things about Christianity they know from church. They don't seem to like Islam so if you focus on Christianity, it is boring. Sometimes as soon as you write the topic, they start narrating for you. But when it comes to Islamic religion, they have so many problems with the words, and practices.

Although this statement does not necessarily explain fairness, Paul believes his very act of teaching more about Islam and not Christianity shows he is not biased. His interpretation of unfair representation is teaching more about one's religion to the neglect of others. I see his decision to teach more about Islam as having a dual purpose – to keep his students engaged and to avoid bias. By teaching more about Islam, suspicion about his unfairness would be put at bay. Moreover, since his students know less about Islam, they are motivated to learn and he keeps them engaged.

Another reason that seems to influence Paul's decision to attempt a fair representation of religions is his personal experiences as a religious *outsider* in a Seventh-day Adventist teacher training college. He recounts to me:

> I attended an SDA training college and they had so many rules. Catholics and SDAs don't see eye to eye. When I got there I knew I was at a different environment. It was very difficult for me but I told myself once I have been admitted I would just follow their rules. We were told that Sundays we would be allowed to have our worship but they cancelled it. They knew if that continued, they will not get people to join their church. If I bring it to this situation, it taught me not to impose Catholicism on everyone because I did not like it when I was at the college.

Paul here gives an important rationale for his decision not to victimize non-Catholic students. From my interviews, interactions, and observations, I am convinced that Paul attempted to represent all religions fairly. However, his position as an *insider* necessitating his commitment to "shielding" his Church from incessant deliberative attacks makes his ambitions more complicated. Yet it is important to note that as an *insider*, he had the privilege to be biased and his school would have supported both nuanced and overt teaching of Catholicism in his class. In other schools I observed during this research it was not uncommon to see teachers openly admitting to teaching about all

religions and dressing it up with conclusions that sought to maintain Christianity as the fulfillment of all religions (Jackson, 1995). Some teachers and even students defended such acts as normal because Christians were in the majority in those schools, and "democracy means majority carries the vote". Interestingly some of these teachers were professionally trained religious educators who admitted that they were trained to represent all religions fairly. I found it impressive that Paul, a non-trained religious educator, made a personal commitment to avoid making his students "a captive audience" to Catholicism. Even outside of the classroom Paul does not punish students who refuse to participate in Catholic practices, contrary to his principal's demand for Catholic teachers to enforce compliance with Catholic routines. Mrs. Benefo (the principal) remarked in an interview that "if you go to Rome, do as Romans do." All of Paul's students, having chosen to be part of St. Andrew, are required by school rules to recite prayers, sing hymns, and attend mass. Students who refuse are to be punished and the principal reported having the support of her Catholic teachers to ensure students tow that line. Paul is clearly not one of those teachers. He is an *insider* who is not necessarily supportive of this agenda.

Monica Agyapomaa - the Outsider

James White Seventh-day Adventist School (JWSDA) is uniquely positioned in a suburban area which is mostly Muslim, making the school majority-Muslim. It is a preferred school choice for most of the families in the area because it has been selected as a site for the government's feeding program. Mr. Osafo, the principal, is bent on restoring Adventist religious character of his school regardless of its huge Muslim population. Among the radical measures he put in place was to require teachers to follow Adventist dress code. A doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church speaks against ornaments and in practice, Adventist women do not wear ear-rings, excessive make-up, and are supposed to dress "modestly." This rule was enforced among students but Mr. Osafo extended it to include all female teachers. He said to me: "if you want to work here, you need to stop wearing ear-rings." This was one of the reforms that set the school management and the teachers on a warpath. Most non-Adventist teachers protested and petitioned various offices. The common ground found was for non-Adventist female teachers to wear small ear-rings. The teachers were not happy about this, neither was Principal Osafo so by the next academic year, six out of the nineteen teaching staff had left the school. This incident drew a line between who belongs and who does not, based on the limits of administrative accommodation, *insider*s versus *outsider*s.

Mrs. Monica Agyapomaa, a Catholic teacher at JWSDA, was part of this story – an *outsider* forced to follow the religious dictates of a faith she does not share. Unlike her colleagues who left JWSDA, Monica chose to stay. Influenced by stories of religious controversy at James White, I was surprised to see Monica teaching religion. With the zealous agenda of Mr. Osafo, I did not expect to see a non-Adventist teaching religion and I was not alone in thinking this way. Monica told me a story to explain that a challenge to her status as an "*outsider*" teaching religion had come up before:

> Some time back there was an Adventist teacher on this staff who raised the issue that she should be teaching Religion because she is an Adventist. I explained to her that I am a Christian too. If I were a Muslim, or Indigenous Religion (IR) worshipper, it would be different. So far as I am a teacher in this school, Religion is not meant for a particular denomination. We don't teach SDA doctrines, we teach about Christianity. So everything about Christianity I would be able to teach.

The complainant Adventist teacher considered Monica an *outsider* but Monica considered herself

an *insider* in general terms. While alluding to some merit in the query, she asserts her identity as a Christian and positions herself as an *insider* (in Antoun's terms, an internal enemy) who is less dangerous than external enemies such as a Muslim or an IR adherent. As a Catholic Christian, Monica shares common dogmas with Adventists as far as belief in the trinity, salvation, the Bible as the word of God and some apocalyptic prophesies. It is for these reasons that she sees herself as no different from any Adventist teacher. She also raises the issue about religion not being for a particular denomination but soon contradicts her stance by alluding to the conditional validity of the query if she were a Muslim or IR adherent. I present Monica here as an *outsider* because that is the understanding we co-constructed during my interaction with her. She might have positioned herself as an "internal enemy" to defend her position as a teacher of religion but admitted in my interviews that she was an *outsider* at James White, more evidence that religious identity is murkier that often appreciated.

Monica is a professional teacher trained at a well-known college of Education (a diploma awarding college) and graduated as a specialist for the teaching of religion. She had taught at a Catholic school and two SDA schools prior to coming to James White. She admits her long association with Adventist in her family and other Adventist friends has led her to a greater appreciation and comfort with most of their doctrines and practices. Perhaps this was one reason she did not transfer out like the other teachers after the uproar. To stay, she manages her figured world of an *outsider* working in an Adventist school, occasionally enacting "as if" *insider* identity (Holland et al., 2001) – not only with small earrings.

Monica reports that her pre-service program equipped her with so much knowledge and skill that she represents all religions fairly. She was emphatic in distinguishing preaching from teaching and reminded me that her role in the classroom was not to promote or demean any religion but to educate students about different religions. However, I was worried about how she represents IR and Islam based on some statements she made. In recounting some challenges she encounters in classrooms, she narrated this incident:

> Once I was teaching about Muhammed. A student stood up and challenged my assertion that the start of Islam was marked with conflicts and wars. I had to talk a lot to explain what I meant. I used examples and asked questions about why Muhammed left Mecca to Medina. After a long elaboration, he understood my point.

From this narration, it appeared to me that the story was crafted to vindicate her position. Anti-Islam commentators the world over have sought to present Islam as a violent religion (Cimino, 2005). It is thus understandable that a student would protest such a characterization of his religion. Monica's explanation even as she narrated it to me, appeared to have borrowed some of the language of popular commentary that "the start of Islam was marked by conflicts and wars." While acknowledging difficulties teachers face in enacting fair representation, I believe some contextual framing of the history of Islam would have made a difference here.

Monica's own identity as a Christian representing Islam was a contributing factor in this challenge. If she was a Muslim teacher, the student's reaction might have been less confrontational. My worry with her handling of this scenario was the defensive posture I sensed. I expected Monica to be more open about her biases and accept such critiques professionally, but she chose to argue herself out. Even as she recounted this story to me I observed her vocal pitch rise and her emotions flaring up as if she was mounting a defense in a trial. She was convinced her actions were professional but I disagree with her on that score.

Later Monica made a confession about IR that raised my eyebrows, especially because it came exactly after she had claimed to be representing all religions fairly. In explaining why she

would not invite an adherent of IR as a guest speaker to her class, she remarked:

> Hmm, you see Muslims call God Allah, it is the same God of Christians. Idol worshippers [*she immediately changes her characterization of IR from Traditional worshippers to idol worshippers*] we know they go through gods and ancestors to reach God. I personally believe it is not the same God that we worship that they are worshipping. Muslims worship our God but idol worshippers worship something different. They rely on some other spirits.

This is intriguing given that the official curriculum Monica teaches emphasizes that IR adherents worship the same God of Christians and Muslims (Ghana Education Service, 2008). Although Monica might have been sharing with me her personal opinion, it did not differ significantly from her professional opinions about IR as her subsequent pronouncements made clear. In a later interview she remarked:

> ... we know they use and work with spirits. Such spirits could show up in the course of their presentations. When I am teaching for instance, sometimes the Bible I am using influences me to act like I am preaching at church. So it is possible that they could be possessed spiritually which could be problematic.

While admitting her own challenges to taming her subjectivities, Monica would not entertain an IR priest in her class because she doesn't believe they worship the same God and that they could be possessed and cause harm to students. It is interesting that she did not see her own "spirit possession" and consequent preaching as problematic. Monica here reinforces depictions in occidental literature that stretched the category Christian to include Jews and Muslims while describing all non-Christians as idolaters (Masuzawa, 2005). She had no issues with inviting a Muslim and other Christians as resource persons but did not consider IR adherents worthy of such invitations because she perceived it as something other than worship of God. I see parallels of her statement in her students' affirmations about IR (which I discuss extensively elsewhere (Author, forthcoming).

Given Monica's misrepresentation of Islam and IR in these ways, I was curious about how she represents other non-Catholic denominations within Christianity, particularly the Seventh-day Adventists who Paul described as "not seeing eye to eye" with Catholics. How does she position herself as an *outsider* representing their religion? A significant difference between SDAs and other Christian denominations is their doctrinal belief in the Jewish Sabbath day of Saturday as holy and a day of worship, instead of the widely held Sunday worship day by the rest of Christendom. Monica told me about debates in her classroom on this topic:

Monica:	Sometimes when you are teaching about days of worship, we teach that different denominations worship on Saturdays or Sundays… The syllabus does not specifically favor a particular church. It does not say the Sabbath is Saturday. It says creation started from day 1 to day 6 and God rested on the seventh day. So when I am teaching, I don't specify the exact day God started creation like Monday, Tuesday or something of that sort. What I tell them is what happens on each day. Sabbath as a day of rest is helpful and I teach that it doesn't matter the day you go to church, you have to make the day holy.
Interviewer:	What if some students ask questions about your own opinion?
Monica:	They ask all the time. They come asking Madam, is the Sabbath Saturday or Sunday? I explain that different calendars start the chronology of days differently so it can be any of them. That is not very important because it would not take you to Heaven. What is required is for you to be committed to what you believe....I don't entertain them because they can argue and debate and they might even bring

in their parents and I am afraid it could lead to a big conflict and parents might come to hurt me.

Monica stated again during another interview that:

> …... you see even as we teach, for example in teaching about Christmas, some Christians don't celebrate, Jehovah Witnesses and many other groups. Some people ask why we should celebrate these festivals. I ask them: "have you celebrated your birthday before? They say yes, then I say that is all there is about Christmas. With these kids, if you don't handle them well, they will take you to dangerous grounds.

Corroborating this account, during a focus group discussion some Adventist students described their lessons about religion.

Gifty: We learn all about Christianity but I think it is more about Sunday worshipers than Adventist.

Moses: All the Christian festivals listed like Christmas, Easter, Ascension etc., we don't celebrate but we learn about all those.

Rachel: We are not offended by that because those do not turn argumentative. It is only when we get to Sabbath part that we debate. The teacher brushes over it and we bring it back and engage in debates. Sometimes other teachers walking by would stop and join in the debate.

Monica seems to demonstrate less assertiveness during deliberations about Christianity vis-à-vis SDA doctrines. While she was emphatic to tell me she does not believe IR adherents worship God and recounts how she defended her statement that Islam began with violence, such a stance is not taken when teaching about doctrinal issues involving Adventist. I interpret from these data that Monica's decision to be fair in representing Adventism stems from two reasons. First, her own religious identity and the doctrinal ideology she espouses contradicts that of the school. As an *outsider*, she avoids being seen as misrepresenting Adventism and given the history of JWSDA, she plays it safe by representing it fairly. On the other hand, by taking a position that sought to promote Adventism, she runs the risk of offending other Christian students who are not Adventists. Her statement "they will take you to dangerous grounds" supports this interpretation and further illustrates her fears. Safety to her is found in positioning herself in the "as if" world of neutrality in order to protect her job and her faith.

I see Monica embroiled in a complicated relationship with different faiths operating in her classroom. Her own religious identity influences her teaching although she perceives herself as fairly representing all religions and I applaud her even trying to do that. Her classroom is made up mostly of Muslim students but the few Adventists are very vocal because it is an Adventist school and they attempt to influence classroom deliberations their way. The Muslim students consider Monica an *outsider* and occasionally challenge her (mis)representation of Islam. Other non-Adventist Christian students count on her to defend their Christian faith in general, but when it comes to issues of doctrinal disparity, they part ways and see her as an *outsider*. Perhaps the most complicating factor is the schools' religious ethos and the imaginary, and to a large extent, real ubiquitous gaze ensuring that Monica does not misrepresent Adventism. Being fair to all religions in this case is far more complicated than Monica was prepared in college to handle.

Hamza Awudu - The insider-outsider

Of all mission-public schools, the Islamic type is the newest form to take roots in Ghana. While

mission schools like Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican predate Ghana's independence, formal Islamic schools popularly called English-Arabic schools were introduced after the 1960s. Their purpose was to broaden the former Quranic schools' curriculum to include "secular" studies and encourage Muslims to send their children to formal schools in order to participate in the politics of the new Ghana (Boyle et al., 2007). Since then, a massive expansion has occurred and Islamic schools are now found in communities with dense populations of Muslims. In one such *Zongo*§ community is Naagode Allah Islamic School.

Mr. Hamza Awudu is one of the founding teachers of Naagode School. He was posted to the school after graduation from a teachers' training college and began to teach grade four. He tells me: "when the school was established there were no Muslim teachers and since this is an Islamic school, they needed me here and that is how I got to be here." After four years at the primary level, the JHS (Middle) schools was starting and Hamza moved to teach religion and social studies and has taught these subjects since.

Naagode was established to serve the needs of the Muslim population but interestingly, at the time of this research, there were more Christian students than Muslims in attendance. Hamza did not appear to be worried about Christians dominating his school but expressed optimism about the opportunities the unique circumstance presents. Moreover, the Muslim teachers are less than half of the total staff population. Out of a total teaching staff of twenty-three, nine identified as Muslims. What might appear even more irritating to Muslims was that at least two of the Christian teachers bear Islamic names and are persons who have converted to Christianity. The principal of Naagode explained to me that they cannot insist on getting Muslim teachers because they are fewer than Christian teachers in terms of overall teacher demographics in Ghana. Islamic schools stand to lose if they take the position of other *mission-public* schools "to want their own people." Hamza and his other Muslim teacher colleagues appear to have swallowed their preferences and succumbed to the reality of being minoritized in their own schools with its attendant challenges.

I categorize Hamza as an *insider-outsider*. By being a Muslim in an Islamic school, Hamza enjoys being at home in a place where his religion is the defining ethos. The mosque on the school compound is an important symbol with practical relevance. Performing ablution is a norm rather than an exception and he can comfortably wear his *agbada* and *jellabiya* to school without attracting scornful looks. On this score, he is an *insider*. Looked differently, the population of the school in terms of students and teachers puts his religion in the minority – thus an *outsider*.

These demographics sometimes meant that unusual incidents occurred for an Islamic school. In fact, I witnessed an incident in which some Christian teachers were observed arguing with some Arabic language teachers over a passage in the Qur'an which admonishes Muslims to consult "*those who read the book*" for interpretation of the confusing parts of scriptures. The passage reads:

> If thou art in doubt regarding that which We have sent down unto thee, then ask those who read the book (*revealed*) before thee. Verily the truth hath come unto thee from thy Lord; be not therefore amongst those that doubt. (Surah 10:94)

Three vociferous Christian teachers without any hesitation interpreted the passage to mean Muhammed (SAW) asked Muslims to seek counsel from Christians, an acknowledgement that Christianity is superior. The debate was intense and although none of the teachers were aiming to convince their opponents, they were trying to score points against the other. I must admit that the collegiality that existed even during this period of intense argument was impressive. It was obvious

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§ Zongo is a Ghanaian terminology for communities with a concentration of Muslims.

that such debates go on occasionally in the staff room and that the climate in the school made these differences discussable. I cannot in my wildest imagination expect to see such debates happen at St. Andrew and JWSDA schools because environments there projected singular religious atmosphere and chatty talk about other religions seem to have no place there. Clearly, in terms of the school's demographics, Hamza is an *outsider* who has to constantly enact his role in a "figured world" of Christian majority.

As a simultaneous *insider-outsider*, Hamza is worried about misrepresenting religions other than Islam. He is very comfortable teaching Islam because he practices it and had pursued its academic study. With Christianity, he admits difficulties:

> Teachers might have preferences for teaching about their religion because they know more about it than the others. Even here, I have to seek help from colleagues in connection with the Christian aspect of the syllabus. As a teacher you always need to know far more than what you are teaching your students but when you take the textbooks, it is not just deep enough. Sometimes the authors do not have in depth knowledge about what they are writing. Sometimes the spellings are wrong.

Hamza alludes to deficiencies in pre-service education about teaching religion, a phenomenon that is more widespread (see Barton & James, 2010; Greenawalt, 2002). I admire Hamza's candor and his willingness to admit deficiencies, an attribute which is uncommon among teachers in Ghana. Owing to colonial legacies, the general perception of teachers is that of pedantic scholars who are respected for what they know and embarrassed by what they do not know. Hamza deviates from this culture and uses his students as resources to make up for his weakness. He tells me he has experienced periods when some Christian students have challenged his representations but in all those instances, he invited the students to provide a more authentic account of their lived experiences. As he says:

> Once a student interjected my class and said this is how we do it. Even with pronunciation, I sometimes get it wrong and the students correct me. I encourage such interjections and allow my students to help out in such situations because they speak from experience. The students might know more because they practice their religion. I accept the students as resources in my class for this reason.

From my interactions with him, Hamza comes across as an open-minded person who humbly accepts to be corrected, even by his students, with genuine willingness to learn more about himself and others.

Hamza is also displeased about the misrepresentation of IR and blames everybody including himself for the low recognition accorded it:

> Well, the fact is Ghana in general has sidelined IR. It looks as if it is evil and that is how we perceive it so the children might say 'this person worships idol'. I think it is us Christians and Muslims who have made it so. We denigrate IR but we sneak out to the shrines….I would say it is about parents, teachers and religious leaders. Most of the time, we make it look devilish and you have already told the child the devil is bad and so how do you expect them to appreciate devilish religion?

While his colleagues in Christian schools see nothing wrong with the neglect of other minoritized religions, Hamza believes they deserve a rightful place in the curriculum and he tries to make space in his teaching to talk about them. He says:

> During teaching, I mention the presence of these other religions although the syllabus is not devoted to them. I teach them for the students to know there are other religions only that we have limited our lessons to just three….It would have been ideal for the students to know about them [other

religions]. Myself for instance if I had not obtained advanced schooling, I wouldn't have known about them. I know Hare Krishna is around this area and when I became friends with one of them, I have come to know there are a lot of similarities in their religion too. I used to have a lot of misconceptions about them until now. Now I freely attend their worship when I get invited.

Through such statements and other observations I did in Naagode, Hamza convinced me of his being fair to all religions. He did not come across as someone "acting neutral" because of his professional role. He appears to hold fairness as a personal philosophy as the word appears several times during our conversations. I saw Hamza occasionally checking classrooms to ensure Muslims performed ablution and prayers, and I also saw him engaged in informal conversation with some Christian students. He was very popular for his demeanor and the students liked him. I do not have enough data to explore further reasons for Hamza's attitude but one that is clear is Naagode's demographics. In significant ways, Hamza's neutrality appears to have been "formed and reformed in relation to everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it" (Holland et al., 2001, p. 55). Having been exposed to many students belonging to different faiths, he has been recruited into a realm (whether an abstraction or real) where his personal biases do not matter to him anymore, but the opportunity to demonstrate accommodation of alternative views does.

Discussion

Paul, Monica and Hamza represent thousands of teachers in *mission-public* schools across Ghana. I see all three teachers as demonstrating "different selves" at different times in their roles as teachers (Mead, 1963).There appear to be near consensus in literature about the fluidity of individuals social self (Cote & Levine, 2002; Holland et al., 2001). The finding of this study is yet another corroboration of the fluidity of identities. Learning from the teachers presented here, I am convinced that their personal religious identities are predicated on practices and activities situated in socially enacted, culturally constructed, recognized fields of social life, which with varying degrees of pressure, attempt to fit them into available identity "molds" (Cote & Levine, 2002; Holland et al., 2001). All three teachers position themselves in a figured world of "religious educators" within which they act to realize outcomes that are valued by their schools' religious dynamics. At JWSDA, the defining ethos is to project Adventism. Hence any act that supports this course is valued. Monica's misrepresentation of IR and Islam are therefore valued in her school because it is in the interest of Adventism. Similarly, Naagode's defining ethos is engagement with religious diversity, so Hamza's actions are also situated within that social construction. Naagode's defining religious ethos is based on the Quaranic belief that "there is no compulsion in religion" (Al Qur'an 2:25). Thus, Hamza does not force Muslim girls to do their prayers even though he would have preferred to do that as a devout Muslim. Eric plays his role as an insider, recruited to protect, if not promote, Catholicism. While he might not teach as St. Andrew's managers would prefer, his mechanisms to shield Catholicism from attacks by internal and external enemies is a highly appreciated value there. I therefore see schools' religious social environments as figured worlds where "characters and actors are recognized, significance assigned to certain acts and particular outcomes valued over others"(Holland et al., 2001, p. 52)

Another crucial finding is that teachers' religious identities are not necessarily a potent predictor of their pedagogical (in)actions. The finding here interrupts scholarship on the relationship between religious identity and teachers' pedagogical actions. Previous works on teachers in sectarian schools (Levine, 2004; Peshkin, 1988; Schweber, 2006) have presented them as very supportive of their schools' religious agendas. In most cases, school curricular enactments were mediated through the metanarratives of the religion of these schools. It thus makes sense that

every *insider* teacher is supportive of promoting their school's religious ethos (Nelson, 2010). While this might hold true for private sectarian schools, this study reveals that it is not the case in *mission-public* schools. Paul, a Catholic *insider* does not necessarily support his school's agenda of compulsorily requiring students to engage in Catholic routines. His personal experiences weighed heavily on his thoughts about such acts and he abstains instead. He also chooses to teach less about Christianity in his religion classes. Relatedly, Hamza could be predicted to be favoring the teaching of Islam to the neglect of other religions based on his identity as a Muslim in an Islamic school. However, he adopts a fair and balanced approach. Finally Monica does not necessarily misrepresent Adventism in spite of her status as an *outsider*. Predicting teachers' pedagogical posture based on their religious identity is an erroneous estimation if such guesstimate is not done within the sociological context of school's religious ethos.

Finally, there is more to teacher religious identity than the often simplified representation as a constant category. Teacher religious identity exists in a state of fluidity and depending on the school context and classroom demographics influences teachers (in)actions. Outwardly, it might be easy to define a teacher in a school as an insider or outsider with a single criterion of whether they share the faith of the school. However, from the findings of this work it is far more complicated. My categorization of Monica as an *outsider* and Hamza as *insider-outsider* appear very neat on paper but very messy in reality. Monica's *outsiderness* can be challenged on the score that she is a Christian, a broader category that makes her share some beliefs in common with Adventists. I cannot imagine her struggle to teach a topic on "The Trinity" for instance, as much as a Buddhist teacher will do in any Christian school. However, faith-inspired happenings in the school for which she did not subscribe, makes her feel less an *in-person* and more an *out-person*. Again, it is hard for her to imagine ascribing to an insider status when majority of her students identify as Muslims. It is far messier to position teachers using faith as the defining criterion.

Conclusion

My big takeaway from this research is: "religious identity is complicated". Like other identity makers such as gender, race, and ethnicity there is more to teacher religious identity than the often simplified representation as a constant category. Teacher religious identity exists in a state of fluidity and depending on the school context and classroom demographics could facilitate misrepresentation of religions other than the "normative" one. What qualifies a teacher to ascribe a religious identity? Would being a fundamentalist or evangelical Christian; Sunni or Shia Muslim make any difference in teaching, beyond the umbrella categorization of Christians or Muslims? Such begging questions require a rethink of teacher identity and associated positioning of them in their schools. If we expect a predictable pattern of pedagogical (in)action of teachers based on their positionality in their schools, we will be in for big surprises. Teacher identity consists of multiple layers and manifold patterns which cannot be structurally determined. Its varied influence is contingent on extenuating factors which includes schools' religious ethos.

Besides the teaching of religion where this complexity is often unraveled, the implication of teacher religious identity on curricula enactments in other subject areas as science, literature, history; and co-curricular activities such as athletics, clubs, school routines et cetera, is enormous. To say much research is needed is an understatement.

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