

Cultism and its Implication on Development: A Case Study of Rivers State from 2003-2019

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Abstract. This work examines the implication of cult activities on the development of Rivers State. The origin of cultism was traced to the cult activities in the various Universities in Nigeria. These cult groups subsequently initiated people who were not students. The politicians who have the unquenchable desires to win election through unconstitutional means sponsored these cult groups to unleash Mayhem as well as to kill political opponents. The proliferation of cultism and its implication on development in Rivers State was located within the context of Marxism conflict analysis, it was argued that the political class at the helms of affairs exercised their authority to maintain their selfish and parochial interest by sponsoring cult groups to eliminate political opponent. After some time, this culminated into multiple crises that have claimed the lives of so many innocent people. The incessant cult clashes and the problems associated with it (Kidnapping, killing, burning of houses etc.) hampered the growth and expansion of business in the state. Again more youths are running away from school because cultism offers quick money. Generally speaking, this has actually affected the development of the state. It was also found out that there is a correlation between cultism and acquisition of wealth. There is also a significant relationship between cultism and political patronage/appointment. It was also discovered that the more the cult activities, the higher the death rate and destruction of economic activities in the state. So many foreign companies and investors relocated to other states in the federation that are more peaceful. It was

therefore recommended that the government should deal decisively on any culprit according to the law without any preference. It was also recommended that the parents should train their children in accordance with the biblical standard.

Keywords: Cultism, Development, Proliferation of arms, the political leaders, violence crimes.

1. Introduction

The past three decades have really witnessed the most horrible and monstrous killing, wanton destruction of properties, and disorganization of the educational system as well as the larger society. David and Oliver (2005) succinctly put that the proliferation of cult groups led to a very hot competition for the available students willing to join. It is believed in cult circles that the more the number of men you have, the more you will dominate your environment. Therefore, membership drive is a very important activity for cult groups.

The numerical strengths of all the cult groups in tertiary institutions in Rivers state is increasing as some students also willingly joined the bandwagon just to feel belong and to be protected within university environment. In the bid to actualise their dominance in their environment, more secondary school students have been confirmed and forcefully initiated into their "Feeder teams". David and Oliver (2005) emphasized that the graduates of these "Feeder

teams" need no extra prodding to become full-fledged cultists on entry into the University.

Ogunbamara (2000) asserts that secret cult activities are kept secrets and their meetings are also carried out at odd hours of the day. There is no public university in Nigeria that is totally free from cultism. Different cult groups are always attacking each other every semester; their constant clashes usually paved way for wanton destruction of property and untimely death of members. It is important to point out that conflicts emanating from cult clashes on the various campuses have really posed serious threat to the students, academic staffs and the non-academic staffs. Beside the ordinary people on campuses, the lives of the cultists are also in great danger, hence some of them abstained from lectures and also find it difficult to meet up their academic activities. This deplorable condition actually affected their academic pursuit and performances.

So many people who were not students have been initiated as members of the various cult groups at one time or the other in Rivers State. In fact, belonging to cult group is now a way of life and a general feature of our society. The focus of the youths have shifted from acquisition of education and meaningful skills that can put food on their table tomorrow to cultism that provided immediate wealth emanating from oil bunkering, arm robbery, kidnapping, assassination, vandalization of oil pipes etc. it is important to point out that these activities have really affected development of the state as wanton destruction of property, incessant killings and shouting as well as kidnapping are happening on daily basis.

The constant terrorization of the people and violent destruction that people that characterized the state, posed severe threats to the people as well as inestimable anxiety. The ugly seen in and frightening condition described above imparted negatively on development and peaceful co-existence in fact, it is indeed reasonable and wise to state that many companies and business men have relocated to other states of the federation that are peaceful and free from cultism. The cultists are so

numerous and it is difficult to identify who cultist is. At present they are about 65% of the youths in Rivers State, they interacted and interrelated on daily basis in their special languages that are difficult to decode by non-members. The cultist employed some of the tactics and modus operandi of the security agencies when carrying out their nefarious and dastardly acts. There is no community in Rivers State that is free from cultists, or that had not been terrorized by cult related activities.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study:

- To examine the causes of cultism in Rivers State.
- To examine the implication of cultism on the development of the state
- To determine cult related activities and violence conflicts
- To proffer solutions to the problems identified.

1.2 Hypotheses

- The more the participation in cult activities, the more the dividend of democracy
- The more the participation in cult activities the more wealth acquired
- The more the participation in cult activities, the more their education are abandoned.
- The more the cult clashes and wanton destruction the less the development of the state.

1.3 Causes of Cultism

Several youths and adults joined cults or got initiated into cult groups because of the following reasons:

- People joined cult because of insecurity on campus and their immediate environment. They are of the opinion that the moment they got initiated, no

- one will be able to molest or intermediate them any longer.
- Others joined cult because of they were forced by the cultists. These people have no option but joined them out of threat.
 - They see it as a process of socialization and fraternization, as they are exposed to people from other tribes, states, Local government and communities.
 - Others joined because of what they intended to gain. To such people, it is the shortest cut to get rich quickly, since it exposes them to arm robbery, kidnapping and illegal oil refining.
 - Some people get initiated because they want to enjoy the dividend of democracy. These youths served as thugs and aids to politicians, and their main duties are to snatch ballot boxes during election, shoot political enemies and unleash all manner of violence so as to achieve their selfish aim. They want to dominate their environment like the Lion of the forest Hence they joined forces with others to intimidate and harass the law abiding citizens so as to attract attention and recognition.

1.4 Definition of Concepts

Cultism: This refers to a group of people whose activities are kept secret and behaved in unconventional manner as well as infringing on the Rights of people.

Violence Crimes: This has to do with dangerous actions that are carried out by cultists, murderers, criminals, criminals that claimed the lives of innocent people as well as destruction of properties.

2. The Evolution of Cultism in Nigeria

Cultism was not known to Nigeria University before 1953. Opuwari (2000) asserts they the emergence of secret cult in Nigeria Universities can be traced back to the early 1950s. In similar vein, David and Oliver (2005) pointed out that the 1953/54 session of the University collage Ibadan, now the University of Ibadan has gone dawn in the annals of history as the session that gave birth to the first campus fraternity in

Nigeria. That was when seven young men in their afro centrism founded the pyrates confraternity (PC). They emphasized that these young men were led by Prof. Wole Soyinka, and other members included the late Raph Opara, Pius Oleghe, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, Nathaniel Oyinola, Olumuyiwa Awe and Ben Egbuchelam.

He emphasized that they were propelled by the zeal to fight what they referred to as Moribund convention, neo colonialism and tribalism and to also defend humanistic ideals while promoting comradeship and Chivalry among members. They used to maintain order in every social gathering and also acted as police. They were guided by what they referred to as the seven rudder blades, and four compass points. These were rules that guided and regulated their behavior. However, their activities were peaceful and orderly until some disgruntled members that were expelled from the organization formed themselves into different cult groups in other to fight the supremacy and dominance nature of the pyrates confraternity on the various campuses. This action led to the emergence of several cult groups such as the buccaneers, Vikings, mafia, Blackaxe, Eiyee, black, Braziers, Daughter of Jezebel, Black berets, K.K.K. Other cult groups that are not so prominent and pronounce are as follows, the dragons, Islands, the Secret sons of Satan, White Angels, the Vipers, Musketeer Fraternity, the Barracudas, Eagle club, Cappa Vendelto etc.

It is also important to state that these cult groups have also initiated students in the secondary schools and youths who are not in the University. Presently, in the various communities in Rivers State and Niger Delta at large, we have countless number of cult groups that constantly terrorized the villages on daily basis. Some of the cult groups operating in the villages are as follows, Deywell, Deygbam, Green Landers, Islanders, Jagaban etc.

These cult groups used sophisticated weapons such as AK 47, Pump action, rifles, various types of pistols, revolvers, acid, dynamites, matches, Axes, Knives etc. when carrying out their operations. Today, there are no public University and public secondary schools

including communities that are devoid of cult groups in Rivers State. This implies that it has really spread like a wild fire or epidemic disease

3. Implication of Cultism Development and Academic Performance

The most collectively and cherished dreams of every individual in the world is to have peace and to live in peace with one another. But it is one of the most difficult task to achieve especially in the 21st century that witnessed several remarkable and outstanding conflicts that caused the death of several millions of people. Others were placed in deployable conditions and perpetual bondage (Deedam, 2013). The incessant monstrous and barbaric killings increased tremendously in the past three decades in Rivers state as a result of cult clashes in both higher institutions and the communities in general.

Presently, cult killings, kidnapping and destruction of houses are common features of our state. No day passes without a gory news and pictures of beheaded and battered corpses lying dawn helplessly in their pool of blood. The various communities in Rivers State are no longer saved for habitation. It is now an obvious fact that so many people especially prominent men and women no longer go to their villages because of the unwholesome and gruesome killings that are going on.

Dagogo (2018) avers that ever since the emergence of these cult groups, the residents of Port Harcourt particularly in Diobu and old Port Harcourt Township areas, have lived under the threat of some of these vicious cult groups, the Icelanders and Greenlanders, and of course, their affiliates, the Deygbam and Deywell. In similar vein Ebiri (2015) posits that incidents of major clashes between rival cult groups, Deywell and Deygbam in the northern part of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local Government Area claimed as many as 16 people in July (2016).

Severally, there were reported cases of cult clashes between rival cult groups, mostly Greenlanders and Icelanders in the southern part of Degema Local Government Area. In Kono-

Boue community in Khana local government Area, a reprisal attack was launched by the Deywell against the Deygbam and all the men in the community chased. In April, 2019 about 23 men were killed in one day while the women were spared. The same scenario was replayed in Zorsogho in the same local government Area by the same group of cultist. This reprisal attack claimed the lives of about 32 young men in one day.

So many sons and daughters of Rivers State have been killed by cult groups, for example, Chief, A.K. Dikibo, Marshall Harry and Hon. Monday Ndo, who was representing Khana constituency two in Rivers State House of Assembly were murdered in their cold blood at different point in time. Several communities in Rivers State have been destroyed and deserted by the villagers at one time or the other communities like Bakana, Ogbakiri, Gwara, Baen, Ke, Ogu, Bolo, Emohua, Omoku, Bille, Buguma, Asarama, Boue, Aluu, Sogho, Kpong, Choba, Ibaa. It is on record that Rivers State had not experienced this high and alarming rate of monstrous killing before the introduction of democratic rule in 1999. Hence, it is strongly believed in several quatres after careful scientific observations, that the cult clashes, conflicts wanton destructions and death were politically motivated. This argument points to the fact that the political leaders in Rivers State hired the services of the various cult groups to unleashed violence as well as intimidating their opponents during election. Sophisticated weapons were bought by the politicians and distributed to these cult groups to silence their opponents.

At every election since 2003, different cult groups used to brandish their guns at the polling units, collation centers and at their various political rallies, without being arrested by the police. The few that were arrested were released few hours, few days or weeks without being tried in a competent court of law.

According to Peterside (2005) the 2003 democratic process exacerbated violence as the people democratic party (POP) deployed its incumbent identities to capture political strongholds outside areas of the party's

influence. Thus idle youths that operated as political thugs and militia groups were recruited because of their fire-powers and were paid heavily for their service thereby transforming violence into commodity, proceed and purchased in the democratic process. It is perhaps in this sense that, Poroma, Kpaa and Abel (2008) postulated that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the hands of non-states actors has been one of their biggest security challenges confronting the state which is capable of throwing the state into anarchy and increase crime and violence.

The proliferation of arms and small weapons among the varying cult groups made life on bearable, people lived constantly in fear, as all the legal and traditionally recognized institutions had been battered, destroyed, threatened and weakened by the cultists. In some communities, the chiefs have been dethroned, while in some other communities the chiefs and their entire council of chief have been reduced to a toothless bull-dog, bench-warmers and puppets. They cannot function or carry out their day to day activities without interference from the cultists. On the other hand, some of the communities are operating without chief, and lawlessness became the order of the day in such communities. Apart from killing wanton destruction and looting of property, some sacred places are no longer respected and reserved for rituals. The thin lines that held the communities together had been destroyed.

Cultism is an agent of destruction and underdevelopment in Rivers State. Several companies and business men ran away from the state because of the high level of insecurity perpetuated by these cult boys. The content kidnapping at Omoku, the kalabari water ways, East west road (Ahoada/Emohua section) and the Taabaa-Opuoko section in Khana local Government Area made businessmen and tourists to run away from Rivers State.

More importantly, the prevailing unemployment and consistent oil bunkering activities attracted so many youths who abandoned their educational career Wabali and Deedam, (2014) posited that many youths who were supposed to be in the school are now in one cult camp or the other so as to make earns meets. In fact more, youths are attracted to join cult because of its economic importance. As youths, they have accessed to huge amount of money as a result of ransom paid to them by the kidnapped relatives. The funds they are generating per day from oil bunkering are also high compared to what education will give them on the long run.

The above explanation shows that cultism has negative implication on peaceful co-existence that was in place from time immemorial, economic activities, educational sector, political sector as well as the agricultural sector. No (body) youth wants to be a farmer or a fisherman because of the high amount of money generated from cultism.

Table 1: Some of the Notable violence attacks unleashed in the various communities in Rivers State from 2003-2019

S/N	Communities L.G.A	Year	Mode of violence	Causalities
1	Port Harcourt	2003	Clashes between Icelanders and Green landers in Diobu.	Properties destroyed, several people injured.
2	Port Harcourt	2005	Ravaging of Port Harcourt Township by cultist (Greenlanders and Icelanders – including their affiliate’s cults Deywell and Deygbam.	Several Properties destroyed while 2 persons died.
3	Port Harcourt	2006	Deywell and Deygbam clashed in Milel Diobu Area.	One young man died.
4	(Obubu) Eleme	2007	Cult clashes	A farm house was burnt down and, and 3 persons were killed.
5	Abua/Odua	Aug. 2009	Cult clash between Greenlanders and Icelanders.	2 persons were killed
6	(Ibaaa) Emohua	July 2012	Clash between Icelanders and Greenlanders	10 persons were killed and properties worth millions destroyed.

7	Egba/Egbema Ndoni	2014	Fought over the supremacy of the area. (Deywell and Deygbam).	12 persons lost their lives.
8	Port Harcourt	2015	Cultist invaded a hostel in Diobu axis of Port Harcourt.	Five persons were killed.
9	Eleme	2015	Rivalry between Deywell and Deygbam.	Five persons killed
10	(Onne) Eleme	2015 Sept.	Clash between Deygbam and Deywell	Three killed
11	Agbonchia Eleme	2015 Sept.	Clash between Deygbam and Deywell	Five killed
12	Ebubu Eleme	2015 Sept.	Cultist chased out the paramount ruler from the community sporadic shooting.	Properties destroyed
13	Ogba/Egbema Ndoni	2015 Feb.	Constant shooting	Eight killed
14	Ogba/Egbema Ndoni	2015 May	Gun battle between the police and cultists	Over 20 persons killed
15	Ogba/Egbema Ndoni	2015 July	Cult clash between Deywell and Deygbam	18 persons killed
16	Ogba/Egbema Ndoni	2015 Sept.	Violence shooting between the cult groups	17 persons killed
17	(Beera) Gokhana	2015 May	Cult related crises	Four persons killed and properties destroyed.
18	Bomu/Leive (Gokhana)	2017	It was masterminded by the antagonism between Deywell and Deygbam	5 persons and killed and properties destroyed
19	Bomu/Leive (Gokhana)	2016	It was also masterminded by the two antagonistic cult groups (Deywell and Deygbam).	8 persons killed, houses destroyed
20	(Yeghe) Gokana	2016	Crisis between Deywell and Deygbam	7 persons killed and properties destroyed
21	(Baen) Khana	2017	Clash over the supremacy of the community	6 persons killed and others injured.
22	Gwara Khana	2018	Clash between Icelanders and Deygbam	5 killed including one promising young man that came for a burial.
23	(Eeken) Khana	2018	Un-identified cult group ravaged the community	6 killed and 7 other injured.
24	(Sogho) Khana	2019 April	Zagaban and Icelanders clash. They shoot Sporadically.	27 youths died
25	(Kono Bove) Khana	2019	Reprisal attack by the Deygbam on the Deywell and all the men of the community.	23 person were killed
26	Nyokwu Khana	2018	Deywell and Deygbam rampaged the community	One notable politician was killed (menezaa)
27	Kpean Khana	2018 24 th Nov.	Deygbam ravaged the community after the burial of Austin Nwokinaka	Killed a medical practitioner and 2 others.
28	Bianu Khana	2018	A group of unidentified group of cult shoots sporadically.	Killed the youth president.
29	Betem Khana	2019	Cult group invaded the community	The youth President and the chief were killed.
30	Luumene Bagha Khana	2018	Clash between Deywell and Deygbam. The Deygbam descended on the Deywell cult at their camp.	The leader of the Greenlanders was killed including other members of his group.
31	Okwali, Taabaa and Nyokuru	13 th June, 2019	Iceland attacked 3 Communities	Killed 7 persons, destroyed houses in 3 communities
32	Luumene Bagha and Opuoku	17 th June 2019	Iceland attacked 2 Communities	Killed 6 persons, destroyed 2 houses in communities

4. Discussion of Findings

Hypotheses one states that the more the participation in cult activities, the more the dividend of democracy, it has been proven and confirmed that cultists who served as political thugs to snatch ballot boxes during election, kill political opponents and unleashed mayhem on the citizens are always and usually compensated by their political godfathers, they bought houses, land, cars for them. Beside the above, some of them, who are educated, were given political appointments, contracts, persona aids, special assistant etc. In fact, in some cases, they benefited the democratic process than the law abiding citizens. The above explanation shows that the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis two, states that the more participation in cult activities, the more wealth acquired. The explanation above indicates that some of the youths who engaged in cultism acquired more wealth than other youths who are not cultists. This is because cultists have accessed to sophisticated weapons that enabled them to engage in kidnapping, arm robbery, assassination and oil bunkering. To them these are literature business that made them to make so much money within a short period of time, while the law abiding citizens wallowed in abject poverty without any meaningful source of livelihood. Based on this explanation, hypothesis two which states that the more participation in cult activities, the more wealth acquired is accepted.

Hypothesis three, states that the more the participation in cult activities, the more their education are abandoned. The discussion above shows that greater proportions of the youths in Rivers State are no longer interested in education. Many of them are dropped-out; they abandoned education and embraced cultism because of its immediate benefits. They are able to acquire wealth in a short period, which education would have given them after so many years of hard work. This action will have negative impact on the development of Rivers State because in the near future, the state will have so many vagabonds, illiterates and criminals who will have nothing to offer toward

the development of the state. Unfortunately, the state will lack the required manpower to turn the wheel of development and progress in the state.

Hypothesis four, states that the more the cult clashes and wanton destruction, the less the development of the state. It has been confirmed that the more the cult clashes, wanton destruction of lives and property, the more development eludes the people. The current level of terrorism perpetuated by the cultists who are sponsored by the selfish politicians forced some companies to fold and relocate to other states that are peaceful. The constant killing and kidnapping of expatriates and the capitalists has detrimental effects on development and the people's livelihood.

Many people were relieved of their employment because of the relocation of some companies, most families are affected, yet the environment is not suitable and convenient for business as a result of insecurity perpetuated by the cultists.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations have been preferred as panacea to the problems associated with cultism and its implication on peace and development:

- The government at various levels should try as much as possible to rise up to the occasion by devising proactive measures to tackle insecurity caused by cultism. All the culprits should be treated in accordance with the law. Issues of preferential treatment nepotism, ethnicity and political affiliates should no longer be considered.
- The citizens should be able to get the law enforcement agencies acquainted with valuable information about their hideouts, camps or residential houses. This will enable the police to work assiduously to arrest the cultists.
- The home has a pivotal role to play in the fight against cultism in the various communities and the schools parents should be able to train their children from infants in the fear of God. Parents

should always put an eye on their children, especially at adolescent and youthful age. Their constant pieces of advance and discussion are very important in the child's moral life.

- The parents should also try as much as possible to check and examine the behavior of some of the friends kept by their children. This important because most youths were influenced by peers to get initiated into cults.
- The religious leaders should take it upon themselves to constantly preach against cultism and its adverse effects. They should make use of the mass media so as to reach everybody.
- The government should re-instate chiefs that were deposed and dethroned by cultists as well as providing adequate security for them.

6. Conclusion

Cult activities that reared their ugly heads in the University has taken a different dimension. Several youths in the secondary schools and the various communities have been initiated into different cult groups. The land scape of River State has been dotted with different cult groups, which constantly posed serious threat to lives and properties.

The statistics provided on table 1.1 above shows that so many persons have lost their lives and properties worth millions of naira destroyed. In fact the incessant killing, shooting, bombing, kidnapping that aggravated into tension and threats forcefully pushed several business men out of the state. Hence, making life unbearable as unemployment jumped to the roof top. So many youths were attracted to join one cult group or the other because of the financial benefits or gains from kidnapping and arm-robbery.

This has really affected the education of most youths who abandoned education for kidnapping and oil bunkering. Cultist activities are alarming and strengthen because evidence shows that they are sponsored by politicians who are regarded to godfathers.

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