

## **IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM STRUGGLE OVER THE USE OF SPACE IN JOS CITY VIA THE BLARING OF LOUDSPEAKERS AND BLOCKING OF RAODS**

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### **Abstract**

*The study examined the struggle between Christians and Muslims over the use of space in Jos, the capital of Plateau State, Nigeria and its impact on the general populace. The two major aspects of struggle over space by Christians and Muslims in Jos city as discussed in this paper were through the use of loudspeakers in places of worship and the blockage of roads during religious worship. The researchers employed the use of qualitative research approach in which oral interviews and observation methods of data collection were used. A total number of 18 Christians and Muslims within the study area were interviewed on the impact of road blocking and the blaring of loudspeakers on the populace. The study found out that both the blocking of roads/streets and the use of loudspeakers at high volume by Christians and Muslims has impact on the harmonious and peaceful coexistence of the people. The impacts of blocking of public roads include obstruction of traffic flow and infringement on people's right to movement. It causes unnecessary traffic, which will force people to use only one lane that is not blocked thereby resulting to serious traffic and at times causing accident. Again, road blocking can also result to significant economic damage for business men and women who need to meet up with the time of supply of goods and services. Likewise, the study also found out that the use of loudspeakers, especially at high volume, has serious effect on the general populace. Possible impacts of the misuse of loudspeakers by Christians and Muslims on the inhabitants of Jos Plateau include: sleep disturbance, hearing impairment, loss of concentration, high blood pressure, annoyance/inconvenience, and potentiality of fueling religious crisis. The study recommends that there should be proper education on the religious use of loudspeaker at moderate level or volume in such a way that it would not affect people's peace and comfort and that sound limiters should be attached to public address system (loudspeakers) in the Churches and Mosque to reduce intensity. On the blocking of roads, the study recommends that appropriate government agency should enact a law against blocking of roads/streets by religious adherents during their public worship.*

**Keywords:** Struggle, Christian, Muslim, Blocking of Roads, Blaring of Loudspeakers.

### **Introduction**

Throughout human history, struggle is part of human existence. Humans, from the cradle have been engaged in different forms of competition or contestations for many reasons. To an extent, it is needed and could be helpful in making human society better and reducing the danger of monopoly of ideas or services/goods. However, when approached from a bitter angle, competition could be indeed dangerous to human society. Religious

competition in Nigeria can be viewed from dual standpoints. On one hand, it has to do with intra-religious competition. This deals with a form of competition or struggle that exists within a religious community. On the other hand, it has to do with interreligious competition, which is a form of competition or struggle between two or more religions (Raphael 207).

Jos, the capital of Plateau State is populated with Christians, Muslims and people of other faiths. Both Christians and Muslims carried out their religious activities in various forms. They often compete with one another over dominance or prominence. Most times, during their public worships, they block roads or major streets within Jos city, in addition to the use of heavy public address systems, usually at high volume. They both struggle for prominence over who has the loudest speakers. Through this practice, Jos has become a city of noise. In so doing, they create nuisance to the general public through the use of these heavy public address system during their religious activities whether in the day or at night. The following two sections of this paper detailing explain how Christians and Muslims struggle over the use of space through the use of loudspeakers in public space and the blocking of roads and their impacts on the general populace.

### **Struggle Over Space Through the Use of Loudspeakers and its Impact**

One of the aspects of competition or struggle over space by Muslims and Christians in the city of Jos is through the use of loudspeakers also known as public address system. Christians and Muslims use loudspeakers for various reasons. Apart from the reason of amplifying the voice of the preacher or teacher who educates people on the basic tenets of the religion and encourages people to shun evil, another reason for the use of heavy public address systems (loudspeakers) by religious adherents is to project a sense of dominance over public sphere or domain. Through this, one can easily recognize the religious identity of a particular area within the city of Jos by the type of religious sound that dominates the vicinity. By dominating the sonic ambiance of the city, a particular religion creates an impression of physical or demographic domination.

Hence, Christians and Muslims are important actors in this spatial contestation in Jos as both compete with each other in the politics of sound as they mount loudspeakers in their Churches/Mosques, moving cars, and in front of strategic shops. Murtala Ibrahim narrates his experience of how the politics of sound by Christians and Muslims affected his sleep thus:

Where I reside in Jos is close to a Christian neighbourhood, and so I am often awakened by church loudspeakers at around 4 a.m., which is obviously a reaction to Izala's sonic practices. As sound constitutes a physical signature of human surroundings, Izala, Sufis and Christians compete to drown out one another through loudspeakers in the contested politics of space- and presence-making (763).

Usually, loudspeakers or public address systems are mounted or attached to Church's buildings or Mosque' buildings and as well as in moving cars within Jos city. Some Churches do not mount their public address system or loudspeakers outside the Church buildings, rather their loudspeakers are used inside the buildings. Example of such is the First Baptist Church in Adebayo Street Jos. During an interview with the pastor of the Church, Rev. Sunday O. Jabunmi, he emphasised that before he was posted to the Church, he learnt that the church was using loudspeakers outside the church building until after the 2008 crisis. The church stopped using loudspeakers outside the church building because of

security advice, which requested that all the public address systems (loudspeakers) mounted outside the building be removed. This was due to the security challenges experienced in the State during that period. Therefore, since then, the church only uses public address system inside the auditorium (Interview, 28/12/2023). One interesting thing about this Church is that it shares the same land space with the Mosque. Both the Church and the Mosque share the same fence.

**Plate 1:** First Baptist Church and Nurudeen Society of Nigerian Mosque Sharing Same Fence at Adebayo Street, Jos



**Source:** Researchers, 28/12/2023.

**Plate 2:** Speakers Mounted on Top of the Nurudeen Society of Nigeria Mosque by Adebayo Street, Jos



**Source:** Researchers, 28/12/2023.



**Plate 3:** Loudspeakers mounted on Top of the Jeep with inscription “Church on the Move”  
Driven by Pastor Mathew Adams



**Source:** Researchers, 21/10/23.

The Churches and Mosques that mount their loudspeakers outside of their buildings (i.e. loudspeakers attached to the buildings), both seems to compete for dominance in most cases. They both struggle for prominence over who has the loudest speakers. Through this practice, Jos has become a city of noise. In so doing, they create nuisance to the general public through the use of these heavy public address system during their religious activities whether in the day or at night. It is because of the disturbance from the sound from the loudspeakers that makes Aanchal Barchiha to emphasize during an interview that in her own opinion, people should not use loudspeakers in religious places of worship because it disturbs other people that do not hold same belief. She shared her experience thus: “When my exams were going on, I used to get up at 5am in the morning to prepare and the loudspeaker sound coming from some Mosques near my house won't allow me to concentrate properly” (Interview, 18/1/2023).

During the field work, an interviewee who claims anonymity refers to the loudspeaker culture as the culture of noise which is an unacknowledged menace to society. He said that loud music blaring from speakers assaults the ears and mind of the citizens of Nigeria on the street, on the buses and in the comfort of their home. There are no time restraints on the culture of noise, loud sound from public address systems and loud music is played for the entire neighbourhood at any time of the day or night. Hence, the loudspeaker culture has implications for the individual and the entire society. It has detrimental effect on health,

education, social relations and spiritual growth of people. Noise creates psychological stress, which impacts negatively on mental health leading to depression and anxiety (Interview, 20/1/2023). Therefore, the struggle or competition between Christians and Muslims over the use of public space through the use of loudspeakers, especially when used at high volume, it has serious effect on the general populace.

### **Struggle over Space through Street Road-Blocking and its Impact**

This is another aspect of competition over space, which is through the barricading of roads by Muslims and Christians in Jos city during their worships on Fridays and Sundays respectively. Some people view this as an obstruction of space meant for the use of the general public while others see nothing wrong with it because of the reality of security challenges in the country, hence the need to safeguard the lives of the worshippers during worship by barricading the roads to prevent particularly, those who want to attack worship places.

The blocking of roads or barricading half part of the road or even the whole street has become the order of the day in Jos city and some other parts of the country as every street that has a church is blocked on Sundays and every street that has a Mosque is also blocked on Fridays. In fact, in some instances, even when the streets or roads that are very close to the worship places are not barricaded, still there will be no movement of people within the area during worship because the worshippers will lay their mats on the main road, blocking the entire road till the end of the Friday prayers. Below are pictures of road blockage:

***Plate 4: Road-block at the Central Mosque Jos on Friday. Picture Taken Shortly Before the Commencement of Juma'a Prayer on 29/12/2023***



**Source:** Researchers, 29/12/23

**Plate 6:** Road Block Behind Rwangpang Street, Jos Close to the Mosque Before Plateau Rider's Park Jos on Friday, 30/12/2023.



Picture above clearly show how Muslims and Christians in Jos compete over the use of public space through blocking of public roads or streets with barricades. During interview, Mersimm Abdurrahman raised a concern that the blocking of public roads by religious adherents for their prayers actually denies citizens right to freedom of movement. According to him, the blocking of roads constitutes a breach of the right to freedom of movement as enshrined in Section 41 of the Nigerian Constitution. He adds that, although some people may argue that the essence of blocking roads is for the safety of the lives of the worshippers to protect them against attacks, but still it is not lawful (interview, 18/1/20223). Again, Muhammad Lawal stressed that there are usually large population of Muslims in northern Nigeria and the mosques are not large enough to contain them therefore, they always extend outside the mosque to the street. When Muslims pray, they usually stand in rows, one line after the other and it is not allow to give any space. Friday prayer is mandatory on any adult male that include youth and Muslims are also imbibe the habit of taking even children to Friday mosques (interview 30/1/2023).

Umar H.D. Danfulani emphasises how Christians and Muslims compete over public space by resorting to street praying. He gave reasons, in his opinion, why Muslims prefer to pray on the open street. He first of all debunked the notion that it is not true that Muslims pray on the street because their mosques are congested; rather, they do so for a number of reasons, which he stated thus:

Firstly, Muslims insist on communal prayers on such days in the central mosques which are not designed for such capacity crowds. Secondly, to demonstrate their exclusivist claim that Islam is the only religion acceptable to Allah/God, hence the need to obstruct traffic where the need arises. Thirdly, to prove to their Christian counterparts that Friday is a great day. In some cases, it has been observed that while Muslims pray in the street, their mosques may be one third or even half empty. They park their luxurious cars in the open streets and equally spread out their praying mats on the same. Thus Muslims block some major streets to traffic on Fridays in Jos (Danfulani 345).

Danfulani's view on this issue partly explains why Muslims pray on the open streets in Jos city which also buttresses the fact about an existing competition over space between



Christians and Muslims in Jos. Some of the major streets that Muslims block in Jos on Fridays are Masalachin Juma'a Street, Layin Zana or Buzu Lane, Mango Street, Dilimi Street, Katako Road from Zaria- towards Konan Shagari, among others (Danfulani 345-346).

In the same way, Danfulani also explains how Christians block streets on Sundays during their worship too. He states that; “When Christians block streets and obstruct traffic on Sundays, it is most often to score the same points enumerated above. Thus a stranger in Jos on Sunday may find it difficult to pass through Ahmadu Bello Way...” (346). So, according to Danfulani, Christians also block streets in Jos for the same reasons as their Muslim counterparts, which is to show that Christianity is the only true religion. In other words, both Muslims and Christians block streets and obstruct traffic because of the competition over public space. This is not just peculiar to Jos Plateau as earlier mentioned, but it is a common practice witnessed throughout Northern Nigeria.

It is therefore, with this kind of competition over space by Muslims and Christians in Jos and other parts of the country where religious adherents block roads for the religious functions, it is needless to say that Nigeria is notoriously and incurably a religious nation. The evidences that are around us, both at the local and national levels depict unequivocally the high level of religious tones that pervade the Nigerian nation. Obviously, any discussion raised about the Nigerian nation might not be complete without the mentioning of religion. This is because religion has assumed the central stage in virtually every matter that concerns the nation. In a sense, it is true that religion is the sole worldview within which events are explained and behaviour patterned in the Nigerian society. It permeates every facet of life of the people.

Despite the fact that Nigerians are said to be religious in all ramifications however, the way religion is practised in Nigeria has become a serious concern to many. Just as discussed above, religious adherents will block public roads and cause heavy traffic jams in the name of worship. Owing to this kind of obstructing public roads/streets, Danfulani raised questions that why has the Nigerian religious person persisted in such primitive activities even in contemporary times? Why have the people of God decided to build shrines (religious places of worship) not only in private homes and institutions, but also on public properties such as motor parks, government factories, government houses, government schools, colleges and universities, the presidential lodge and hostels? Religion is supposed to be a private affair between a person and his/her God. Why have Nigerians made religion a public affair even to the point of violating other persons' right? (346-347).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Although people have right to religion and worship as one of the fundamental rights of human beings; but such right to worship must be carried out in such a way that it would not infringe on the rights of other people as well. Egyegini and Danfulani lamented that religion ought to bring peace and unity in the society, but on the contrary, the adherents of religions do carry out their religious activities which affect people through negatively (260). Hence, religious adherents, particularly Christians and Muslims in Jos city and Nigeria at large, need to avoid whatever will affect the peace and comfort of others when performing their religious obligations within public sphere. Therefore, the researchers give the following recommendations:

1. That since blocking of public roads/street obstructs traffic flow and infringe on people's right to movement, in addition to other negative consequences, government should enact laws against blocking of public roads by religious adherents during their worship.
2. Due to the proliferation of religions and religious houses with the use of sophisticated loudspeakers, care must be taken by religious adherents/speakers not to put the health of the same people that they are meant to serve in jeopardy because doing so will be counter-productive.
3. There should be open dialogue and engagement between religious leaders, community members, and local authorities. In doing so, religious leaders should encourage discussions to find common ground and address concerns related to the use of loudspeakers and as well as the blockage of public roads.
4. There should be proper education on the religious use of loudspeaker at moderate level or volume in such a way that it would not affect people's peace and comfort. This is because, education, public enlightenment and sensitization on the human health catastrophe associated with noise pollution generated through various sources including loudspeaker, is crucial to ensuring that people are adequately informed since many religious users of loudspeakers do not know that using loudspeakers at high volume constitutes noise pollution with adverse side effects on people.
5. Adherents of the two religions should have respect for each others' right to quiet time or hours to rest, as well as the use of space meant for the general public without obstruction. Effort should be made to promote understanding and respect for different religious practices while also considering the impact on the larger community.
6. The indoor loudspeakers in the Churches and Mosques should not be positioned closer to the worshippers to reduce to hazardous effect on the ear.
7. Sound limiters should be attached to public address system (loudspeakers) in the Churches and Mosque to reduce intensity.

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