

(Re)Experiencing Christian-Muslim Coexistence: A Case Study in a Fractured Urban Setting in Lahore

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Abstract—The paper aims to highlight the Christian-Muslim coexistence in a fractured urban setting next to an elitist urban community divided by a prolonged wall forming an ‘edge’ in Lahore. The objectives to achieve the aim were: (1) to explore ‘multifaith urbanism’ and its historical context and (2) to experience the space through illustrations and placemaking. To achieve the exploration a separate research methodology is used. A systematic literature review would assess all accessible research related to Christian-Muslim coexistence and urban fractured spaces. This would be followed by experiential studies of space to present the character of space. The research provides evidence of the urban social existence of Christian and Muslims at a community level and simultaneously shows urban alienation at a district level. Due to the chosen research method, the research results may lack generalizability to other urban spaces facing similar issues hence researchers are encouraged to test the proposed outcomes further. The research fulfils the need to study and understand a multifaith urban space trying to sustain livelihood facing an elongated wall.

Keywords— Hierarchy, multifaith urban space, street design, urban planning.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE topic of Christian-Muslim coexistence emanates from instances in society when we often meet people with different religions. The differences in religions could include people of different faiths or none, or people of different religious denominations (Islamic sects, Christian denominations). The differences an individual has with people of other religions are serious and important considering urbanism. Urbanism can be defined as the study of how inhabitants of a town or a city interact with the built environment. The paper first discusses instances of Christian-Muslim coexistence in urban settings identified through literature and then presents a case study showing current evidence.

Section II describes the research methodology that was used. In Section III, a systematic literature review is conducted with all included studies. In Section IV, a colony in Lahore, Pakistan is introduced for trying to understand a multifaith urban space edged by an elongated brick wall. Section V presents conclusions and topics of potential further research.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methods used to fulfil the aim of the paper are a systematic literature review and a case study. This section discusses the method used for collecting and

analyzing existing literature. A systematic literature review (SLR) assesses all accessible research related to the topic of research [1]. There are generally three phases of a SLR: planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting the review. A SLR involves determining ‘search strings’ related to the topic of research aimed to detect maximum relevant literature. Search strings identified for the current research are as follows:

- Christian-Muslim coexistence in an urban setting
- experiencing Christian-Muslim unity
- multifaith urban space
- fractured urban settings in the Global South

The next step involves the identification of repositories for gathering maximum literature. The databases used for gathering studies include JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and Sustainable Organization Library.

The search strings are kept constant when searching on these databases. 8,106 studies were recorded from three repositories.

The next step is the deletion of duplicates from the collected literature due to common words in the search strings.

The next step is screening through keywords. For screening some keywords identified from other fields are medicine, bone, drug, disease, tissue, etc. After screening, 6,244 studies were left.

The next step involves the scanning of all studies by title and abstract. After this step, 2,974 studies were left. After scanning, an inclusion and exclusion criteria are established.

A. Inclusion Criteria

- The research papers that are accessible online.
- The papers that are published in English are the only ones that are considered.
- Research papers involving ideas related to urban hierarchy, multifaith urban space, and street design.

B. Exclusion Criteria

- The research papers from other fields such as business, commerce, manufacturing, mathematics, cell biology, gene therapy, and biomedical sciences.

After identification, screening, and eligibility, a total of 10 studies were included in the systematic literature review. The above-mentioned steps can be seen below (Fig. 1).

In relation to the case study, I was introduced to the colony through a design studio (Walls as Architecture) in my undergraduate studies, at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan. The studio involved the study

of how a wall becomes a boundary (Fig. 2) and the different uses of walls (Fig. 3). Quite early in the design studio, the wall was defined as a continuous vertical brick or stone structure that encloses or divides an area of land. It was also defined that walls are boundaries at the micro-level, whereas boundaries are walls in their material and existential sense. Whenever a wall functions upon subjects other than just the division of space and starts operating upon hierarchal levels such as the divisions of classes, division of culture, and division of societal structure. In these instances, a wall transforms into a boundary, which is usually an edge [2] at an urban level and can also be categorized due to territorial marking.

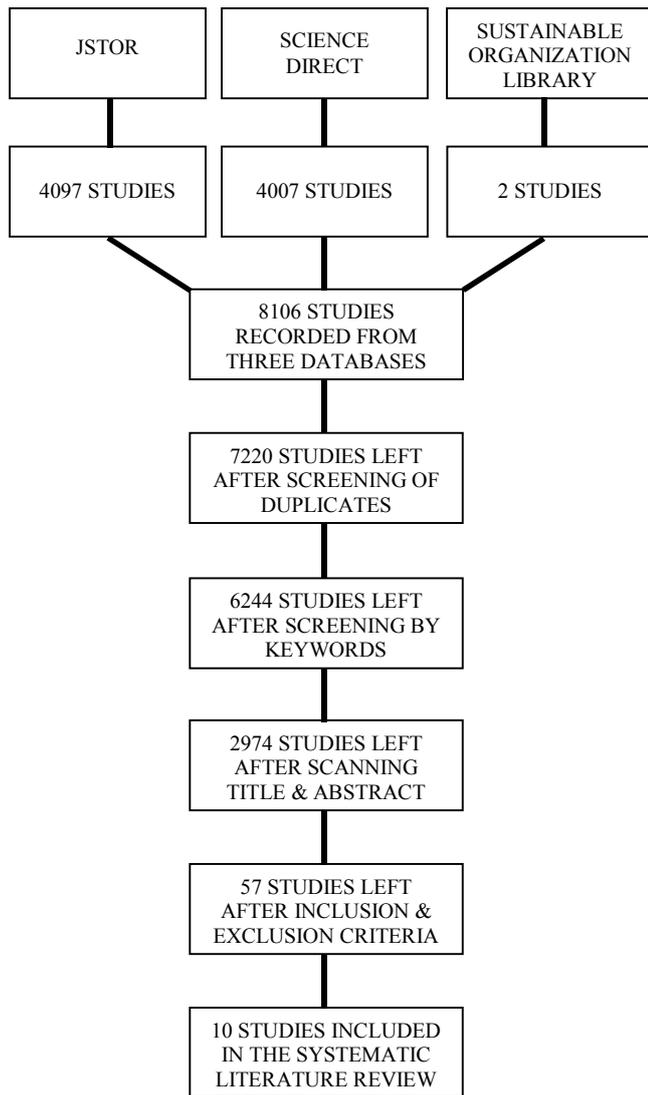


Fig. 1 SLR diagram for the topic of research

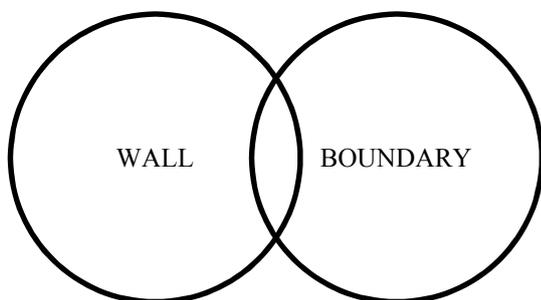


Fig. 2 Overlapping between a wall and a boundary

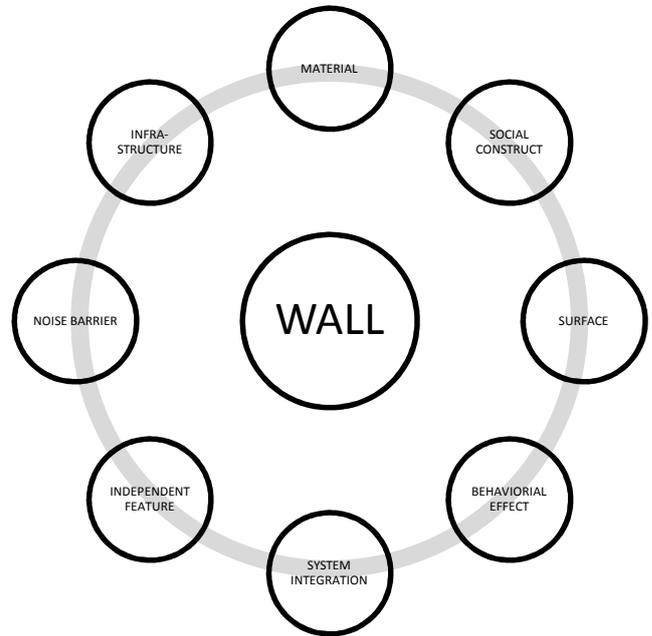


Fig. 3 Different uses of a wall

III. SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

For trying to understand Christian-Muslim coexistence in an urban setting, it is beneficial to understand Christianity's or Islam's setting in the history of religions. A few researchers discuss Islamic setting in a study of comparative religion [3]. The discussion is needed as an attempt to justify the intellectual, social, political, and spiritual errors perpetuated both by Muslims and non-Muslims [3]. The authors discussed linkages between Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and identified that these religions share the symbolism of light.

For analyzing in more detail, it is necessary to contextualize this research. There are several areas and regions in the world that can add a context and explain interfaith relations such as the Philippines [4]. A researcher from Silliman University explored Christian-Muslim, Roman Catholic-Protestant, Anglican-Independent Catholic, and inter-Protestant relations [4]. The author presents the tensions between Christians and Muslims in the Philippines by reviewing history. Islam was introduced in the Philippine islands almost 200 years before Christianity was. Arab traders and adventurers and Malayan and Indonesian missionaries came to the Sulu Archipelago in the 14th century and spread Islam. Islam started to spread on the southern coast of Mindanao and about a century later Muslims began to convert central and northern islanders. In today's time, a growing consciousness of religious unity among Muslim Filipinos is developing a positive effect on other minorities [4]. The author declares that Christian Filipinos should learn to respect the religion and culture of

Muslim Filipinos. On the other hand, Muslim Filipinos should realize that they can be loyal to their religion, and still be full participating citizens of the Philippines [4].

Another context in the Global South is of the Islamization in Sudan [5]. The research aimed to examine the Islamization trend as a complex character by discussing the historical roots of Islamization in the northern regions and associated fears in the southern region. Previous journalistic accounts give evidence of racial and religious differences focused on Arab versus African, or Muslim versus Christian. A deeper examination of northern and southern patterns suggest variation in economic opportunity and development. In relation to this variation, the author identifies the basis of the national identity of Sudan – Islam, and Arab culture founded in African soil and traditions [5].

The perception and image that inhabitants develop in an urban setting regarding any religion are based on the lens they are using for viewing religion [6]. The author presents the idea that the public image of European Muslims is directly dependent on whether Europeans view Islam as a cultural phenomenon or a political phenomenon. Europeans can view Islam either as a threat to western values making it difficult for them to cooperate with Muslim migrants or they can view Islam as a political movement against the authoritarian regimes making it more likely for Muslims to merge in a Western society without losing their cultural values [6].

The process of contextualization is essential in relation to understanding religious diversity in a region [7]. Ethiopia can be viewed as an amalgamation of several different faiths for many centuries unlike other African countries [7]. The author highlights that the most crucial incident was of first migration in the 7th century when a group of Muslims fled from Mecca to the Christianized Empire of Axum in Ethiopia [7]. In that period, Ethiopia used to have a tolerant and peaceful reputation with respect to religious righteousness. This reputation later changed as the Ethiopian Empire was based on Orthodox Christianity and several Ethiopian rulers regarded Ethiopia as ‘an island of Christianity in an ocean of Muslims.’ Ethiopia is still perceived in the western world as a Christian country although Muslims constitute around half of its population and are not a minority. The imageability of a region/country established by its rulers is critical in how other countries perceive it and its urban space [7].

To understand multifaith urbanism it is necessary to understand the significant impact of one religion over an existing religion [8]. An important context is Islam’s increasing presence in the predominantly Christian nation of Solomon Islands. The author presents how a few well-educated Islanders were interested in Islam’s elegant monotheism and qualities such as unity in the 1980s and the 1990s. A sharp increase in the number of Muslim converts was observed due to the violent civil conflict (1998-2003). The newly converted Muslims seem to be occupied with the problem of sin and blamed Christianity for customary rules and believed that Islam provided a set of clear moral rules of living [8]. Solomon Islander Christians and Muslims together seek moral and spiritual solutions to social and political problems [8]. Although there is some congruence between both groups however it is essential to highlight that

Islam in the Solomon Islands is very complex. Converts are from different provinces, different socioeconomic backgrounds, and different denominational traditions [8]. This variation has created differences in how the new Muslim converts now see Islam and Christianity. The educated and urbanized Muslim converts saw Islam as a religion similar to Christianity but more universal and more monotheistic. The less privileged Muslim converts tended to reject modern Protestant freedom and blamed Christianity’s emphasis on forgiveness for people disregarding God-given moral laws [8].

A recent study shows that urbanism is a focus in discussions regarding diversity, spatial dimensions of ‘living together’, and multicultural spaces [9]. Multifaith urbanism is explored through the lens of two London boroughs – Hackney and Tower Hamlets in East London. London is a cosmopolitan city, and it is argued that segregation in London is not so strong [9]. The study shows that Tower Hamlets is more segregated and polarized (wealth-based) whereas Hackney presents diversity with micro-enclaves. Several topics are presented by the author that relate to ethnocultural relations in urban neighborhoods. Conclusively the research defined segregation in deprived areas creates several problems especially in terms of local relations, reduced social mobility, and lesser opportunities [9].

Segregation causes reduced social mobility and lesser opportunities; hence it is necessary to look into other regions or contexts which might prove to be a role model for bridging the gap between the two religions and cultures [10]. In a diverse urban setting, misperception among both Muslims and Christians can lead to confrontational rhetoric. The research highlights how the West needs to rethink the traditional views of Islam and recognize that there are different brands of it. Turkey needs to be studied as a model of a European state for bridging the gap between the two religions and cultures as it combines modern capitalism and secular democracy with a moderate brand of Islam. It allows all groups to enter the parliament to voice their views freely and challenge the republican order [10]. Urban areas and contexts around the world should benefit from Turkey’s bridging role between Christianity and Islam.

In relation to modern urbanism and diversity, it is necessary to conclude the review by discussing how all three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) have more commonalities than differences [11]. All three religions leave the reality of God to faith. All three religions have sacred literature that attests incidents of direct divine involvement in human affairs that occurred in the past. Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all obligated to respond to God’s will. All three of them cannot evade responsibilities to themselves, to mankind, and the world. Like all other religions, Christianity and Islam have moral imperatives for a lifestyle which are the Ten Commandments and the Five Pillars of Islam respectively [12]. The paths of Abrahamic religions are very different, but their destination is One. These similarities are vital for a better dialogue to be established between different groups in an urban setting.

The next section presents a case study highlighting Christian-Muslim coexistence in a fractured urban setting next to an elitist urban community divided by a prolonged

wall forming an ‘edge’ in Lahore, Pakistan. For understanding the character of the space and the impact of the elongated wall, the case study was examined experientially through visual studies.

IV. AL NOOR COLONY, LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Driving 10 kilometers southeast from the center point in Lahore, one starts to feel an uneasiness in the urban fabric of the city. As soon as you turn left from Walton Road towards Khayaban-e-Iqbal after passing the northern side of the Packages Mall, you witness a fracture in the urban setting. On one side of the six-lane road, there are evenly spaced commercial properties thriving on business. On the other side, a struggling Christian-Muslim colony can be observed which has been segregated from the rest of the community by a brick wall (Fig. 4).

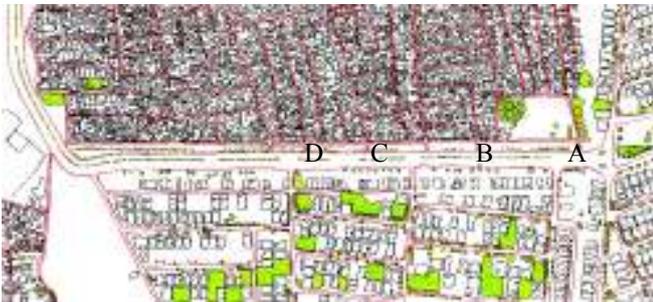


Fig. 4 Detailed mapping of Al Noor Colony, Lahore

While visiting and observing the space, it is seen that dark alleyways lead to the brick wall. The brick wall has marginalized the Christian-Muslim community from the rest of the city. Due to its presence, there are limited points of entry and exit to the rest of the city. Even with such limitations, a person does not feel insecure walking in the street between the building line and the brick wall. A critical observation is that the inhabitants of multiple faiths are not only living harmoniously together but due to their diverse occupations, they have utilized the presence of the wall in various ways.

For trying to understand the character of the space and the impact of the brick wall, the case study was analyzed experientially through visual studies. When entering the colony from point A (Fig. 4), the wall feels like a high parapet, offering minimal visual connection to the outside world. At the entrance of the colony, there are no buildings present, but a communal graveyard. Like most of the spatial nuances at Al Noor Colony, the communal graveyard also gives evidence of Christian-Muslim coexistence (Fig. 5).

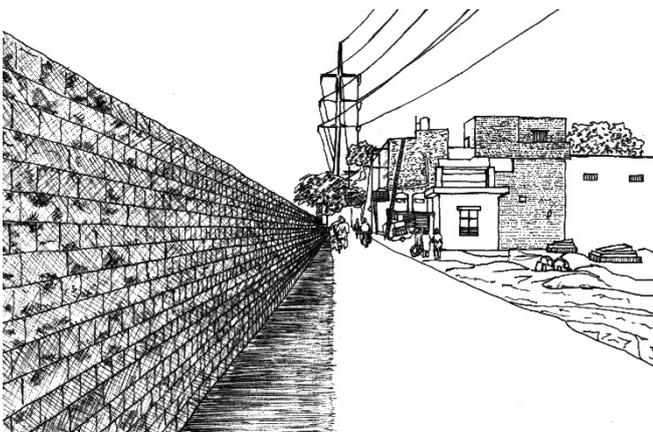
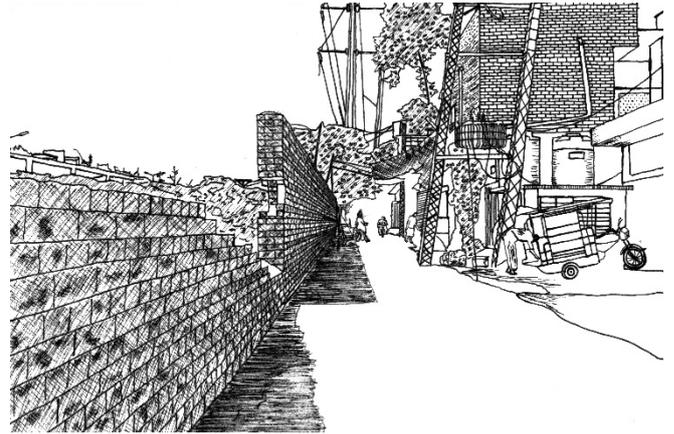


Fig. 5 Brick wall facing the communal graveyard

Walking past the communal graveyard, a commercial area can be seen. It is fascinating to see the changing character of the wall as the inhabitants of the colony have broken parts of it for their access. At this point (Point B, Fig. 4), the wall feels like an access point for the ease of traders and vendors living and selling goods at Al Noor Colony (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6 Broken brick wall providing access to community

Moving along the commercial area, instances of artistry and craftsmanship can be observed (Point C, Fig. 4). An



individual can feel the desire of people to create, innovate, and recreate even in such stark conditions. Carpenters and craftsmen are utilizing the brick wall as a backdrop for presenting their designed furniture (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7 Brick wall being a backdrop for carpenters

The end of the commercial area marks the beginning of the residential area at Al Noor Colony, Lahore (Point D, Fig. 4). It is the same street, yet the experience suddenly changes when moving from one zone to the other. The richness and creative inventiveness of the carpenters in the commercial area, followed by the melancholic dark alleys in the residential area generate the whole experience of Al Noor Colony. In the residential area, religious symbols are marked on architectural features such as metal doors. These religious symbols include the Christian Cross. Apart from religious symbolism, features of territorial marking are also observed when walking into the residential area. An example includes a series of metal posts mounted to the brick wall braced with barbed wires depleting any form of

physical accessibility (Fig. 8).

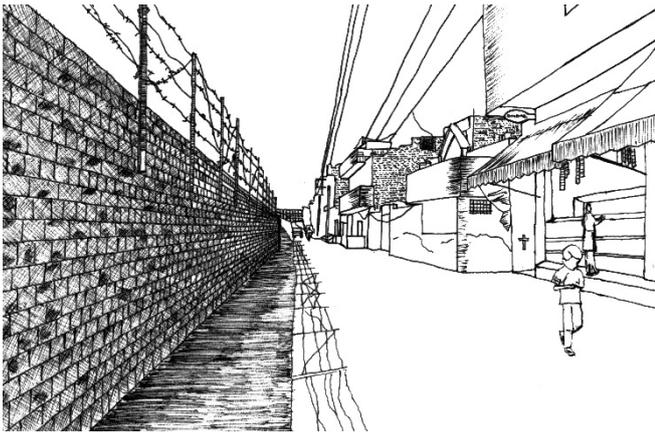


Fig. 8 Brick wall mounted with barbed wires

Moving past the area with the barbed wire mounted brick wall, there are a few other instances that can be observed in which Christians and Muslims seem to be living harmoniously. A few bricks are taken out from other parts of the wall and stacked in a staircase-like formation to provide access to the inhabitants of the colony (Fig. 9). Walking further, some scarce plantation can be observed growing right next to the wall creating small incremental changes in views from the residential buildings across the street (Fig. 10).

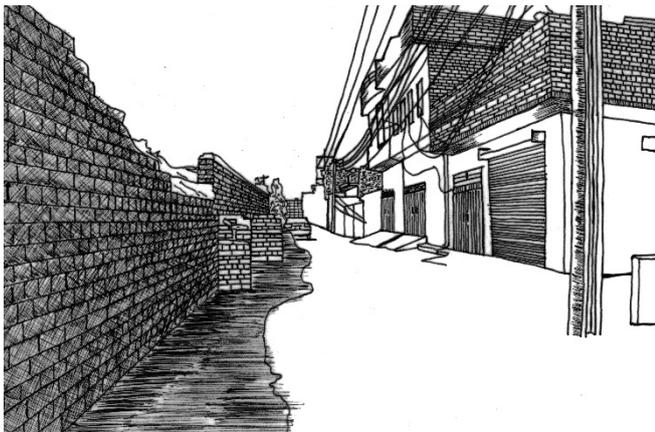


Fig. 9 Stack of bricks providing access to the other side

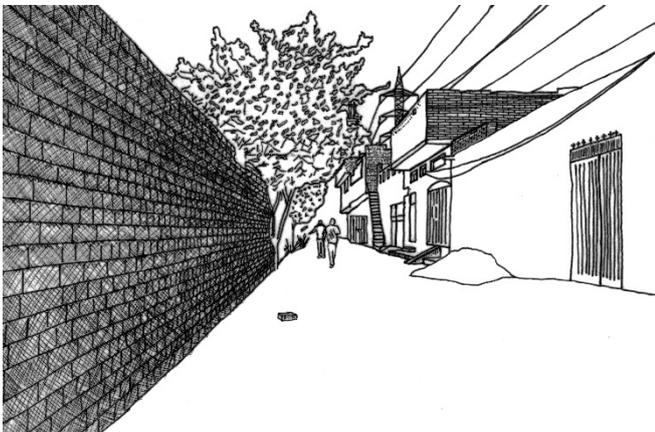


Fig. 10 Scarce plantation emanating from the brick wall

The case study of Al Noor Colony in Lahore, Pakistan gives evidence regarding the coexistence of Christian-

Muslim coexistence in a fractured urban setting next to an elitist urban community divided by a brick wall forming an 'edge' in the city. Visual studies have been quite beneficial in identifying various characteristics of the multifaith community. Visual studies also helped in understanding the impact of the elongated brick wall on the community.

The next section presents conclusions and the topics that need to be studied for potential further research related to multifaith urbanism.

V. CONCLUSION

The paper aimed to highlight the Christian-Muslim coexistence in a fractured urban setting next to an elitist urban community divided by a prolonged wall forming an 'edge' in Lahore. The objectives to achieve the aim were: (1) to explore 'multifaith urbanism' and its historical context and (2) to experience the space through illustrations and placemaking. A systematic literature review and a case study were conducted to achieve the aim and objectives. The systematic literature review highlighted instances of Christian-Muslim coexistence in urban settings around the world based on the research conducted since 1969. The review identified how all three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) share several characteristics. The shared characteristics were discussed using many contexts such as the Philippines. The research presents evidence of how Christian and Muslim Filipinos can coexist while still being full participating citizens of their country. Another explored context includes Sudan. It has been evidenced that previous research presented racial and religious differences focused on Arab versus African or Muslim versus Christian about the country. Research about Ethiopia shows how the imageability of a country created by its rulers governs how other countries perceive its urban space. The review presented the Solomon Islands as an example of multifaith urbanism to understand the impact of one religion over an existing religion. The systematic literature review also identified how the West needs to view Islam as a cultural phenomenon rather than a political phenomenon. Turkey has been presented as a model to understand how a European state is trying to bridge the gap between the two religions and cultures. The research highlights a case study as an example of Christian-Muslim coexistence in a fractured urban setting edged by an elongated brick wall. Al Noor Colony gives evidence that even with stark conditions there is still peace among people of multiple religions. The case study also shows how the character of an urban edge can be analyzed through visual studies. The research can be expanded by exploring other combinations of Abrahamic religions such as Jewish-Muslim and Jewish-Christian coexistence in urban settings. There were several countries identified by the systematic literature review. Potential further research could include an exploration of their fractured urban settings.

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