

THE MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS SPACE FOR A BETTER NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's public space has become a hotbed for vigorous religious activities by adherents of Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religion. While public spaces are areas that are collectively owned and accessible to individuals and groups, religious spaces are public spaces that are appropriated for religious purposes. The conversion of public space into religious space enables religious groups to promote their peculiar identities to attract followership. However, the conduct of religious activities in the public arena always triggers conflict with other contending users including religious adherents themselves. Studies exist on the legal, political, environmental, and inter-religious harmony implications of religious use of public space. However, little or no study is available on the connection between the management of religious space and the building of a better country. The paper adopted a qualitative research method that drew data from both primary and secondary sources and used Preventive Diplomacy as a theoretical framework. The study unveils strategies on how to manage religious space for a better Nigeria including conscious efforts by religious bodies to avoid interference with the rights of people while conducting their activities; tolerance by religious groups; government regulation of religious activities; intervention by landlord associations; the role of traditional institutions; the role of umbrella religious organisations; religious groups obtaining permission before using public space for religious activity; litigation; use of acoustic equipment in religious houses; and use of ICT for worship. The study concludes that the implementation of these strategies will result in a peaceful and harmonious religious space needed to create a better Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigeria, Public Space, Religious Space, Management, and Conflict.

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Introduction

Religion, which in this paper is adopted to mean “the worship of higher powers”¹ are a powerful force in societies around the world and in the lives of people everywhere. The definition infers that religion involves an element of belief as no one will worship higher powers unless he believes that such powers exist. The development of religion is as old as when human beings began to seek ways to explain the workings of the forces of nature and the fact of their existence. Religion is not only a powerful force in the lives of people but also a strong foundation for many societies. Therefore, religion is a belief in the existence of God which makes it sacred. In light of this, Kimball² asserts that religion often shares sacred stories, sacred spaces, and sacred people.

According to Fleming and O’Hara³, one of the elements of religion is that faith people often congregate to worship and celebrate in sacred buildings and places. In other words, sacred place as a major component of religion requires that religious activities should be conducted in places regarded as sacred by religious adherents. Such places include churches, mosques, temples, and shrines. The question is what constitutes a sacred place? In answer to this inquiry, Chris Park submit in Gbadegesin,⁴ that sacred space is one of the prominent geographical dimensions of religious expression with most religions designating certain places as sacred which encourages adherents to always visit such places. It is as a result of this that

Gbadegesin⁵ sees that Christians and Muslims in Nigeria are constantly competing to forge sacred spaces for themselves.

To Kong, “a sacred place is a dwelling of god(s) and a place in which one experiences god’s presence”⁶. Recognised and purposely built places are sacred centres for religious adherents based on their experiences with these places. Kong explains four aspects of these experiences. The first explores peoples’ conception of what is “sacred” and “sacred place”. While the second analyses adherents’ religious experience, the third highlights the importance of the physical setting of the sacred place. The code of behaviour that people ritually observe in sacred places is the fourth experience. It is evident from the foregoing that sacred space is very important to religious practitioners. Therefore, sacred places are places where people experience God’s presence (a form of divine manifestation) which can be natural places such as a grove, mountain, or spring, or built forms such as mosques and churches. This idea is similar to what Lawuyi conceptualised as a “space of power” which could be a (secular) space where power is ascribed to by the patrons and the power determines the aesthetic and ideological element of the space.⁷ In essence, a space of power has an allure and awe due to either its physical characteristics or spiritual endowment.

The import of this explanation on sacredness is to emphasise that religious activity being a sacred activity ought to be conducted in sacred locations and not in secular places. However, this is not true in reality because it is observed that religious groups profusely make use of public or secular spaces

for different forms of religious activity or programme. According to Germain⁸, most religious practices entail some collective rituals that spill over the boundaries of private space into the public space such as markets, streets, parks, schools, stadia, etc. This is due to the understanding that religion is both an individual and social activity, which requires sharing with others or practising within a community⁹. Thus, instead of confining themselves to the private realm and supervising individual piety, all three major religious groups (i.e. Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religion) in Nigeria have been manifesting remarkably in the public arena. They have been actively involved in using public spaces for their activities. Religious groups convert public spaces to religious spaces and this can be described as domination or occupation of spaces that are not originally designed for such use. Religious groups allow their activities to transcend the confines of their private space into public space.

Literarily, a religious programme consists of actions, behaviour, process, and attempt that is religiously laced, to worship God, performing some obligations towards him, humanity, and the natural environment. According to Ayantayo¹⁰, there are two major types of religious programmes practised by the three major religions in Nigeria. The first is classified as institutional programmes which are programmes that are recognised and stated in the calendars of the religious groups such as festivals for traditional religions, Easter and Christmas for Christianity, and a five-time daily prayer, the *Eid al-Fitre*, and *Eid al-Adha* for the Muslims. The second category is the programmes “designed to meet some exigencies

of times and seasons in the religious life of religious followers, leaders, and the nation” Ayantayo¹¹. In general, religious programmes are meant to take care of doctrinal and liturgical activities which include prayer, fellowshiping, devotion, worshipping, festival, fasting, rituals, etc. It is instructive to note that many of these activities are performed in the public space which is not established primarily for them.

Public space is conceptualised as areas that are collectively owned and accessible to all persons and groups. Religious space is considered in this study to mean the appropriation of public space for religious activities. In this context, there are two broad categories of religious space: physical or material and aerial spaces which are often saturated with religious activities even though they are not originally designated to function for such use. Concerning material space, Adeboye¹² identifies two types of appropriation by Christian Pentecostal groups in Nigeria, which are: partial appropriation and radical appropriation. The former has to do with sites that are used for religious activity temporarily and include stadia, public squares, racecourses, streets, and other large or small spaces. Radical appropriation refers to the appropriation of unconventional sites such as cinema halls, hotel halls, multi-purpose halls, and other leisure zones possessed either through outright purchase or hire. To a very large extent, Adeboye’s explication also goes for other religions such as Islam. Aerial space has to do with the atmosphere and sound waves that move through the air or atmosphere as far as the sound can go Ojo¹³.

Studies exist on the constitutional/legal, environmental, political, and inter-religious harmony implications of the conversion of secular space to religious space. Scholars who examined the legal implications of religious use of space include Bhagwati¹⁴, Mazur 2008¹⁵, and Rotrive.¹⁶ They hold that domination of public space with religious symbols and activities amounts to an infringement on the Constitution and emphasises their desirability or otherwise to people's right to freedom of religion. Writing on the environmental implications of religious activities in secular spaces, Ayantayo¹⁷, Mepaiyeda¹⁸, and Abbink¹⁹ conclude that the phenomenon negatively affects the environment through noise pollution generated by religious centres with the use of loudspeakers. In addition, visual pollution occurs in the environment through the indiscriminate display of religious billboards, banners, and handbills²⁰. Existing studies on the interface between religion and politics are not new and many scholars such as Usman²¹ and Kukah²² have concluded that the incursion of religion into the public domain has resulted in the politicisation of religion, making religion an instrument for political manipulation. Through an empirical study, Ojo²³ examined how, why, and effects of religious use of public space in a multi-religious milieu and found that the phenomenon promotes negative inter-religious harmony among adherents of Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religion.

It is apparent from the foregoing that religious space has been studied from the perspectives of constitutionality, environment, and political and religious harmony. However, less attention has been devoted to the management of religious space which

if properly done can facilitate a better society. This is because as asserted by Odumuyiwa²⁴, no society is devoid of religion and religious activities and this includes even the atheistic ones. Therefore, according to Max Muller, religion influences the moral character of man, religion can be seen as a moral tonic that can assist in building a well-ordered society²⁵. A well-ordered and peaceful society is a *sine qua non* for development. This is the justification for this paper. By a better society, we mean development or progress which is considered to be a process and not an end in itself. In other words, this paper sees development as a continuous process whereby the current state is adjudged to be better than before. It is creating an enabling environment that would make sustainable development possible as no society can develop and prosper socially, economically, scientifically, politically, and technologically under a situation of religious strife and chaos.

Nigeria has been experiencing religious conflicts resulting in colossal loss of lives and property. Many factors, including religious use of public space, are responsible for this. Albert²⁶, Ojo²⁷ confirms that the transmutation of secular space into religious space engenders inter-religious conflict. Hence, there is a need to explore ways by which religious space could be managed for a better Nigeria. This is important because religion is a great institution in Nigeria with large followership whose religious behaviour “could affect the country’s social, political, and technological spaces positively or negatively as the case may be”²⁸. The paper limits the scope to the three major religions of Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religion (AIR). There are many variants of AIR in Nigeria, but

Egúngún and *Oro* cults (common among the Yoruba tribe) are purposively selected because their activities are conducted in such a way that they make use of public space. Therefore, they represent all the other types of AIR in Nigeria that by the nature of their belief and practice, occupy public space. Consequently, the study will examine the ways these religious groups hijack public spaces and the factors responsible for the phenomenon and through that, arrive at how to manage the converted public spaces to religious space for a better Nigeria. For proper elucidation, this paper is discussed under the following themes: introduction, theoretical framework, research methodology, nature of religious space, factors responsible for the emergence of religious space, management of religious space, and conclusion.

Theoretical framework

This study is hinged on the Theory of Preventive Diplomacy to facilitate a proper understanding of the discourse. The theory was developed by Boutros-Ghali, former United Nations Secretary-General in his seminal work, *Agenda for Peace*²⁹. The proposal was in response to the quest of the United Nations Security Council on how to make the international organisation more effective at the end of the Cold War in 1990. The main thrust of Preventive Diplomacy as a theory advocates taking actions to prevent disputes from arising between parties to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur. Preventive Diplomacy is a conflict management strategy that aims to create an atmosphere of peace as a precursor for development

through the prevention of disputes and prevention of escalation of disputes. Boutros-Ghali advocates that individuals and institutions may perform preventive diplomacy much as the United Nations and that confidence-building must be vital to managing conflicts.

The relevance of the theory to this study concerns its emphasis on the prevention of disputes. This is in sync to manage religious space which is the main thrust of this paper. In the context of this paper, the management of religious space is devising or exploring ways by which conflict could be prevented when religious activities are held in the public space. The study assumes that Nigerians are hyper-religious and committed which makes them always appropriate public space for their use. The assumption has intellectual backing. In the view of John Mbiti, Nigerians and indeed Africans are religious in everything as rhetorically remarked:

Africans are notoriously religious and each person has a religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates all departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible to isolate it³⁰.

In the same way, Ayantayo³¹ asserts that religion manifests theoretically and practically in the social, economic, technological, business, and political cultures of Nigerians. Ogbu Kalu says that religion dominates the roots of cultural areas of Nigeria. Consequently, due to Nigerians' strong penchant for religion, all the major religious groups always contest public space and turn it into religious space and because it engenders conflicts, management of the space

should focus on how to prevent religious conflict. Therefore, Preventive Diplomacy is relevant to this study because it seeks to explain that preventive strategies are needed to manage religious space to enhance the peace and development of Nigeria. In other words, while religious space thrives in the country, the paper explores ways of managing it to prevent disputes from arising and when it arises, to prevent it from escalating into violent conflict among the adherents of the three major religious groups in Nigeria. In light of this, the paper strongly aligns with the view of Kofi Annan in his 2002 report on the prevention of armed conflict that religious groups are capable of preventing conflict. His words:

Religious organisations can play a role in preventing armed conflict because of the moral authority that they carry in many communities. Religious groups and leaders possess a culturally-based comparative advantage in conflict prevention and can help to emphasise the common humanity of all parties and mobilise non-violent alternative ways of expressing dissent before the outbreak of conflict.³²

Thus, it is believed that the management of religious space through the application of the tenets of the theory is a peacebuilding strategy to prevent sectarian conflict and thereby promote peace and harmony among religious groups. This would provide the ground for a better Nigeria.

Research methodology

The study is explorative and adopts the qualitative method of research. It adopted an explorative research design because the phenomenon is open to more extensive study as the strategies advanced for managing religious space cannot be said to be exhaustive. The study also involves a collection of extensive narrative data to gain insight into the phenomenon under consideration. To this end, primary data was obtained through oral interviews with 20 key informants who are mostly religious leaders of Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religion. They were purposively selected because of their deep insight into the issues of the investigation which borders on why, when, and how religious groups utilise public spaces as well as ways of managing religious space to avoid conflict. Furthermore, non-participant observation of the conduct of religious activities in public spaces was undertaken. Data was also obtained from secondary sources such as books, journal articles, unpublished materials, newspaper reports, and internet sources.

Nature of Religious Space

Religion is an important social institution in Nigeria and part of this importance is reflected in the spaces religious organisations occupy for their activities. In addition to the more traditional places of worship, they are fond of using public spaces too, for example, congregate for special festivities and prayers. Therefore, this section seeks to identify the ways by which public spaces are appropriated for religious activities and that describes the nature of religious space. Ojo identified three major ways by which religious space functions.

These are road blockage for religious activities, the erection of loudspeakers in places of worship, and the indiscriminate pasting of religious billboards, posters, and banners in public spaces.

Road blockage:

Religious groups seek to express themselves in the public domain by conducting some of their activities there. Muslims conduct their Friday and festival congregational prayers called *Jumat*, *Eid-Fitr*, and *Eid-Kabir* prayers respectively by occupying public roads. The Islamic faithful also engages public roads when they organise lecture presentation programmes such as *Thajud* which is an all-night event similar to Christian vigil prayer sessions in churches, *Malud* and *Dawah* programmes. While the former programme is conducted in celebration of the birth of Prophet Mohammed, the latter involves public preaching or propagation of Islamic beliefs to enlighten and invite people to the religion of Islam.

The Christian group contests public space by blocking roads in a slightly different way from the way Muslims do. While the Muslims block main roads for prayer, the Christians more often occupy road setbacks for the propagation of their faith. The street procession is another way by which some Christian organisations occupy roads while performing a religious obligation such as Palm Sunday and invitation for an upcoming crusade, retreat, or convention programme. It is observed that, while this mode of religious use of space does not prevent total vehicular movement, it does often engender traffic gridlock. Similar to this is the observation that traffic gridlocks mount in

places where a Christian event of great magnitudes, such as a crusade, is held due to a large number of attendees. While the roads may not be intentionally blocked because they are not directly being used for religious activity, it generates negative side effects for road users. However, sometimes Christians also literally block the public road for one programme or the other, similar to the way Muslims do.

As part of their religious obligation, Egungun masquerades, which is a form of African Indigenous Religion make public appearances that occur in the form of procession on the road. They occupy the public road in procession together with large followers and that obstructs the free flow of vehicular movement. Orò festival rite which is another variant of African Indigenous Religion takes over sovereignty of public roads in a more serious way than other religious groups. Although they do not block roads in observance of their rituals, their activity takes many people, most especially women, off the roads.

The resultant effect of road blockage for religious activities is obstruction of vehicular and pedestrian movements of people whose interests are negatively affected which provokes annoyance. The psychological deprivation of peoples' right to movement can stir negative reactions against the religious group using the space which portends danger for inter-religious harmony. For example, a devastating religious cum ethnic conflict occurred in Jos between Christians and Muslims who are mostly settlers because a Christian lady attempted to pass through a road where Muslims had gathered for their Friday congregational prayer. That behaviour provoked the anger of

the Muslims who reacted violently and pitted them against Christians who are mostly the indigenes.

Similarly in June 2012, there was a clash between some Muslim youths and the dreaded Egungun Oloolu masquerade in Ibadan. The Muslims were conducting a religious activity along a street that led to its blockage in the Popoyemoja area of Ibadan. The event coincided with the time Oloolu Masquerade undertook his annual outing and he and his large followers met the Muslims at the event place. A serious altercation ensued to the point that Oloolu was disrobed of his sacred costume which according to Yoruba belief, is a taboo. The fierce clash spread to other parts of the city including Idi-Arere and Beere among other areas and this caused much tension in the affected areas. In the same vein, a violent conflict occurred in Zaria in 2015 when the former Nigerian Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Tukur Yusuf Burutai, and his entourage were prevented from passing through the road blocked by members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria for their religious programme. These examples underscore the fact that, while a religious group could consider blocking roads for religious activity as exercising its right to religious freedom, the practice denies people their fundamental right to movement and is a veritable source of inter-religious disharmony.

Erection of loudspeakers in worship centres:

This has to do with aerial space which involves sound waves that move through the air or atmosphere as far as the sound can go. One major instrument that helps to amplify sound is the public address system erected in many religious houses. It is

observed that this aerial space contestation is wholly associated with Christian and Islamic groups whose churches and mosques are sited mostly in residential areas. African Indigenous Religions of Egungun and Oro extractions also have sacred spots, but they are often located in places far away from human habitation. Besides, unlike the two other groups who often congregate in their mosques and churches, the traditional religious adherents do not congregate as such and, when they do, their meeting is often without the use of loudspeakers mounted on their places of meeting. Thus religious groups, especially Christians and Muslims, fill religious space (aerial space) by deliberately mounting external loudspeakers in their worship centres. This confirms the findings of Ivo Strecker³³ that religious groups aggressively use loudspeakers to compete with each other over influence in the public space.

The use of loudspeakers in churches and mosques while performing some religious activities result in the disturbance of people through noise pollution. Noise pollution causes serious health hazards to people, provokes annoyance, undermines the security of the environment, and causes inter-religious conflict as a precursor to negative inter-religious harmony. For example, a High Court judgment was delivered against a church in Ogbomoso in 2000 because of the overbearing noise that its activities were generating to the annoyance and disturbance of the respondent and his wife which was also adversely affecting their health. The church building shared a common fence wall with the plaintiffs' apartment. The court ruled that the church building should cease to be used as a place of worship³⁴. A disharmony between Christians and

Muslim youth in the Onipepeye area of Ibadan occurred because Oyo State Government directed that a church should stop generating noise. The Christian youths then threatened to shut down all mosques in that area because they also accused them of noise pollution. There are many instances where the robbery was taking place in a residential area and victims could not get help from the neighbourhood because a church was holding an all-night prayer session characterised by deafening noise through the use of loudspeakers mounted on their worship centres.

This shows that noise from churches and mosques is very dangerous and the volume alarming as observed by Soni-Ehi over three decades ago:

Residents of big cities are increasingly going through the process of partial deafness. Their sensitive eardrums are daily being bombarded by a continuous barrage of environmental noise overflowing from ear-shattering drum-size speakers of markets, mosques, and churches.³⁵

Ayantayo identifies two factors that facilitate the occurrence of disturbing noise by churches and mosques. The first is the location of the religious houses most of which are in residential apartments in cities and towns. He claimed that there are no fewer than seven to ten churches and mosques cited in an average street in residential areas in Ibadan which is the biggest city in West Africa. The second factor is the timing of the religious programmes in churches and mosques. They hold mostly in the night from midnight till in the morning for Christians and Muslims, it is more common with them in the

early hours of the day and sometimes too, throughout the night like the Christians.

Pasting religious billboards, posters, and banners:

Another nature of religious space is its massive and indiscriminate occupation with advertisement instruments such as posters, banners, and billboards. Streets are filled with posters, banners, billboards bearing religious inscriptions, and in most cases, invitations to religious programmes. These instruments are common communication channels through which religious groups get across to others of the same faith or different beliefs. All the religious groups make use of these advertising instruments. The effect of the use of these instruments to promote a religious group is the defacement of public and private places which results in visual pollution. Visual pollution destroys the aesthetic beauty of cities and towns because it is observed that they are often indiscriminately and unregulated displayed. The implication is that it tends to instigate inter-religious crises. This can happen if, for example, Christian posters are pasted in a Muslim-dominated area or on a mosque or Muslim posters are pasted on the wall of the house of a person who is a Christian or on a church building. Instances, where religious posters are destroyed by the opposite religious faithful, abound.

Factors Responsible for the Creation of Religious Space

The nature of religious space in Nigeria indicates that it is active with religious activities. While the paper recognises that religious space contestation may lead to serious violence, it is

important to address factors responsible for it thereby recommending suggestions on how to prevent it which is the primary purpose of the study. Several factors are accountable for the creation of religious space. This includes the need for religious groups to fulfil religious obligations such as Christian evangelism, Muslim *da'wah*, and performance of traditional rituals such as Egúngún and Oro festivals, protection of religion against domination by others, the exercise of the constitutional right to worship in the public, and desire to create public awareness and enhance the identity of religious organisations.³⁶ Of all these causative factors, the promotion of the identity of religious bodies in the public space seems to be the foremost rationale for the massive creation of religious spaces in Nigeria Adebayo³⁷, Ogunbile³⁸, and Ojo³⁹.

However, as much as these predisposing factors for the creation of religious space are venerated and significant to religious groups, it negatively affects people in the society which makes them displeased with the way religious groups appropriate public spaces to promote their beliefs, values, and practices. Therefore, this paper argues that the performance of religious activities in the public space induces social tension and disputes among different religious adherents who are supposed to live in harmony despite their religious differences. This corroborates the assertion made by Huber⁴⁰ that serious research shows that religiosity does not necessarily decrease, but rather at least in certain circumstances, increases latent or manifest violence. The intense religiosity of religious groups in Nigeria, a multi-religious society, manifests in various forms of

religious activities in the public space which has negative implications for inter-religious peace and harmony.

The Management of Religious Space

The management of religious space is directed at strategies needed to prevent religious conflict whilst religious activities are being promoted in the public space. This aligns with the preventive diplomacy adopted for this study. Some of the management strategies will be illustrated using a term by Deborah Teasley. It is a psychology term known as Self-Regulation Theory (SLT). It means “a system of conscious personal management that helps us to control what we think, say and do”⁴¹. The term has four components. They are **standard** which refers to the quality or standard of desirable behaviour; **motivation** which has to do with enthusiasm to keep to the acceptable standard of behaviour; **monitoring** implies thoughts or actions that precede breaking a standard and lastly, **willpower** which refers to internal strength to control urges to break a standard behaviour. The theory suggests that a person or group should be able to control itself without external influence. It assumes that an organisation or group should have its activities controlled by the people involved in it rather than outside organisations or rules. The concept is applied in this study because it suggests to religious groups conduct their activities in the public space in such ways and manners that they do not incite the anger and displeasure of people capable of making the societal environment unbearable. One of the possible means of arousing emotional imbalance in people is by trampling on their fundamental rights such as free movement or a peaceful and quiet environment.

Therefore, a strategy is necessary to be instituted to prevent violent inter-religious conflict.

One such strategy is that religious bodies should conduct their activities in such ways that the rights of people to move and have a peaceful environment are not violated. For instance, a respondent who is a church founder said:

In my church, we don't generate disturbing noise during worship...I did not mount loudspeakers outside the church building and I try to regulate the noise knowing that the noise can have devastating effects on people or how people feel when disturbed by noise at night.⁴²

In line with Teasley's Self-regulation Theory, this is a deliberate act of self-regulation that is essential to manage religious space with the intent to prevent a disturbance of people with religious pollution which precipitates religious conflict. This strategy as exemplified by the respondent church leader confirms Alubo's position that "whether in the more traditional enclosures or open spaces, religious spaces are regulated by moral codes, including, depending on the type of religion and/or the denominations"⁴³. Moral code here is considered to mean socially right and acceptable behaviour. However, it is instructive to note that, the behaviour of the respondent is exemplary and uncommon with many religious elites, hence the need for enlightenment on self-regulation.

However, the other side of self-regulation which is expected of religious groups to promote religious harmony in the face of contestation for public space is religious tolerance. The first aspect of self-regulation has to do with religious groups

consciously controlling their public space activities to avoid violation of people's rights. On the other hand, the second aspect of self-regulation requires that members of different religious groups control their reactions towards other religious groups when they encounter their activities in public space. In this wise, it is expected that they tolerate one another to prevent religious conflict. Tolerance refers to the ability of each religious group to show understanding and bear with each other's differences in beliefs and practices. Therefore, an exhibition of tolerance by religious adherents towards opposite religious practices is a strategy recommended for managing religious space capable of ensuring a better Nigeria. Respondents from all the religious groups unanimously opined that religious tolerance is vital to managing religious space. However, to prevent religious strife, one of them added that tolerance should be complemented with other actions such as religious leaders should avoid preaching against other religions; government should encourage dialogue among religious leaders and youths before and not until there is a religious crisis; correct indoctrination of youths and children on religion; and religious leaders should understand the tenets of other religions⁴⁴.

Another model of managing religious space for a better Nigeria will be explained with the idea of social regulation. Social regulation refers to the restriction placed on the practice and profession of religion by non-state actors or institutions such as religious groups, associations, or a society's culture which determine the standard of desirable or acceptable behaviour in the public space. In this regard, the role that some non-state actors can play in managing religious space is examined.

Landlord Associations:

This is an association comprising house owners and tenants in an area or community for the security and development of the area. The establishment of the association is common in urban cities. The association is a non-state institution that can be effective in managing religious space by both preventing and resolving a conflict that arises through religious use of public space. There are clauses in the constitution of many landlord associations prohibiting churches and mosques from using loudspeakers at particular hours of the night. Through proper implementation of the rule, space is managed to prevent noise pollution and save people from its devastating effects and thereby promoting a better society. For example, Ifesowapo Landlord Association, Kute, Ibadan bans the use of loudspeakers by religious houses between 10.00 p.m. and 5.00 a.m.⁴⁵ The ban was informed due to the complaints by residents against excessive noise from religious houses at night.

Apart from such proactive steps to avert conflict, landlord associations can also be involved in managing religious space through the settlement of disputes. For example, when there was a crisis between C.A.C. Theological Seminary at Orita-Aperin, Oniyere, Ibada, and Muslims in their neighbourhood on street-to-street evangelism by the Christians, the matter was brought to the attention of Adesola Oniyere Landlords Association, Ibadan. The matter was amicably resolved by the association. This suggestion corroborates findings by Albert, et.al⁴⁶ that landlord associations are considered as one of the channels of informal dispute resolution. They serve as platforms for preventing and resolving potential or actual

disputes among residents of their areas on issues such as religious activities in the public space.

Traditional Institutions

Traditional institutions represented by Obas, Emirs, and Obis can also engage in managing religious space. They are the custodians of the traditions and cultures of their people. Although they do not have constitutional roles in Nigeria, they are involved in promoting peace in their domains. Therefore, they can authoritatively put in place measures that can prevent and resolve conflict about religious space contestation. For example, to avert conflict between *Orò* adherents and Muslims in Ogbomosoland, a respondent revealed that the Soun of Ogbomoso always directs the former group to postpone the *Orò* festival anytime it coincides with the Muslims' Ramadan fasting period⁴⁷. This is an effective way of managing religious space and has been effective in preventing clashes between the two religious groups. In addition, respondents disclosed that to contain the incessant conflict that occurs during *Orò* festivals in Iseyin, the *Ọba* of Iseyin holds a broad-based meeting involving *Orò* devotees, Christian and Islamic leaders, the Police, Chairman of Iseyin Local Government, High Chiefs, and other relevant stakeholders to negotiate on the days and time of *Orò* festival when it is approaching. This is to ensure that the religious space is managed in such a way as to prevent clashes.

Religious Organisations

Umbrella religious organisations such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) Muslim Association of Nigeria, and International Council for *Ifá* Religion should be established to enlighten their members on how to avoid confrontation with members of other religious groups and thereby promote harmony among them. To further promote religious harmony, there can be an establishment of a rainbow organisation made up of all three major religious groups to promote and maintain cordiality among them. The establishment of such an association is a peacebuilding process because it would effectively make the eruption of religious violence less probable. Through this forum, matters of differences and potential clashes can be reported and amicably resolved before they escalate into serious skirmishes. This is also a religious space management strategy capable of preventing and resolving disputes from religious activities in the public space. Its establishment, objectives, and mode of operation will regulate the activities of religious groups in the public space principally to prevent frictions and resolve such when they arise.

Government or State Regulation of Religious Activities

Apart from social regulation which has been discussed above, there is also government regulation which can be described as the restriction placed on the practice, profession, and selection of religion by official laws, policies, or administrative actions of the state. The State has the responsibility to protect citizens' rights and promote peace and safety which are necessary for

society's socio-economic progress. Therefore, to attain this goal, the State uses either law to ban the existence and/or operations of some religious organisations or through administrative restrictions, curtail their activities, especially in the public space.

However, this paper does not support the outright ban on the expression of religious beliefs and practices in public spaces because it can be counter-productive to national peace. This is because religion is a sensitive issue in Nigeria and Nigerians can be too emotional about it. Therefore, banning can be wrongly interpreted to mean denying people their right to freedom of religion. For example, the Federal Government's attempt to implement the provision of the Financial Reporting Council Act in 2016 as it affects the tenure of the leadership of the churches and mosques was interpreted to mean undue interference with their internal affairs. It was also interpreted to mean persecution of Churches by the Federal Government headed by a Muslim. The controversy and public outcry that greeted the implementation of the Act were so much that the Government had to suspend it. The position of this paper on banning religious space corroborates the view of Jennings, who gave a strong voice against banning religious activities in the United States public space which is relevant in this context. He advised that:

Banning it entirely is not desirable for a vast number of people; religion is a powerful, important, and positive part of daily life. To do so would not only be unlawful, but it would also be counter-productive⁴⁸.

However, under certain circumstances, religious activities in the public space could be banned and lifted no sooner than the situation becomes conducive.

Government can manage religious space through the enactment of laws to regulate religious activities in the public space. For example, Oyo State has Oyo State Environment (Sanitation and Waste Control) Regulation 2013. The law is aimed at preventing environmental nuisance, among others, by controlling noise pollution generally. This includes noise generated through religious activities in churches and mosques. To this end, Section 58 (a) states that for residential areas, the noise level should not exceed 60 decibels for daytime and 45 decibels for night hours. This legislative restriction affects religious noise. The Law is being implemented through the State's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. Similar laws exist in Lagos State. However, it seems the Oyo State law against noise pollution perpetrated by churches and mosques is not achieving the desired result as reflected in the editorial comment of Nigerian Tribune which states that:

This law, which first came into existence in Oyo State in 1985, has been observed largely in breach. The seeming utter disregard for the law is believed to have been fuelled mainly by ignorance and impunity... Though insidious, noise is even reputed to be more devastating in its effects. There is a category of culprits who deliberately generate harmful noise levels and because they have always got away with the

law, they have developed a sense of impunity⁴⁹.

The recommendation of this strategy is congruous with the view of Hosu and Funza⁵⁰ on the regulation of religious activities in the public space. According to scholars, apart from being neutral in religious matters, State's approach to religion is active intervention in regulating the activities of all religious organisations or groups, especially in the public space. Thus, to prevent inter-religious conflict, the Government's intervention through legislation and empowerment of relevant institutions to regulate religious space is highly essential for a better society. For example, Borno State has a Preaching Service Board which is given all the powers to regulate the activities of Christian and Islamic groups in the public space. However, for Government regulation to be an effective strategy to manage religious space, it will require an enormous political will.

Obtaining Permission to Use Public Space

Another method of managing religious space to prevent religious conflict and enhance a better Nigeria is that religious groups should seek and obtain permission before using a public space for a religious activity. It is reasoned that if permission is sought from relevant authorities in an environment to be used, the users might not encounter conflict. Some of these relevant authorities include the Nigeria Police Force, the landlords association of the area if it is a residential area, and possibly the religious leaders in the area. This would ensure that the religious group is granted permission for the use of the space and should there be an issue along the line, it could be easily resolved. For example, *Egúngún* traditional worshippers often seek permission from the authorities of the Nigeria Police

before using public space for their activities. The intention is to have a police escort as they carry out their religious rites by a street-to-street procession and this would also prevent clashes. This measure will create a peaceful and rancour-free religious environment.

Litigation

Another way by which religious space can be managed is by litigation. It is often used when disputing parties are unable to reach an agreement through a non-adjudicative or consensual process such as mediation or negotiation. Litigation is capable of preventing dispute escalation because punitive judgment serves as deterrence in the sense that it would discourage the perpetration of similar acts of a breach in the future. It is aggrieved individuals or groups that use religious houses whose activities constitute a nuisance or a breach of their fundamental right in one form or the other. The case of J. O. Adeyemo and M.O. Adeyemo vs. Christ Calvary Apostolic Church in suit No. HOG/47/2000 at High Court of Justice, Ogbomoso attests to the fact that litigation can be used to settle conflict arising through religious contestation of public space.

The judgment was that the church building should cease to be used for worship because of the noise pollution it caused. Expectedly, the judgment should deter and prevent similar breaches from other religious houses. However, in reality, the opposite is the case because religious-environmental pollution is still very much prevalent in Nigeria's religious atmosphere. The inability of the landslide judgment to discourage the incident of religious noise pollution is probably because many

people are unaware of it, even though the judgment was executed. The church building was abandoned which led to its dilapidation and collapse as at the time the aggrieved plaintiff was interviewed in 2013.

Use of Acoustic Instruments in Religious Houses

It has been established that one of the nature of religious space is a saturation of the public space with religious noise which manifest in church and mosque activities. Their institutionalised programmes such as vigil prayer, early morning call to prayer, sermon delivery, the beating of drums, etc. always go with the use of loudspeakers erected on worship houses. The aftermath of this is noise pollution which is an irritant in society. As a way of managing religious space to prevent acrimony that divides people and undermines social cohesion, it is considered a good strategy for religious houses to be equipped with acoustic instruments. To make it effective, the government at all levels should enact and diligently enforce a law that all religious buildings should possess this noise control technology. Otherwise, vigil and other related activities should be made to hold without the use of horn speakers to prevent the disturbance of the privacy of others. Relatedly, extant laws on noise control should be judiciously implemented without fear or favour by relevant authorities such as the National Environmental Standard and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) at the national level and its equivalent at the sub-national levels. It is to be done without fear or favour because it has to do with religious houses and

the Nigerians who are to implement the law are religiously inclined to a great extent.

Application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for worship

Since this paper aims to discuss the management of religious space for a better society, the application of ICT to religious activities is considered worthwhile. The logic is that organising religious worship virtually with the use of ICT would serve as a good alternative to having a large number of people gathered in a physical place which always causes disturbance and discomfort to people either through noise pollution or traffic gridlock. The advantages of this modern communication technology are many for religious groups. This includes a social distancing that minimizes the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ability to reach a large audience in the comfort of their homes, comparative cost-effectiveness, and above all, prevention of religious conflict that often erupts when public places are used for religious programmes.

Conclusion

The management of religious space focuses on strategies to prevent and resolve disputes that occur when religious activities are performed in the public space. This paper argues that the existence of religious space in Nigeria is inevitable because Nigerians are profoundly religious which is responsible for the ubiquitousness of religious space. In other words, the use of public space for religious activities is

widespread in the country. Therefore, to promote peace and religious harmony and create a better Nigeria, it is considered imperative to explore ways to prevent conflicts while religious activities thrive. Using Preventive Diplomacy as espoused by Boutros-Ghali, the paper explains strategies for managing religious space. These are the adoption of orientation by religious bodies to conduct their activities in such ways as not to interfere with the rights of people; demonstration of religious tolerance by religious groups; government regulation of religious activities; intervention by landlord associations; the role of traditional institutions; the role of umbrella religious organisations; religious groups obtaining permission before using public space for a religious event; litigation; use of acoustic equipment in religious houses; and use of ICT for worship. Scrutiny of these strategies indicates prompt and short-term prevention strategies to nip religious conflict in the bud and this is in line with the operational or direct conflict prevention approach.

In addition, the study shows that formal and non-formal institutions such as government agencies and landlords associations respectively are involved in the management of religiously appropriated public spaces. Non-governmental institutions use the mediation approach to prevent and settle disputes even though they are not established primarily for that purpose. It can also be noticed that litigation or adversarial approach is recommended to manage religious space. Therefore, both adjudicative and consensual processes of conflict management are applicable in the management of religious space. An example of an adjudicative process is

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litigation, while mediation provides an example of a consensual process. While not laying claim to be faultless and exhaustive, this paper hopes that all these strategies are capable of managing religious space to prevent sectarian conflicts, promote peace and harmony among religious groups, and thereby enhance a better Nigeria.

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