

Threat of Cultism to the Society: A Case Study of the South-South Region of Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the incidence of cultism in the south-south region of Nigeria. The study further sought to achieve other objectives and possible resolution in cultism activities which include identifying community intervention, government intervention and crime stoppage. In other to curb out cultism we need to identify the causes of cultism in our environment, its effect and crime prevention to safeguard the life and properties of citizens. Consequently, this paper examines the causes of cultism in our society and the role the state needs to play in resolving these cult activities by getting firsthand and vital information in order to gain deeper insights into the modus operandi of cultists in our environment as well as what need to be done in other to result to fight this menace in our society. Cult activities (i.e. cultism) in Nigeria are pervasive and destructive, with shocking results: The source of data for this paper was derived from the internet and existing literature, a quantitative research method was used. The study further revealed that poor parenting, peer group influence, youths being used as political tools, lack of government intervention in curbing crime, lack of jobs creation; to mention a few could really increase crime and cultism activities in our society. The study recommends that cult activities play a negative role in diverse ways which will be of great disappointment to a wider society if not properly eradicated and controlled; also, the police should create awareness for everyone to provide useful and needful information.

Keywords: Cultism, South-South Region of Nigeria, Causes, Effects and Peace Building

Introduction

Cultism in the South-South Region of Nigeria has been a frequent occurrence in the past which has led to loss of lives and properties also lead to poor economic and agricultural growth within the locality. This has made the States not conducive for education; it is now common in our secondary and tertiary institutions where there are cult rivals clashing daily even at broad daylight with dangerous weapons on the street destroying and killing themselves and innocent citizens. It is urgent that these immoral acts come to a still for schools' safety and better learning environment. Additionally, our youths are not learning or focusing on academic tasks since cultism has taken hold in our society. Cultism is a factor that, with the right management, can be controlled. In the South-South region of our beloved country, cultism and related activities have posed a serious threat, challenging and instilling terror in the lives of individuals and the educational system. Cultism is an activity or practice of a group of people with one common spiritual, religious or philosophical belief. Cultism and gang related conflict trend differently across the regions in Nigeria. They are most prevalent in the South-South region of Nigeria. A 2017 Report from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) attributed two-thirds of the most violent conflicts events in the south-south region to cultism.

In general, sociological studies, the term cult has been subjected to a whole lot of controversial and divergent definitions. But most cults are referred to as secret cults. They are called cults because their activities and practices are hidden from the public and non-members. Members of secret cults often swear an oath of allegiance or go into covenant with each other. They are meant to defend their beliefs and practices down to their very last breath (Johnson, 2017). The point of view is based on the fact that these sets of humans have no fear of committing havoc on a daily basis and wasting lives without a second thought and it is obvious beyond imagination.

The menace of cultism indeed has become a perceived threat to the society which needs an urgent call for collective and social action from the government. With the population of cult groups in Nigeria and in our institutions, one cannot predict the next move of action if not properly investigated or eliminated, the researcher submitted to you that except urgent measures are taken to fight the menace, our society may never be safe or secured for citizens. The situation has gotten out of hand, and it is observed that cult activities are carried out 'ransom are being paid but still the lives of those involved are being taken' and nothing's been done about it, the worst is yet to come if preventive measures and machinery are not put in place.

However, there are numerous cases of armed robbery, kidnappings, rapes, and killings among others, that are attributed to cult groups especially the Black Axe (also called Egede) and the Aro-Mate (also called the reds) that appear to be the most notorious of all the cult groups in Cross Rivers State. This highlights the complexity of the insecurity situation in the region, especially Cross Rivers State in cases like the cult clash related activities in Okundi community of Boki Local Council in Cross River Central Senatorial District, where lives and properties were lost, several houses and millions were burnt within two days. Meanwhile, the State Police Commissioner, Austine Agbonlahor, when contacted, confirmed the incident, disclosing that it was a cult war but could not ascertain how many lives were lost (The Guardian: 2017).

Operational Definition of Cultism

The definition of cultism could be seen as a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, initiation, policies, and activities are secret and kept secret, with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members (Ajayi, et al. 2010). Members of secret cults often swear an oath of allegiance or go into covenant with each other; they are to defend their beliefs and practices down to their last breath. In contemporary Nigerian society, cultism has constituted a major social problem and vices. This menace that is very common in tertiary institutions in Nigeria today. Cultism itself, according to history, started for a good cause, but over time, things have changed.

A Brief Origin of Cultism in Nigeria

It is paramount to note that Modern day cultism does not tow the same path as that of the Ogboni, Ekine, Owegbe, among others. The Ku Klux Klan popularly known as (KKK) inspired Modern-day cultism in Nigeria. Their activities were targeted toward the ex-slaves and those who gave them freedom. KKK sought to restore white supremacy by threats and violence, including murder against Black and those who supported them. These activities inspired our nationalists to intensify their fight against colonialism in Nigeria and thrive for independence. It therefore led to the establishment of the first recognized Cult group in Nigeria, **National Association of Sea Dogs also known as Pyrates Confraternity** (Ajayi, 2010).

The Origin Cultism was traced to the Sea dog Confraternity that is also known as the Pirates were formed in 1952 at the University of Ibadan by a group of seven students whose names are: **Wole Soyinka, Pius Olegbe, Olumuyiwa Awe, Aig-Imoukhuede, Ralph Opara, Olu Agunloye, and Tunji Tubi**. The peaceful and non-violent confraternity setup then in the 1980s, metamorphosed into a secret cult whose activities have been characterized by some bizarre and violent activities. (Ajayi, 2010). Their objective was to fight non-violently but intellectually and effectively against the imposition of foreign conventions, to review the age of chivalry, and to find a lasting solution to the problems of tribalism and elitism. The formation of this secret cult was in good faith and with good intentions. Their activities and operations were aimed at fighting colonialism and oppression. They equally rendered social services such as blood donation to hospital and presentations of gifts to orphanage homes etc. (Ajayi, 2010). It was not until the 1990s that they began spreading to the streets and creeks. The motto of the confraternity was "**Against all Conventions.**" Sources indicate that Supreme Eiyeye Confraternity (SEC) (SEC n.d; BBC 27. Jan. 2016) is also known as the Air Lords (ibid; The Guardian 6Nov. 2015) or the National Association of Airlords or unlawful society''. Sources further indicate that Eiyeye is one of a number of similar groups active in Nigeria (Ezeonu 19 Sep, 2013, 270; ISS 31 Mar. 2015; UN 2014, 56).

Brief History of Cultism in the South-South

In current Nigeria, especially in the South-South region, cultism has caused serious unrest to its citizens; these acts are carried out by youths in which it's seen as a way of life. Members of different cult groups in Nigeria are extremely dangerous, and members of a particular cult are always ready to kill their fellow rival cultists at any time without remorse or regret. The modern-day cults kidnap people, beat lecturers that offend them and engage in other social vices. The cult members have dealt with some lecturers and individuals who have relationship affairs with members' girlfriends and boyfriends. Many engaged in cybercrimes and armed robberies. Politicians also employ many cult groups in Nigeria to scare or deal with their political rivals. Cultism is especially in the South-South region of Nigeria has nothing to offer society but social vices and evil practices. Data from the Nextier Violent Conflict Database (24, July 2023) reveals that Rivers State tops the list of reported cult activities in the country. Today cultists are hardly recruited from Universities, but rather from the street of Benin City, the capital of Edo State in the South of Nigeria, where the top originate. Some of their members are businessmen, civil servants politicians and even musician (Alexis, 2023).

Literature Review

Cultism is an organization formed by students while in the school, most specifically in the tertiary institution. Molagun (2003) defined cultism as a religious group often based on instant emotive experience rather than on a throughout dogma of most world religions. Beth, (1982) Advanced Oxford Dictionary defines cultism as a term coined out of the word cult, and that cultism is an extreme religious group that is not part of an established religion. Omebe and Omebe (2015) believed the problem of secret cults has assumed a crisis in our society and Nigerian education sector. The wide use of violent armaments including arms and ammunition by these cult members or groups signifies a grave danger for the growth of education in our country and the wider society because it threatens the well-being of its citizens. Ojo, (1995) paints an unhappy picture of the condition when he writes that "students keep dying, getting damaged and disfigured; they keep being sexually distraught by occult confraternities in the society and school environment. Yet the school establishments are doing nothing to challenge the evil" (p.47). Lar (2005) in his words pointed that the actions of cult members have led to so much loss of life and property mainly in our institutions of learning; Students kill and injure themselves during intra and inter cult clashes on revenge missions' valuables like cars and houses are burnt down electronics, provisions in shops among others are looted.

According to Kolo (1994), the problem of cultism is a problem of social crises which has caused so much havoc in the society. Political programs, economic situation should be changed to take care of the masses instead of putting their life at risk. He said eccentricity should be avoided. He said policies that say non-indigene will lead to an opposition. Certainly, students on ethnic basis instead of commendable grounds and general disparity in the society, if eliminated, will help stamp out cultism and cult activities. In this case, students should be encouraged to join approved religious groups in schools for moral up-bringing and spiritual security in God (Salau and Nwaonusuru, 1994) are of the view that all fingers has to be put to check eradication of cultism and sundry have parts to execute in the task of monitoring the societies, parents, school authorities, government, law enforcement agents, educationist, counsellors, and the media each, have some contributions to make towards the resolution of secret cult in our academic sector and the general society.

Cultism Activities (South-South Region; 2020-2022)

A report made by (Punch Newspaper, 4th Oct, 2022), contrary to earlier report Six persons were killed in a cult clash in the Obudu Community of Cross River State in which the states police command has confirmed that only two lives were lost in a rival cultists clashed. Some suffered machete cuts, and was reported that the cause of this killing was as a result of a stolen motorcycle by a member of a rival cult group. It was alleged that cult activities are rampant in the area by so doing putting the citizens at risk. The Public Relation Officer has confirmed the

incident and the lives lost in which the security agency are working hard to stabilize the situation and foster peace in the communities. (Wodu, 2022)

Another was in the case of Bayelsa State in which over 15 suspected cultists were killed in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State in a renewed cult clash. The research gathered that residents in the affected areas have deserted their villages and communities while economic and social activities have been disrupted just in the cause of cult cases in the above-mentioned local government (the citizens had reasons for running in hide of their dear life's). It was learnt that the three popular cult groups in the area, Skylo, Mafia and Black Scorpion, have always engaged in bloody clashes which so many lives were lost in the process (Daily Post: May 13th, 2021) as residents lamented the action of the youths and called for the intervention of security operatives because it was bloody. The boys (cultist) were prepared in such a way that those security agencies were afraid as they used charms and have adopted a measure of going to operation in large numbers to attack the military post and police station and these charms makes the security operatives to either fall asleep or make them not to see them as they approach this is to show the society how this cult group are just prepared to destroy lives and properties in the state (Edem, 2021).

In addition, the state security has put in place measures to control and coordinate peace in the residence and advised that the chiefs and elders of those affected areas should help in giving information on time as to tackle these bloody clashes from happening. Another Cult clash between two cult groups has allegedly left four persons dead at Khana Local Government of Rivers State. And from an eyewitness the killing of one person has been raging till Saturday night and that many people in area have been staying indoors to avoid being caught by strange fire (Vanguard: 2021). In addition, I do not know the specific groups involved in the war, but I can tell you that we have been experiencing regular gunshots and people running helter-skelter because of one group chasing members of the other group. Another incident took place in a yam Festival of Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State in which two persons were killed in a cult clash that left many injured and properties worth millions of naira destroyed and the government are really putting plans to curb out cultism activities in the environment.

Men of the River State Police Command on Friday Killed four suspected cultist alleged to be terrorizing Rundu and Adjoining communities in the Enuoha Local Government Area of the State (Punch Newspaper 3 June, 2023). The information gathered that what led to the attack was a case in which the Nigerian police arrested five cult members and, in a revenge, to rescue them, four policemen were killed in the process. The assaulters allegedly trailed the victim from his home to a lottery betting shop, where he was shot three times at a close range, while others at the shop dashed to safety. The outbreak which occurred about 6:00p.m on Sunday on the 8miles, left residents in the community in panic. Frustrated by the killing, the vigilance group took to the street in a stop-and-search duty for the killers, but to no avail.

In a related development, the populaces of Yenagoa City, the capital of Bayelsa State, and environs have expressed fear over the rising cases of cult-related killings and armed robbery in different parts of the city. Premium Times reported that an unconfirmed number of persons have been killed between Monday and Saturday following a cult clash between Eiye and Vikings cult groups. Two corpses were seen in the early hours of the day at Azikoro Street junction, while another one was sighted at Pipeline junction in the Eyaen axis of Yenagoa. Apart from the escalating cases of cult killings, there is an upsurge in robbery incidents across the state capital which has shut down nightlife (Premium Times: 2021).

Effects of Cultism in Our Society

1. Early Death:

The consequences of involvement in cult activities are endless and inevitable. Apart from the reputation damage one will suffer in a long run when he or she is easily associated with past participation in a secret society, there are more grievous ramifications. Some of which include destruction of live, early death and loss of properties. (Edeh, S. 2021)

2. School Drop-out (Uncompleted Education):

Maximum numbers of cultists end up not finishing their educational program. In the present day, school establishments in a bid to curb the rate of cultism and its activities, have embraced strict punishments for it which include expulsion of students involved regardless of the academic level they are. In my own point of view, students who are involved in cultism fail to make an average or excellent cumulative point in their examinations because of their lack of seriousness towards their studies. In severe cases, they are asked to quit by the school or drop out due to frustration. All these are because cultism is a vast disturbance to academics (Edeh, S. 2021)

3. Obsession of Drugs and hard substances:

Moreover, drug abuse / habit can result in negative outcomes which tend to influence our youths who are cult members or take part in cult activities. These drugs and substances such as tramadol, alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, codeine etc. can be sedative to human beings. The constant usage of them can expose the brain to incessant crave for it which with time becomes an addiction. Many young people associated with cultism have been exposed to these substances which they have become engrossed into. In cases of lack of funds these young youths can go as far as stealing or pinching to get money in order to buy these things (Edeh, 2021).

Causes of Cultism in the South-South Region of Nigeria

The researcher reveals his views on what he observed and noticed to be the causes which lead to the spike of cultism and other related crimes like kidnapping, armed robbery and killing in the South-south Region of Nigeria which are analyzed below.

1. Cultists Being Used as Tools for Politicians: The use of cultists as tools in the hands of politicians has really escalated which drives in encouraging cultism in our society. Politicians use the avenue to mobilize these young boys directly or indirectly for their own personal interest and with good funding which aids in providing every requirement needed for smooth running of their selfish activities.

Mr. Francis had his own view that most of these cult groups had an involvement with top government officials as their backup or sponsors to achieve their dubious needs and motives. This act really takes place during campaigns and elections in which these boys are used as a threat to the opponent in carrying out activities like causing fights in polling units, destruction of electoral materials, killing and kidnapping of their political opponents, creating fear within INEC electoral officers etc. which has been a threat to Cross River State Government. No fear of being halted within these young boys because they have a backup of top government officials or a godfather who has their back in-case of any cause of being arrested in which it works in their favor. (Edeh, 2021)

2. Affluence: This is another contributing aspect to the cause of cultism in our society and schools today. In this case, youths then to join cultism just for recognition, pursuit for authority, money, position and defense. This is because of the worth system of the society, the system values affluence without due deliberation to the means and its negative implications but to gain respect and to be feared within and outside the school environment (Chukwurah, 2022).

3. Peer Group Influence: This is a vital fact to our contemporary society which has driven and increased the rate of cult activities among youths. Peer Group Influence is another major cause of cultism to young people. This is an often occurrence in universities and secondary schools where students mingle more with each other. In the long run, such individuals become dependent on habits like drug abuse, clubbing, stealing or gambling which make it difficult for them to break away from the circle of friends and this leads to poor academic performance of such individuals (Edeh, 2021).

Government Intervention to Curb Cult Activities in the South-South Region of Nigeria

Government should inaugurate a tribunal to try a cultist and if found guilty should be sentenced accordingly. This will be detrimental to those who have joined or to those who have the intention of joining the secret cults and this will help in reducing the high cost of education in Nigeria so that everyone can afford it. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been described as one of the most polluted and underdeveloped areas in comparison to other deltas of the world (Etekpe, 2009; Asuka, 2010). The region is also embroiled in various forms of violent conflicts.

Nevertheless, reprieve was achieved when the Federal Government of Nigeria launched in 2009 the Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP) for ex-agitators in the region. The PAP is a comprehensive peace building program anchored on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) with the aim of arresting youth restiveness in the region. Despite this effort, sustainable peace has remained elusive as the region remains one trapped in violence (Ibaba, & Etekpe, 2013).

Behavioural Change of an Individual: From Culture of Violence to the Culture of Peace

What Is Culture?

Culture is the system of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people. [Culture](#) is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, [religion](#), cuisine, social habits, music and arts. Thus, culture can be seen as the growth of a group identity fostered by social patterns unique to the group (Li and Karakowsky, 2001).

"Culture is a pattern of learned conduct and results of behavior, whose module elements are shared and spread by the members of a specific society and it's evident that we cannot do away with it (Linton, 1945). Culture is a learned pattern of life-style from generation to generation.

The Concept of Peace

Definition of Peace by (Bankikiza, 2004) submit that peace is both a gift by Divinity and an effort by people to accomplish it, independently and generally which needs constant attempt in linking divided people, drawing people closer, settlement, reconciliation and eliminating hidden anger in humans.

The Concept Peace by (Andersoon, 2004), is the harmonious interaction that cultivate mutually beneficial relationship, intellectual competence and constant dialogue are two important theme addressed by the theory of peace. As a concept, peace is also said to have features or characteristics that include non-violence which indicate the total absence of any physical, emotional, psychological, verbal or societal harm to one-self and other members of the society (Loyd 2012).

The [UN Declaration on a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence](#) contains more detail than needed and was politicized in the process of its adoption. A culture of peace is an integral approach to preventing violence and violent conflicts, and an alternative to the culture of war and violence based on education for peace, the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, respect for human rights, equality between women and men, democratic participation, tolerance, the free flow of information and disarmament. As explained by UNESCO each of these areas of actions has been priorities of the United Nation Since its foundation; what is new is their linkage through the culture of peace and non-violence into a single coherent concept. Galtung describe negative peace as the absence of human violence and war, positive peace as the absence of structural violence (Galtung, 1964).

Using Mediation, Dialogue, Gospel and Negotiation Pattern to Bridge the Gap between Cultism and Peace Building

The process of peace building comes to reality when putting proper mechanisms in place; peace work is mediation, negotiation, and dialogue with a means of moving parties in conflict toward a mutually acceptable outcome. Dialogues in areas affected by conflict are ways of bridging division and bringing communities together to heal divisions. Negotiation is a fundamental skill that is at the heart of most countries and instigating conflict resolution training. The concept of providing education and training on mediation, negotiation, and dialogue for a range of stakeholders including civil society organizations, heads of cult groups, youth and others key actors in conflict settings will play a very vital role in reducing or eradicating cult activities in our society. At the core of the U.S Institution of Peace work is mediation, negotiation, each a means of moving parties in conflict towards a mutually acceptable outcome. Dialogues in areas affected by conflict are ways to bridging divides and bringing communities together to heal divisions (Keith, M. 2023). Through the Community-Based Dialogues for Reconciliation project in the south-south region, the affected community (Akwa - Ibom State) has built the capacity of local leaders in conflict analysis, transitional justice, and dialogue facilitation to look closely and give immediate reports of any cultist activities. The Cross River State Security is now mentoring these individuals and suspected cultist who are from diverse conflict-affected areas in South-South region, a case study of the Recent crisis in a community in Cross River State between the Yakuur and Obubra in which lives and properties were lost but through the process of implementing community dialogues peace building will be instilled, this has led to over 40 cultists renouncing Groups in Calabar Cross River State capital, the repentant youths are mostly student of University of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology in South-South Nigeria (Channels News, Nov 2016).

According to Campbell (2002), the reformed tradition affirms that the preaching and hearing of the Word is one of the “marks” that makes the church what it is and he summarizes that: “where the preaching of the Word is absent, there is no church and violence is term to be high. Most of these cult related incidents take place in communities and villages where youths do not take the Gospel seriously or even pay attention to the Word of God, but if time and chance is created to spread the Gospel then violence will be eradicated in these affected communities.

Conclusion/Recommendations

- In many parts of the world, cultism creates an atmosphere of negative peace because of its footprints in the security market which facilitate arms proliferation. Youth cultism is one of the sources of violence in most Nigerian cities, but the research work has tried to show us possible resolution in tackling cult related activities.
- The violence which manifests in various forms including armed robbery, rape and the taking of hostages is a direct result of prevalent poverty, unemployment, and the high illiteracy rate in the area. This is surprising in a possibly wealthy, major oil-bearing community.
- The poor and low classes of individuals who form the majority of the cult group have a large number of populations and are not only unemployed and illiterate but more importantly, the projections of development are miserable, particularly for the youths. Hence, with shrinking commercial chances leading to rising worry and social discontent, there is a high awareness among young men that membership and participation in the activities of cult groups remain a viable means of improving their social and economic conditions. The violence widespread to cultism therefore must be treated as a social problem, with policies developed that address issues of structural inequality, unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy in our society. Procedure should also focus on firming community controlled social institutions particularly in the light of disintegrating traditional associations and traditional ethics.

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