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**GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT
AND NEW SACRED URBAN SPACES
IN NIGERIA:
A CASE STUDY OF THE
GOSPEL FAITH MISSION
INTERNATIONAL TOWN,
OJOO, IBADAN**



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GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT AND NEW SACRED URBAN SPACES IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF THE GOSPEL FAITH MISSION INTERNATIONAL TOWN, OJOO, IBADAN

Abstract:

This paper was written as part of the masterclass “sacred urbanism: entrepreneurial religion, infrastructure, and the new urbanism in Nigeria” held at the university of Ibadan in June 2017. In the course of the masterclass, a team of postgraduate students conducted a day of field research at the Gospel Faith Mission International Town (GOFAMINT) located in Ojoo, Ibadan. The paper questions relations of Nigerian religious organisations and the state in the areas where emerging camps are located. The paper also pays attention to the regulation of various activities and the provision of infrastructures.

Keywords: Governance, infrastructure provision, sacred urban spaces, state regulations

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1. Introduction

In a recent overview of the changing relations between religion and urbanisation, Lanz and Oosterbaan (2016) argue that the scope of the functions of religious organisations has expanded beyond acts of spirituality to involve other organised forms of urban life itself. Similarly, Ukah (2014) argues further, that current religious groups have gone beyond providing some of those basic needs like education and health to move on to issues of development like real estate and infrastructural projects. For instance, in his study titled 'redeeming urban spaces: the ambivalence of building a Pentecostal city in Lagos, Nigeria', Ukah argues that as at the end of June 2012, the entire land space of the redemption camp was divided into twenty-two zones which include industrial, commercial, administrative activities among other. He however notes that those which were dedicated to religious or ritual activities are the most important buildings. Therefore, the redeemed christian church of god (RCCG) could be said to engage in different entrepreneurial activities and at the same time dominate the public space to the point that some basic functions of the state seem to have been taken over by them.

In Nigeria, many Pentecostal churches have acquired large expanses of land spanning hundreds of hectares which in most cases are exclusively devoted to its adherents and could be argued to provide a form of pseudo government (religious city or camps) thereby creating a new "city within the city". Ukah (2014) justifies the neo-religious activities as a pointer to the failure of secular governance. But in the process of these acquisitions, there remains a likelihood of misunderstanding between the religious houses and the state or members of the indigenous community where the camps are sited. It is against this background that this paper interrogates the relations between religious organisations in Nigeria and the state especially in the areas of emergence of religious camps, regulation of the activities of these religious organisations within the camps and the provision of infrastructure within the camp.

With the focus on the gospel faith mission international (GOFAMINT) gospel town, located in Ojoo, Ibadan, this study adopts a case study design and uses key informant interview and observation to elicit relevant information. Five persons were interviewed for this study. These include: Mr. L. a resident of gospel town, a security officer of GOFAMINT, an officer at GOFAMINT clinic, a staff of GOFAMINT nursery and primary school and an administrative officer of GOFAMINT.

2. Role of the state in the emergence of GOFAMINT

According to the Nigerian land use act of 1976, land is the exclusive preserve of the government. However, in practice, the original owners of land (indigenous people) often claim ownership of such lands. The emergence of GOFAMINT town in Alaka Igbo Oloyin area had little input from the government. According to the respondents, the land was acquired “just the way” landed properties are acquired in Nigeria. The only involvement of the government was in the issues of documentation and securing the relevant documents required for such land acquisition.

Also, findings from the study reveal that prior to the acquisition of the current land in Alaka Igbo Oloyin area, GOFAMINT camps and conferences were usually held at the international gospel centre (IGC) based in Ojoo. However, because of the increase in the number of worshippers who turn out for the annual conferences, there was need to acquire additional land to be able to accommodate the worshippers. According to an administrative officer of GOFAMINT,

"when that place could no longer contain us we moved here even now this new place can no longer contain us and we are moving again. As i speak with you, we have gotten five hundred hectares of land along Lagos-Ibadan expressway where we will soon move to".

This shows that the projection of an increased membership is the major drive for land acquisition by religious houses. However, plans for entrepreneurship could also be a motivating factor. For example, one of the administrative officers of the church noted that with the new land acquisition of about 500 hectares the church can embark on any project it decides on including building of universities. In his words,

"we can do anything we want to do now at our new site, for example if we want to build a university we are easily qualified because while we have 500 hectares, the Nigerian universities commission requirement is 100 hectares"

So, in 1983, the management of the church acquired the present land which is about 30 hectares to build a new camp for their annual conventions and conferences. The first convention to be held in this new found town was in 1991. The initial projection was to construct the camp as a mini town for members of the gospel faith mission international. This explains the nomenclature, 'gospel town.' however, due to financial constraints, the dream of having a gated town for the members of GOFAMINT could not be realised. Some portions of the land were sold to other members of christian faith and even thereafter, some resold the lands to people of other faith contrary to the original vision of the church. This may in a way explain why it was only the entrance to the camp that was gated while other areas remained porous.



A section of the GOFAMINT town.

It is interesting to note that the present location of the camp used to be a thick forest harbouring criminal but with the advent of GOFAMINT, it became transformed. The presence of GOFAMINT in Igbo Oloyin opened up the area for commercial activities and migration from the city into the 'new found city' commenced.

However, findings also reveal that in spite of the migration of people into this 'new found' town, the relationship between the government and GOFAMINT has remained very cordial. This cordial relationship could not be unconnected to the fact that the government alone cannot provide all the needed infrastructure for development but partners with individuals and organisations to achieve this. Thus, the relocation of GOFAMINT to igbo oloyin did not only open up this area for visibility and entrepreneurial activities but enhanced security in the area by preventing hoodlums from dominating the space.

3. The Activities of GOFAMINT and State Regulations in Relation to such Activities.

GOFAMINT like most Pentecostal organisations in the recent times are engaged in several activities which transcend spiritual activities. Beyond her religious activities which ranged from their normal weekly activities to annual and biannual activities, there are also commercial activities that take place within the camp. For instance, GOFAMINT operates a clinic, nursery and primary school; and offers laundry services and catering services. They have chalets for their delegates and dormitory for other participants during their programmes. Their spaces and chalets are also available for rent by people from other christian faith for reception, retreat and other christian activities. For each of these services, a fee is attached.



One of the entrepreneurial services of gofamint. Credit: tobe nneli

A GOFAMINT staff explained that none of these activities are regulated by the government or her agents except that when it concerns legal activities like registration of business and sundry activities.

Conversely, one of their activities which sometimes attract criticism is their annual conventions. This convention usually attracts worshippers from all parts of the globe to Igbo Oloyin in Ibadan. During this period which is usually a week-long programme, there is usually traffic jam because of large inflow of people to the area. However, the economic gains which this program attracts to the are outweighs its negative aspects. For instance, it affords the people of the opportunity to display and sell their wares during this period. According to a respondent:

"there is nothing that you display for sale during this period that you will not see a buyer for. In fact, some people used to vacate their homes in order to let it out at good prices. Some people charge twice what they would charge for yearly rent for just a week rent. So, this gain when compared with the issue of traffic is not comparable".

In addition, GOFAMINT accepts the role of the state as the highest security apparatus. Although GOFAMINT has its own security system, it often requires the assistance of law enforcement agents to ensure that order is maintained especially during their annual conventions. Thus they invite representatives of the Nigerian police force, Nigerian civil defence corps, federal road safety corps among others to assist them in maintaining law and order during their programmes that involve large crowd.

4. Infrastructural Challenges Dominant in the GOFAMINT Town and State Response to such Challenges.

The challenge of poor response from the state in terms of infrastructure which is evident in most parts of Nigeria, also exists in GOFAMINT town. This is contrary to the views of Graham and Marvin (2001) that

the provision of infrastructure since the late 19th century is carried out by the state. In the case of GOFAMINT, the group provides these infrastructure for themselves and their neighbours. Therefore, state responsibilities are taken over by the group as they provide accessible roads, potable water, electricity, security etc. For themselves and their immediate neighbours. According to one of the administrative staff,

"Everything you see in our camp is self-developed. We are not in partnership with anybody. We handle most of our challenges one after the other. For example, we run on generator 8 hours daily. Even when they bring the light it is so low that under 30 or 45 minutes it goes off. We have our internal security arrangement, generate our water (...)"



One of the water distribution outlets of gofamint. Credit: tobe nneli

Mr L., one of the residents in the camp confirmed the above stance when he noted:

"I have lived here for more than fifteen years, everything you see in the camp was done by the church. They generate their own water and distribute it across the community. As for light, I think they have a special line with NEPA because their light is very stable. They supply us with light and we pay them a token."

The last statement shows that GOFAMINT has become a "mini government" on its own because while they provide some facilities themselves, they negotiate others like electricity with company providers and then collect the money and pay on the peoples' behalf.

Thus, it is interesting to note that in most cases, the facilities and business ventures of GOFAMINT are open to members of the public regardless of the individual's religious affiliation. Thus, apart from their dormitory and space which are restricted to the use of Christians, their schools and clinics are opened to everybody. Information elicited from the clinic attendant revealed that people of other religions use their clinic very well in spite of the fact that there is a government health centre very close by. The reason for this according to them is

that beyond medical attention, some people prefer where their spiritual needs will also be met. The administrative officer capture it thus:

"Beyond our good health facilities, everybody needs prayers...so they always come"



GOFAMINT clinic. Credit: Kayode Fagite

The inclusivity of the GOFAMINT space negates the argument of scholars like Al-Sayyad and Massoumi (2010) and Ukah (2014) who argue that religious cities breed exclusion and emphasises control within the camp. However, it is pertinent to add that the inclusivity of GOFAMINT camp might not be unconnected with issues of financial capacity to do so.

Finally, it is important to note that the state or her affiliated officials recognises the influence that GOFAMINT wields in the area. Thus, efforts are also made to ensure cordial relationship with the group through gifts which might have political motives. For example, one of the staffs noted,

" Although, the transformer that you saw at the entrance to our gate was donated to us by the wife of the present state governor in 2015 of course you know that by that time, election was around the corner... But apart from that, nobody has given us any other support".

One should however note that the said gift from the governor's wife does not represent state effectiveness in meeting with her responsibilities within the state rather, the donation was more of a personal gift from the wife of the governor to the church.



Picture of the 500 kva electricity transformer donated by the wife of the oyo state governor, Florence Ajimobi during her visit to the camp.



5. Conclusion

The establishment of sacred urban spaces is increasingly becoming popular. Such spaces serve different purposes. Some of which has little or nothing to do with religion. However, the state is often aware of the existence of such spaces but it is not involved, in most cases, in how these spaces are governed nor does it frequently address infrastructural challenges within the space. The religious houses ensure that basic legal requirements from the state are met but they also impose their own rules and regulations within their urban space. They also ensure that their space has an urban mien by providing certain infrastructures like water, accessible road, electricity etc for residents in their space. The gospel faith mission international represents one of such religious institutions however, in their case, they extend the provision of such

facilities to the entire public regardless of religious affiliations but in some cases, at some cost.

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Respondent details

Respondent 1: Mr L. (GOFAMINT resident)

Respondent 2: security staff, GOFAMINT

Respondent 3: health officer, GOFAMINT clinic

Respondent 4: staff, GOFAMINT nursery and primary school

Respondent 5: administrative officer, GOFAMINT

All the interviews were conducted on 21/06/17 at the GOFAMINT town, Ojoo, Ibadan, Oyo state.