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Re-Imagining *Wasatiyyah* as a Socio-Theological Mediation of Youth Anger in Accra, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The paper recognizes that the current coronavirus has caused an anger spike that has brought in its wake global street demonstrations and protests against the ruling elite. In the case of Ghana, this has found expression in some of the young men and women of the country deploying their anger that brings them into conflict with the police – often leading to either death or destruction of property. Much as the issue of youth anger is transnational, in this article, the researcher focuses on two Muslim inner-cities in Accra, Nima, and Maamobi, to reflect on how wasatiyyah could be appropriated to mediate emerging religiopolitical tension in Ghana and the West African sub-region. It is instead for the sake of convenience of the researcher's familiarity since, as a resident of a Muslim inner-city in Accra, the researcher seeks to destabilize the simplistic assertion that Islam is a violent religion, while Muslim youth in the urban slum is concomitantly incorrigibly aggressive. Thus, deploying autoethnography and ethnographic techniques of in-depth interviews, the article explores the intersections of Ghana's socio-political history and global and contemporary issues, including Covid-19 have spiked anger that needs critical reflection. The paper concludes that the anger in the Muslim communities in Accra is not isolated from the social history of Ghana and the global context. To keep the security of the country intact and offers the youth hope, wasatiyyah will help in explaining existential inequalities as well as reorienting people to deploy moral outrage productively.

Keywords

Accra; Ghana; religiopolitical tension; wasatiyyah; youth anger

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, the researcher explores Ghana's sociohistorical narratives of the 1980s to analyze the rubric of youth anger and violence in Maamobi, an inner-Muslim city in Accra. Through the sociological idea of deviance as a social condition, the researcher aims to destabilize the simplistic public framing of Islam as violent and Muslim youth as aggressive. The public image of Islam creates a stigma that something is shameful about being a Muslim or a resident of Muslim-dominated communities (called Zongos). These stigmatized identities have social severe consequences, including the multidimensionality of social exclusion. As residents of the Zongos are assigned stigmatizing identities, their negotiating through the social world becomes very difficult and complex (Weiss, 2007; Owusu, 2010).

Nevertheless, as the West African sub-region since the turn of the millennium becomes a hub of political and religious tensions, the researcher deploys the Islamic theology of moderation as an analytical framework – arguing for a balanced use of anger against systemic injustice without stocking a perpetual cycle of violence. As a resident of the Maamobi community, one of the oldest inner-Muslim urban slums in Accra since the 1980s, the researcher has lived through the stages at which the country's neoliberal turn in the 1980s, as a result of the political elites' imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes, have persistently marginalized the youth in the community and other Zongo communities. The marginalization of the Zongos, however, sits in a long history of the colonial policies that sustained the non-Muslim profiling of Zongo residents as aliens – spiking state-induced deportation of residents since independence in 1957 (Williamson, 2018; Mensah & Teye, 2021). Since the 1990s, therefore, the marginalization of Zongo youths has resulted in anger spikes that occasionally have had fatal consequences. In all these, the current coronavirus pandemic has accentuated both global and local inequalities, spiking anger and tensions globally. The general Ghanaian youth expressed their localized version of the anger in forming a Movement whose demand for the political elites to fix the country's developmental challenges coalesced in their teaser #FixTheCountry.

The Zongos in the country have readily been identified with the #FixTheCountry Movement, but unfortunately, residents tend to be victimhood of any state-sponsored repression of such movements. This has been the case of the death of a Zongo resident at Ejura, whose death spiked agitations in the country in June 2021 (GhanaWeb, 2021b). Incidentally, in January 2022, the youths in Maamobi and Nima, a sister community, revitalised their old rival gangster groups, leading to a violent clash that could have been fatal, but for the immediate intervention of the police (Darko, 2022). Usually, when

violent clashes occur in these communities, the usually public rhetoric is that the areas need more police patrol and security posts. Such responses, brilliant as they are, tend to reinforce the public simplistic Islamophobic tendencies, as well as pigeonholing of Zongo residents who are "incurably" violent who, need 24/7 police monitoring. The surge in local and global tensions is against the background that the West African sub-region has more recently since the turn of the millennium has become the hub of religious and political tensions. Countries like Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Chad (Benson, 2022). The region is also struggling with politicised religious activities by Boko Haram and ISIS (Bukarti, 2021).

The tensions in the researcher's community and the world unmistakably point to a world where the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown have spiked anger against the visibility of pre-COVID-19 systemic inequalities. As a resident, the researcher has often reflected on the issue of anger and inequality, and in the case of the Zongos, the simplistic public framing of Islam as a violent religion and Zongo residents as ontologically aggressive. Given the extent to which such simplistic profiling has affected the development of the Zongos and their residents, he depended on auto-biography, in-depth interviews with community leaders, and sociohistorical analysis to respond to the overly simplistic axioms about the Zongos. In all this, since the anger of the Zongos may be genuine and the call for resisting inequality is imperative, my interest is more about how anger could be productively deployed to ensure the peace of Ghana in a midst of the volatility of the sub-region. Consequently, the researcher seeks to answer the following question: Given the existential reality of imperfection and inequality – expressed in unequal access to power and wealth, how could Islamic theology be deployed to ensure moderation in the use of moral rage to address some addressable challenges of the Zongos?

Youth in Africa have received extensive research, usually focusing on their complex connections with violence (Abbink, 2021). In Ghana, several scholars have focused on both the historical and contemporary involvement of the youth in the country's politics (Gyampo & Obeng-Odoom, 2013). Since the 1990s when the country re-democratised, several scholars have focused on the issue of political vigilante groups which are usually composed of the country's youthful constituency (Gyampo et al., 2017; Arkorful & Lugu, 2020; Kyei & Berckmoes, 2020). Similarly, inequality generating anger which drives political agitation has had an extensive discussion among scholars (Banks, 2014). Political scientists and philosophers have looked at anger from a different perspective including anger as a channel of political communication in the hands of the oppressed. They have also explored the importance of anger as potentially useful in challenging state-oppressive regime as part of ensuring social and political order

(Holmes, 2004). Islamic scholars have also studied anger, especially in relation to spikes in tensions in the world (Kull, 2011; Koçan & Öncü, 2014). In this paper, the researcher examines the issue of anger and inequality in ways that will shed light on how the youth can deploy the Islamic resource of moderation, without submitting both to passive acceptance of injustice and stoking the simmering tension in the West African sub-region.

The Concept of Wasatiyyah

While has benefited from previuos scholarly works, in this paper, the researcher depended largely on Mohammed Hashim Kamali's evaluation of the Qur'anic principle of *Wasatiyyah*. Kamali's work is insightful because he skillfully entwined history, theology, and analysis of contemporary happenings in Islam to enforce the logicality of *Wasatiyyah* or moderation as a peacebuilding mechanism. Kamali argued for a critical balance for Muslims to reject extremism and extremists' interpretation of the Islamic text and traditions. He encouraged Muslims to direct their moral outrage at fostering the good of society, rather than violence, focusing on moderation.

> Moderation is primarily a moral virtue of relevance not only to the personal conduct of individuals but also to the integrity and self-image of communities and nations. Moderation is an aspect, in its Qur'anic projections, of the self-identity and worldview of the Muslim community, or Ummah and also features prominently in almost all major world religions and civilizations (Kamali, 2015, p. 15).

Focusing on the seeming tension between justice and moderation, he argued that moderation

> [D]oes not imply any compromise on religious principles, nor on basic religious duties, in order to please or appease others. Nor should *wasatiyyah* be used as an excuse not to take religious precepts seriously. On the contrary, *wasatiyyah* means confidence, right balancing, and justice (Kamali, 2015, p. 14).

In the history of Islam, inclusive education that integrated "secular" and religious, men and women have often been emphasised (Zaman, 2016; Ahmad & Tak, 2020). The researcher surmises that the importance of concept of *Wasatiyyah*, just like every Islamic code of ethics is that:

> The Islamic creed is not mere dogma but has a practical role, translating into ethical conduct conducive to the betterment of the individual and society (Rumaysah, 2009, p. 14).

From the researcher's own reflection and understanding, the socio-philosophy of *Wasatiyyah* is found in the Islamic believe in divine decree. The doctrine of divine decree is certainly not to cow anyone to passively accept injustice or resort to escapism. But it is to appreciate the fact that:

> Allah, the Most High, knows with the creation are doing. He knows this with pre-eternal knowledge which He has been described with unceasingly and unendingly. He knows all

> their states: when they are obedient and disobedient, all their provisions and their life spans… Whatever befalls man would never have missed him, and whatever missed him would never befallen him (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2009, p. 92).

Admittedly, the above statement is complex and needs extensive philosophical elucidation to separate it from classical fatalism. While that is not the intention of this paper, the researcher argues that there is social reassuring in the understanding that God is in absolute control of whatever happens gives another window for the oppressed and impoverished to make sense of the world, other than relying solely on materialist reading of history. The idea of divine sovereignty could help human beings to understand existential inequality from two main perspectives: First, nothing happens by chance, freeing individuals from the assumption that the existential inequality is primarily a matter of an accident in history – class conflict in Marx's notion of dialectical materialism (Thomas, 2008). Second, it gives one hope that one can work hard enough, trusting in Allah – other than hating and deploying moral outrage destructively.

Youth Gangsterism

Youth gangsterism is a transnational social challenge. It manifests at different levels in society and has attracted scholarly attention over the decades. In other words, what society usually terms deviant behaviours are trans-cultural and trans-geographical. For this reason, the subject has been discussed across nearly all geo-social spaces (Hazen & Rodgers, 2014). Several reasons have been adduced to explain gangsterism among the youth. These reasons have included poverty, lack of comprehensive policy on the youths, peer group influence, weakness of the home in terms of sound parental control and high rate of illiteracy among the youths (Abanyam, 2012; Ezemenaka, 2021). These reasons for youth gangsterism are nearly universal, often concretised in sociological theories, one of which is social control theory. From the perspective of social control, delinquency, of which gangsterism is part, exists when individuals' social bonds, including family and religion, weakens, since social bonds promote conformity (Hirschi, 1969). This implies that when the family, schooling system, and religions as institutions of socialisation collapse, the chances of delinquency increase.

Nevertheless, since the modern governance system appears to have the ultimate role of social control, especially when dealing with widespread gangsterism, the state is often invited to articulate policies to deal with gangsterism, except that sometimes gangsters are as powerful as the political elites (Jackman, 2019). But the use of force to fight deviance and gangsterism raises questions about how capitalists leverage to target the impoverished who challenge inequalities – this comes in the form of social control (Ferris & Stein, 2018). Deviance behaviours, such as youth gangsterism, could be functional in the sense that it helps them to avoid the pressures of conforming to

palpable injustice – in a manner that Turner called neutralisation of commitment (Turner, 1972).

Undoubtedly, the issue of youth gangsterism is intricately identifiable with anger about existential imperfection and inequality. The reasons identified by scholars as inducing youth gangsterism are real issues that border on inequality and social injustice. But while these inequalities that induce anger and gangsterism are both historical and contemporary that appear intractable, the focus of this article is not to recapitulate existing research. The purpose of this study is for the researcher to explore how the youth in Nima and Maamobi could productively use their moral outrage. This implies that while the researcher does not aim to diminish or valorise youth gangsterism, neither is it to essentialise and criminalise any particular social group. Instead, the researcher acknowledges the reason for inequalities breeding anger and gangsterism among the youth, by arguing that the youth need some adaptive knowledge to engage their anger more productive. For this reason, the purpose of this paper is to argue for the Islamic philosophy of wasatiyyah to be integrated into the socialisation of children in Ghana – and in my case those in Muslim inner-cities. As stated above, the researcher focused on Nima and Maamobi not to homogenise the communities as socially uniform and constituting the hub of violence (Owusu et al., 2008). Rather, while emphasising the transnational character of youth gangsterism, the researcher for the sake of his familiarity with these Nima and Maamobi, uses these communities as an entry point to discuss the role of religious philosophy in dealing with a contemporary social challenge.

The importance of this article is precisely because of two main reasons. First, the current coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) has unveiled inequalities that hitherto appeared to have been normalised. For this reason, the pandemic-induced economic morass has resulted in a spike in anger. Second, religion has surged back in ways that need to be engaged productively. In the 1960s, several modernist scholars, including Peter Berger and Harvey Cox predicted that the force of science and technology would push religion to the fringes (Berger, 1990; Cox, 2013). However, by the beginning of the 1980s, religion has resurged significantly. The surge in religion has had two impacts. First, religion has given hope to several people in the face of life's crisis (Krause et al., 2018). The religious promise of a better hereafter, which requires patience amid trials, has reoriented people to find meaning in life. Second, violence has been justified by religious ideas (Kitts et al., 2013). For this reason, the peace of the West African sub-region has deeply become fragile following the politicisation of religion by militant groups (Gow & Olonisakin, 2015).

Concurrently, the importance of this article is to emphasise the productive role of religion in reordering society for social cohesion. Since Ghana has a huge religious constituency, with Nima and Maamobi emerging as communities with historic Islamic root, this study will help in choreographing social life along the benevolence of religious moderation in the face of provocation. Incidentally, the majority of the young men in the communities who are often induced by personal choices and deprivation to indulge in violence lay claim to Islamic identity. Thus, while this article does not conflate Islam and violence, the researcher takes as a priori assumption that the Islamic philosophy of *Wasatiyyah* is providential in helping these young men who identify with Islam to deploy their anger productively. In all, this article contributes to the extant body of knowledge on religion and governance; religion and socialisation, and religion and development. Similarly, the article emphasises Peter Berger's desecularisation that emphasises the resilience and existential role of religion in the face of technological advancement (Berger, 1999).

The Context of This Study

Maamobi is one of the oldest migrant inner-Muslim communities in Accra. As a migrant community that began in the late nineteenth century, the community has attracted migrants from the Muslim Northern part of Ghana and other West African countries, such as Nigeria, Togo, and Burkina (Prempeh, 2021). Given that the Hausa traders were more involved in the trans-Saharan trade, they were very influential in the establishment of Muslim camping sites – what became known as Zongos (Schildkrout, 2007). After the religious reform of Usman Dan Fodio in Northern Nigeria in the early nineteenth century, the Hausa incorporated the spread of reform Islam in their itinerary – making the Hausa language identifiable with Islam – as an Islamic language (Dumbe, 2011).

When the British extended the colony beyond the coast of the Gold Coast to Asante Area in the early nineteenth century and later in the Muslim Northern territories, the Hausa and some of the Northerners were enlisted into what became known as the Hausa Gold Coast Constabulary (Ntewusu, 2014). Several of those enlisted were of slave origin and were used to suppress dissent in the southern part of the Gold Coast. These British tactics of divide and rule predisposed the Hausa in bad light before the southern Gold Coasters (Balakrishnan, 2020). Nevertheless, given that the British taught the physical profile of the Hausa befitted the army, the British embarked on a deliberate policy of Hausanization, where Hausa culture, particularly the language was imposed on the non-Hausa migrants to the southern part of the Gold Coast (Killingray, 2000).

Because of the British policy of Hausanization and the role Hausa played in the spread of Islam and the teaching of Islamic history and theology in Qur'anic schools,

Hausa eventually became the lingua franca of the Zongos (Skinner, 2013). This implies that while currently, the ethnic Hausa are in the minority in several of the Zongos, including Maamobi, residents are simplistically referred to as the "Hausa people", especially among southern Ghanaians.

During the outbreak of the First and Second World Wars, the British enlisted more of the Hausa and people from the Northern part of the colony into its army (Killingray, 2000). According to Imam Iddrisu Yussif, upon the end of the war, several of the ex-servicemen were resettled in areas, including Maamobi in the 1940s (I. Yussif, personal communication, December 12, 2021).[1] But until the early 1950s, the community was not part of the colonial governance of Accra, which had become the administrative capital of the British colonial administrators since 1877 (Arn, 1996). According to Honorable Alhaji Haruna Dabri, the probable reason for the colonial governor's non-interference with the governance of the community was that Maamobi was also dedicated to cattle rearing – cattle range (H. Dabri, personal communication, August 21, 2019).[2] Not only that, since the late nineteenth century, the community was largely dedicated as a cemetery for the burial of Muslims who lived around Ruga, a nearby community around Kanda, Accra (H. Dabri, personal communication, August 21, 2019).

The colonial governor's non-direct interference in the affairs of Maamobi produced two main results. First, it paved the way for local Muslim leaders to fashion their religious and cultural lives as they understood. This made Qur'anic schools more prominent, while western education was largely despised (H. Dabri, personal communication, August 21, 2019). The residents' investment in Qur'anic schools was also because the early nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries leveraged their control of school administration to convert Muslims and non-Muslims Gold Coasters into Christianity (Skinner, 2013). The second impact of the colonial non-involvement in the governance of Maamobi was that it slowed down the pace of the socio-economic development of the community.

During the Gold Coast's struggle against colonialism in the late 1940s, after World War II, Nkrumah mobilised several of the people of the Zongos (H. Dabri, personal communication, August 21, 2019). But because the Zongos have a long history with the Asante who have formed the National Liberation Movement (NLM) as part of defending their commercial interest against Nkrumah, several of the Zongo leaders joined the NLM

[1] Imam Iddrisu Yussif is the Chief Imam of Maamobi, the oldest Imam in Accra. He has served for 59 years and succeeded his father as the second Chief Imam of Maamobi, Accra.

[2] Honorable Alhaji Haruna Dabri's father was an ex-serviceman and has lived in the community since the 1950s.

(Ahmed-Rufai, 2002). Nkrumah's Convention People's Party did not take the partisan interest of the Zongo leaders lightly, despite the Zongos' contributions to the country's independence. Upon independence, Nkrumah politicised citizenship to deport some of the prominent leaders of the Zongos (Gocking, 2005). Later in the 1950s, Nkrumah sought to make amends with the Zongo people when he promised to develop Maamobi and Nima, a sister community, as cities within a city (Paller, 2019). But unfortunately, for reasons, including economic hardship, the military ousted him from office in 1966, and could not fulfil his promise. But, as part of his passion for the nationalization of Ghana's economy, K.A. Busia, the civilian leader who succeeded Nkrumah deported several of the residents of the Zongos, including those in Maamobi, whom he profiled as aliens (Adjepong, 2009).

When Busia was also ousted from office through a military coup led by Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong in 1971, several of the West African historic residents of the community returned to Ghana as cocoa farmers to help with Acheampong's "Operation Feed Yourself" policy (H. Dabri, personal communication, August 21, 2019). The majority of them stayed in the Volta Region of Ghana. This time the Chamba and Kotokoli largely from Togo returned in their numbers. Over time, especially after the overthrow of Acheampong's government in 1979 by Rawlings, several of these people migrated to Maamobi and other Zongos in Accra where their ancestors had settled in the nineteenth century.

As the researcher reserves the impact of the Rawlings' regime on the people of Maamobi later in this chapter, the point in all this is that, the socio-history of the Muslim communities consolidated public profiling of the Zongos. Given the chequered history of the community, it is one of the poor urban slums in Accra. As a slum, the community has virtually all the features of a slum: poor sanitation and squalid living conditions, inadequate housing, congestion, and high levels of poverty. The majority of the residents are also involved in the informal sector of the economy, with women mostly working as traders, hawkers, and men involved in mechanics, commercial driving, and masons.

METHOD

Methodologically, the researcher deploys auto-ethnography and ethnographic research interviews to analyse the challenges that have burdened the community that ultimately predispose some of the youths to indulge in violent crimes. From the perspective of auto-ethnography, the researcher used his personal experiences to explore the entanglement between beliefs, practices, and local and international politics in

informing the anger of the youth as a resident of the community. He has been involved in voluntary activities such as serving NGOs – Aid Afrique and Gender Action Unit – as both Public Relations Officer and Secretary respectively. In 2002-2006, he was elected as a Unit Committee Member, a political office that was introduced at the turn of the millennium as part of Ghana's quest for decentration – usually styled as a power to the people for development. Beyond all this, I have also taught voluntarily at both formal and informal levels. At the formal level, when I finished my course work at the IAS, Legon in 2010, he taught at the Kanda Estate Primary "2" School. He has also been actively involved in teaching women to read and write on Adult Education Programmes. His active involvement with the community has given me a deeper insight into the cultural climate of the residents.

Similarly, he used ethnographic research techniques, such as in-depth interviews with some of the earliest residents of the community since the 1950s, including the current chief Imam of the community who is also the oldest serving Muslim Imam in Ghana. Since 2010, when he researched issues of marijuana consumption among some of the youth in the community for my Master of Philosophy which was submitted to the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, in 2011, he kept in touch with the youth, engaging in both formal and informal conversation. In all my conversations with the categories of persons he mentioned above, his goal, *inter alia*, has been to understand the complex issues facing the community, more recently the issue of anger-based violence and how it could be mitigated. Designed as qualitative research, he recorded all my interviews, including writing down as much information as possible in a fieldnote. I conducted all the interviews largely in Hausa, the lingua franca of the community. But since there are a few residents who do not speak Hausa, he also interviewed some of the residents in Akan (Twi), the commonest spoken language in Ghana. The interviews were transcribed and analysed critically to reflect the local and global forces that have merged to shape the anger of the youth and the concurrent profiling of the community as violent-ridden. The researcher analysed the responses of his interlocutors within local and translocal politics. For this reason, the researcher discussed how the evolution of Ghana's political history and religious resurgence converged with the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated gangsterism and violence in Ghana, focusing particularly on Nima and Maamobi. With all this, the researcher critically on the intervention of *Wasatiyyah* in reorienting Muslim youth and by extension the youth of Ghana to engage in existential equality with patience without passively acquiescing in injustice.

The rest of the paper is devoted to the discussion of the researcher's observation of the complex intermesh of history and contemporary issues in inducing anger and

the need for *Wasatiyyah*. Consequently, it is structured as follows: The next section discusses how the evolution of Ghana's politics since the country's re-democratisation in the 1990s has shaped the behaviours of the youth; it then discusses the various ways the youth have deployed anger in responding to the multidimensionality of existential injustice. Finally, the paper concluded on how the Islamic concept of *Wasatiyyah* could be appropriated to help the youth to overcome the traps of unmeasured and disproportionate anger and its extrapolation to explain the world's existential reality. In all of this, the researcher reflected on the English translated version of Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari, *Youth and Morals*, which he read as a secondary school student.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ghana's political history has been a complex mix of civilian and military rule since the country's independence from the British in 1957 (Asamoah, 2014). Until the 1990s when the country was democratised, the country subsisted under a decade of the military rule of Jerry John Rawlings. Given that Rawlings' adoption of democratic governance was borne out of both internal and external pressures, following the economic challenges of the 1980s, it opened up the country to neoliberal politics (Donkor, 2019). The neoliberalisation of the country's economy was mandated by and as part of the financial aid conditionalities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as part of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). The SAPs involved a significant recession of the state from direct governance of the economy, as these financial institutions read Ghana's economic morass as part of state mismanagement of public institutions. The state, therefore, removed subsidies from the core sector of the country's economy, including agriculture, education and health (Anyinam, 1994; Konadu-Agyemang, 2001).

The above implies that at the time Ghana re-democratised the country's economic inequality had worsened, impacting significantly on the standard of living of the city's slum dwellers, including the residents of Maamobi (H. Dabri, personal communication, August 21, 2019). Also, given that the re-democratisation opened the political landscape for competitive partisan politics, the struggle for political power entwined residents of Maamobi in the circuits of political contestations. In effect, while the economic liberalisation sustained the wealth of a few individuals who entered partisan politics, the youthful constituency of Maamobi and other such communities, provided support to what became known as vigilante groups (H. Dabri, personal communication, August 21, 2019). As party vigilante groups, the political class leveraged the poverty of urban slums to mobilise the men and women of these communities to instigate political violence during competitive national elections.

The youth in urban slums tend to be at the lower ranks of party organisations. So, several of them add work of security guards of contentious lands in Accra in a practice generally referred to as land guards. As land guards, some traditional authorities and political figures are believed to give them light arms to protect lands in Accra. This situation leads to open violence in some areas in Accra.

In Maamobi, in addition to these youth getting daily wages, the politicians promise to hand over the running of public toilets to them. Sometimes, too, the youth are employed to work as toll collectors on major roads in the city. But since the economy has not grown to expectedly meet the demands of the youth, a few times these youths have been easily induced by politicians to indulge in violence, including those that relate to land disputes. It was one of such violence that informed the nation to outlaw all vigilante activities. All this while, Ghanaians have bemoaned the activities of vigilante groups a drawback to Ghana's democracy and a potential cause of politically-informed violence. It was, however, the open violence associated with a Parliamentary by-election at East Legon, Accra that concretised public outcry against vigilante groups that resulted in the passage of the Vigilantism and Related Offences Act in 2019.

The Act proscribed and criminalised all vigilante activities, including the phenomenon of land guards. Since some of the youth were involved in both activities of vigilantism and land guards, the state's criminalisation of these activities made several of these youth redundant. The state has also not been adequately successful in providing alternative job opportunities. As a response, a few of the youth who have learned the basic rudiments of computing went into internet fraud, known locally as Sakawa. But because the state and the international community have tightened cybersecurity, internet fraud does not yield as much as the youth would have expected.

The passage of the anti-vigilante law further constricted youth's means of generating some income. The poor party development in the country, worsened by the state's continuing non-funding of political parties, *inter alia*, incapacitates the political parties to support these youth. As mentioned in the introduction, the current pandemic has shattered the hopes of several of the youths in Maamobi. One of them, Osmanu, said to the researcher in an interview, “the pandemic has worsened my condition. My job as a bicycle repairer is nearly gone.” Another, Adizatu who until the pandemic straddled Ghana and Togo as an international businesswoman said, “the closure of the borders as part of the lockdown also locked my finances down.” As the pandemic exerted a severe impact on the economic and social lives of Ghanaians, the Government of Ghana stepped in to provide a few months of free water and electricity for domestic use (GhanaWeb, 2021a). Similarly, the government supplied hot meals to residents in

Accra (Lartey, 2020). But all this hardly mitigated the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, when the restrictive lockdown rules were gradually removed, the government introduced taxes that further burdened already suffering residents.

Currently, the country is debating the contentious E-levy which the government has introduced to charge mobile money and online transactions as part of recuperating the economy. As the impact of the pandemic continues to expose the vulnerability of the youth in the community, several old gangster groups have resurfaced. In January 2022, a rival gangster group in Maamobi clashed with those in Nima, a sister community. But for the swift intervention of the police, several lives and properties would have been destroyed (Darko, 2022). The public response has been one of condemnation, with a few simplistically re-articulating the rhetoric of Islamophobia and Muslim youth aggressiveness. In a conversation, a colleague said that, "You Zongo people are full of tantrums."

As indicated in the introduction, the goal of this paper is to contextualise anger in the Zongos, focusing on Maamobi. The researcher deploys Islam's theology/philosophy of life, generally referred to as *Wasatiyyah* – the quest for a moderate/middle ground – as imperative in ensuring measured anger in Maamobi. Consequently, while anger has usually been framed as a psychological issue that defines rationality (Ost, 2004), the goal in this section is to argue that anger and rage could help in destabilising resolvable injustice in society. So, the researcher will return to how the re-democratisation of Ghana in the 1990s reinforced systemic injustice in the country – leading to the marginalisation of residents in Maamobi.

Upon Ghana's return to re-democratisation, religions surged, according to similar patterns globally. The political elites have, however, leveraged religious surge for political gains. This is precisely because while contemporary Reformist Islamic leaders, including Al-Hajj Ibrahim Umar Imam, the leader of the Ahlu-Sunna Wal Jama'a (ASWAJ) Islam is leading a reformist agenda of ensuring that Muslim children have adequate access to western education, the politicians are deliberating promoting Arabic. While it is great to promote Arabic education, the political elites' non-investment in other sectors of lives, such as the provision of social services, including libraries, good drinking water, and improvement of the sanitation conditions, complicates the development of the Zongos. Unfortunately, as contemporary politicians invest in Arabic at the expense of other forms of social services, these politicians are reinforcing the colonial policy of duality of education – which streamlined segregation in education between the Muslim North and Christian south.

As postcolonial governments in Ghana continue to politicise Arabic education, the state reinforces the perception that the Zongos should be treated differently from the

rest of the nation. This language policy may empower Muslims religiously, especially as they master Islamic theology, but hardly would it transform their capacity as employable citizens in Ghana's "secular" economy – which requires largely technical skills.

As the state inadequately provides quality western education to Muslim youth, it rejuvenates an old practice the researcher observed about Arab governments' sponsorship of Qur'anic education to the youth in the Zongos. As the researcher observed in the Zongos in the 1990s that the surge in religion, especially following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, several Muslim countries, based on an ideologically-driven quest for evangelism, sponsored several Zongo youth to study in the Arab world, including Kuwait, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia (Skinner, 2010). The ideologically-oriented education Muslim youth received in partly Sunni-related schools in Arabia partly contributed to the several intra-Islamic conflicts that rocked Maamobi and several other Muslim communities in the 1990s.

Since the beginning of the millennium, several Muslim leaders have arisen to the challenge of state politicisation of Zongo development. To the extent that Hajj Umar, as have mentioned above is campaigning for Muslim children to receive western education to empower them for Ghana's "secular" economy, the state's deliberate overemphasis on Arabic could be an aporia to Zongo development. From the researcher's perspective, while Arabic needs to be studied in the Zongos, the state should equally provide other forms of empowerment programmes to build the capacity of Zongo youth and the Ghanaian youthful constituency in general.

Following the politicisation of Zongo citizenship, including the state usually reneging on its promises to develop the Zongos, residents have also become very distrustful of government, especially remnant of political parties that sought to delegitimise Zongos through deportation. For example, the post-Nkrumah party that recalibrated the deportation of Zongo residents was the United Party, led by Dr K.A. Busia. The current Busia's party that has remobilised since the 1990s is the New Patriotic Party. Since the NPP came to power for the second time, since Ghana's re-democratisation in the 1990s, in 2017, the party has indicated an interest in upgrading the Zongos – through its establishment of the Ministry of Inner-City and Zongo Development in 2017. Nevertheless, the Zongos, including those as recent as 2019, have often resisted the government's upgrading policy. In my interview on the subject with Alhaji Haruna Dabre one of the opinion leaders of Maamobi and residents of the community since the 1950s, he said that,

> The politicians have made us suspicious of everything, including even their good intentions. When Kanda was being developed, our parents were promised residential allocation. But

> that never happened. How do you expect people to keep trusting politicians, especially when it is also about the NPP? (H. Dabri, personal communication, August 21, 2019)

The concerns of Alhaji Dabri were shared by several of the youth constituency of the community who have also become very incensed about the looming challenge of ethnic politics in the country. The researcher's point in all the above is to highlight the complexity of the Zongo youth's discontent. As the youthful constituency becomes more discontent with the current state of underdevelopment of the Zongos, including Maamobi, they express their frustrations through anger and street demonstrations, including the one the researcher mentioned above. Concurrently, the political regime has often criminalised anger, while the general public continues to stigmatise Islam and profile Zongo residents as intemperate.

The issue of anger and the governance of a state has been discussed by several scholars, since the emergence of nation-states (Phoenix, 2019). Depending on one's ideological stance, anger has been defined differently. Ideologues who believe in asceticism and social order as *conditio sine qua non* for development, anger is subversive of capitalist development (Macamo, 2011). On the contrary, with revolutionary-minded thinkers such as Marxists, anger is necessary to upset unequal and systemic imbalance that reifies the upper-classes continuing control of the means of production at the expense of the working class (Peters, 2012).

Notwithstanding the multidimensional stances on anger, anger has sides that can both build and destroy society, depending on how it is used. In terms of the positive use of anger, it could be seen as a form of political communication (Lyman, 2004). This is precisely with the emergence of the modern state as a rational state, deploying rational-bureaucratic channels of communication as the only legitimate means of concern that could be subversive of the will of the oppressed (Weber, 2019). In Ghana, for example, residents in the Zongos hardly have access to communicate with the state through their deployment of bureaucratic channels, due to excessive partisan politics. Similarly, as part of the state's capacity to use the power of coercion, the political elites have often resorted to the disproportionate use of coercive power to liquidate the youth's legitimate use of anger as a political communication tool.

On the other hand, if anger is not measuredly used, it could be a potential source of political conflict (Feierabend, 1972). In the last few years, residents in the Zongos have sometimes deployed anger in ways that resulted in fatalities (GhanaWeb, 2018). This is not to reaffirm public stigmatisation of Zongo youth as irrational in their anger, but to rather highlight the extent to which complex politicisation of Zongo development and individual idiosyncrasies converge in youth violence. It also points out how politicians and a few Zongo residents capitalise on Zongo challenges as a resource for political

mobilisation. This mobilisation occasionally results in violence, such as the electoral violence that saddled the parliamentary by-election at the Ayawaso West Wuogon Constituency in Accra in 2019.

All said, anger should not simply be discarded as intemperance and a psychological issue nor simply as a must tool for political communication. Instead, when residents in the Zongos express anger, it could also be read as part of their moral outrage against the imperfections they see around or personal idiosyncrasies. Nevertheless, given the current political and religious tension in the West African sub-region, the youth of Maamobi and the remaining Zongo communities must guard against local and international opportunists from channelling the anger of the Zongos into stoking more violence in the sub-region. Already, as I have said, there are a few reports of a few Zongo youth who have been enlisted into so-named terrorist organisations like ISIS.

It is precisely the need to guard against the possibility of politicians and individuals who are politicising religion by leveraging the anger of Zongo youth into violence that I reflect on how Islam responds to the question of anger and injustice. The researcher appeals to Islam for two main reasons: First, the political philosophies of Capitalism and Marxism (socialism) both create illusions of dealing with existential imperfections. For example, while capitalism argues that individual freedom in a tranquil state is critical in unearthing individual capacity to generate wealth, capitalism creates individuals who know how to make wealth, but hardly how to redistribute – leading to the perpetuation of inequality. Similarly, while socialism promises to dislocate wealth from the hands of a few individuals into the hands of the state to ensure its equal distribution, socialism usually ends up producing oligarchs – who become capitalists in a different variant. Consequently, both capitalism and socialism do not address the issue of inequality satisfactorily. This is also because both late capitalism and socialism tend to read life as essentially materialistic, bracketing it from the control of God. In the end, both regimes either suppress and/or allow anger to usually degenerate into destruction. Capitalists tend to be highly intolerant of the anger of the poor and usually use the state to suppress the poor. Similarly, socialists tend to be intolerant of the rich and usually sacralise the state to perpetuate violence and stifle freedom – including religious freedom as is the case in China.

The above complex and arbitrary deployment of violence in both capitalist and socialist regimes lead to the second reason why the researcher appeals to Islam. Islam, as a religion has an important philosophy of life with God as the ultimate ruler over the destiny of individuals. That Islam affirms God's sovereignty results in Islamic philosophy of anger as a continuing story, rather than the philosophies of capitalism and socialism

as systems. Because Islam's philosophy of anger is a story, it takes into consideration individuals' peculiar challenges, without dismissing them to trigger further anger. This is certainly in contrast to philosophy as a system where individual stories are hardly listened to or reduced to a mono-narrative or metanarrative. As a philosophy in a story, Islamic texts are both literal and interpretative, depending on context. For this reason, Islamic philosophy allows for flexibility and is amenable to dealing with contemporary challenges, so long as it does not condone injustice to the centrality of the oneness of Allah. Similarly, interpretations are not necessarily timeless and ahistorical in their applicability. This chimes with Ali Mazrui's observation that whereas the Qur'an is infallible, the interpreters of the Qur'an are fallible (Mazrui, 2004). It is partly reinforcing Ali Shariati's observation that religious language is symbolic and must be interpreted (Shari'ati, 2015).

Given that Islamic philosophy largely emphasises God's absolute control over the universe, the religion allows for individuals to rest on the multidimensionality of injustice. Several injunctions from the Qur'an extol the virtue of justice, by highlighting the prevalence of injustice as the reason for societies. "And (as for) these towns, We destroyed them when they acted unjustly and We have appointed a time their destruction" (Qur'an 18:59). Since one of the goals of Islam is collective justice, it commands all its adherents to implement justice and equality fully among them and others regardless of titles or personal considerations. It also prohibits oppression and deprives any group of people of their rights (Lari, 1990, p. 130).

But Islam is not alone in its claims to justice. The virtue of justice has received critical attention among scholars for centuries. But the world is still plagued with the multidimensionality of injustice, especially as the world sacralises individualism as a result of communalism. With individualism described differently by Robert N. Bellah as individual expressionism and Charles Taylor's authentic age, since the 1960s, self-centeredness has undermined justice as fellow-feeling. Consequently, one of the contemporary scholars who have taken the idea of justice as a communal feeling is Alasdair MacIntyre. In his book, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* he destabilised the binaries between tradition and modernity that tend to discard "traditional" that reinforces justice from an individualistic perspective. McIntyre then framed justice alongside communalism – leading to his framing of justice as the practice of complete virtue toward others – making justice more communally-centred, than libertarian individually-centred (MacIntyre, 1988).

Nevertheless, in a world of technological advancement, science and technology produce their own antinomies – the more people prosper, the less concern they show towards their neighbour, while technology induces individualism. With all these, the

unfairness and the stark reality of imperfection and injustice have become the basis for continuing anger – morphing into globalised tension. As I have mentioned above, the various philosophies as a system have failed to honour their promise of minimising injustice. For this reason, I deploy the Islamic idea of *Wasatiyyah* as the key to restructuring and restoring social and ontological order to the world. While total eradication of the world's existential imperfection is impossible, for which reason some materialistic logic may continue to fun the ideas of violent revolution, Islam's teaching of patience as an important virtue must constitute the foundation of assuring the youth of Maamobi and the Zongos to seek a moderate response to the challenges they find themselves in. In other words, whereas Muslim youth should not acquiesce to violence, their moral outrage against injustice is obvious that they are unwilling to submit to an unjust regime. But they must strive for a balance between injustice and anger – as Islam teaches moderation in all things.

The researcher ends this section by reiterating the criticality of moderation, which is discussed in the Islamic theological sense as wasatiyyah. On this concept, the researcher leans on the wisdom of. Kamali's work, *The Qur'anic principle of Wasatiyyah*. In the book, he argued that moderation (*Wasatiyyah*) is "primarily a moral virtue of relevance not only to the personal conduct of individuals but also to the integrity and self-image of communities and nations" (Kamali, 2015). He also discussed the relevance of moderation in promoting social harmony and equilibrium in personal affairs. The issue of moderation is essentially Islamic, based on the Qur'anic injunction, "And thus We have willed you to be a community of the middle way, that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you…" (Qur'an 2:143).

Consequently, leaning on the above, I argue that Muslim youth and the general youth of Ghana should see every challenge as potentially a source of opportunity for them to deploy their moral outrage productively. That the youth tend to be discontent with the imperfections they see around signals their readiness not to be part of any regime of corruption. But given that "two mistakes never make right", they should strive for the middle ground (moderation) by seeing virtue in the imperfection – which is an invitation for them to contribute to human flourishing by executing their moral outrage through hard work and faithfulness in God.

CONCLUSION

In the discussion, the researcher has discussed the sociohistorical context of anger in the Zongos in Accra, focusing on Maamobi. More importantly, the researcher has argued that both capitalism and socialism have done very little to answer the issue of existential inequalities. For this reason, the researcher finds Islam's theology of moderation imperative. The paper articulates the fact that scholars need to destabilise binaries between "tradition" and "modern", "religion" and "politics", "private" and "public", all largely based on simplistic framing of time as linear social progression to incorporate religion as an important resource in answering human existential challenges, particularly the threats of both nuclear and biological wars. But largely, the paper argues that inequality, usually structured in the hierarchical ordering of society is a complex issue that reducing history to simply materialistic terms may hardly address.

While it is true that there is so much injustice in the world, it is equally true no particular philosophical regime has been able to explain or found its expression in materially undoing existential inequalities. This implies that socialism and capitalism, as philosophies in a system, may hardly address the issues of inequality that breeds anger. As philosophical systems, both socialism and capitalism tend to be highly intolerant of dissenting views and practices such that a dilemma is often created. In the case of socialism, the centralisation of the means of production in the chest of an imagined state rather results in the creation of oligarchs. Similarly, in the case of capitalism, the freedom that is granted to individuals to create and accumulate wealth rather leaves wealth in a hand of a few individuals who simply lack the ethics of redistribution. Either way, inequality remains. It is this quandary that the researcher sees *Wasatiyyah* as an important intervention in making sense of the world's existential inequality. *Wasatiyyah* could be read as a philosophy in a story, as opposed to philosophy in a system. The logic of this is that it allows for individuals to adapt the logic of *Wasatiyyah* to meet their needs, based on their lived social conditions.

Even so, it has not been easy for the clergy to preach *Wasatiyyah* because possibly because it needs critical thinking to create a balance between patience and passive acceptance of injustice. This researcher holds the view that because of the complex integration of the concept *Wasatiyyah* into the lived realities of different people around the world, the concept needs to be re-imagined to keep the world of wars afloat in a sense of relative peace.

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