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**YOUTH AND CRIME: A STUDY OF RURAL HYBRIDS IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA\***

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**ABSTRACT**

Urban bias strategy as the development policy in developing nations has contributed largely to the problem of rural-urban migrations in these nations. Attention has therefore been focussed, mainly, on the effect of migration to the rural and urban areas. To a large extent, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult for youths – educated in European style with the hope of securing European-style job opportunities – to migrate to the urban areas due to the growing economic crisis and depression since the 1980s – with its effect significantly in urban areas. Consequently, this has led to the emergence of a group of youths we refer to as 'rural hybrids'. This study sets out to inquire into the emergence of this group; investigate their life-style; and ascertain their impact on the rural areas. Using the dis-articulation theory, we examined the emergence of this group. We found out that this group engages in activities considered to be criminal and their way of life is totally contradictory to what the typical rural dwellers expect. As such, they are likely to contribute negatively to the orientation of the younger generation coming after them. On the whole, therefore the rural areas are likely to be significantly affected in the future particularly in the areas of crime and violence.

**INTRODUCTION**

Since the colonial era, the meaning of development to the third world countries has always been 'Eurocentric'. This is couched in the very familiar modernisation theory in the sociology of development and various reasons have been adduced for the currency of this perspective in the Third World. To Roxborough (1979), the reason is the lack of theory to guide the analysis of development in the Third World. Consequently, Western theories were transposed into these societies. For Long (1977), the need to transpose this analytical framework to Third World nations arose due to the re-emergence of thoughts of Sociological thinkers like Spencer, Durkheim, Tonnies, and others who identified societies as 'evolving' from 'traditional' or 'primitive' to 'modern' states.

This latter position informed the creation of European-model urban centres, which manifested in Nigeria through the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1946. Development strategy, then, involved a perpetuation of 'rurality' in some areas and the modeling of certain urban areas by creating slums as different from reservation areas. This kind of educational, health and other welfare services in the urban areas were made more comfortable than those in rural areas. For instance, most secondary schools were built in urban areas such that the rural primary schools leavers have to move to urban areas. More importantly, the educational curriculum requires that on graduating, students will be employed in European-based establishments in the urban centres. This is the pattern that the neo-colonial governments have perpetuated.

It is not surprising, therefore, that geographers and demographers in the study of migration have found out that the pattern of rural-urban migration mostly include male, young, better educated, less risk-averse, and skilled (Todaro, 1973).

Consequently, the governments have been trying to stem that tide of rural-urban migration through the beneficial retention hypothesis. This hypothesis posits that

absence of social welfare facilities and improved agriculture explains the movement of young children to the urban centres. Furthermore, the migrants increase the dependency ratio in the latter and put strain on urban social services. Thus, it is better to create those things that will retain the migrants in the rural areas. It is further believed that when the youths are retained in the rural areas, it will lead to rapid growth in rural areas.

Some researches have however shown that, indeed, the retention of the youths in the villages does not lead to rapid growth (e.g. Seyfrist, C.C., 1986). Furthermore and especially in developing countries, the type of education given in schools do not correspond with available jobs in rural areas. The standard of living in rural areas has continued to deteriorate relative to urban centres. Most importantly, the power structure still favours the latter. Consequently, the desire to migrate among rural youths has continued to increase. The migration pattern is such that, as in Ghana (Caldwell, 1969), areas nearest to the urban areas constitute the bulk of urban migrants in towns. This explains why there are more street-kids of Ogun State origin in Lagos, closely followed by those from Oyo State.

Apart from the phenomenon of street kids, it is also becoming difficult for rural-urban migrants to find relatives to reside with in towns, prior to their getting a job or acquiring skills through apprenticeship. This is as a result of the economic crises and depression in Nigeria. The Structural Adjustment Programme has led to increased rates of unemployment, underemployment and retrenchments in towns thereby making it difficult for urban dwellers to encourage their relatives to migrate to them except as housemaids. This type of job is often perceived as degrading, especially among the Yoruba. The extension of this crisis to Nigeria's semi-urban centres has been confirmed by a recent baseline survey in which the phenomenon of street-kids is becoming a common feature of virtually all the local government headquarters in Oyo State (Isamah et. Al., 1995).

Consequently, it is increasingly becoming clear that some would have been migrants are gradually getting stuck to the rural areas. Coupled with this is the increasing wave to rural crime and violence in rural Nigeria. Is there any linkage between the problem of rural-urban migration and the increasing rural crime and violence in rural Nigeria? Can any relationship be drawn between those who are stuck and the growing crime and violence wave in the rural areas? Do those who are stuck really constitute a group?

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

In the light of the above research questions, the paper sets out to:

- (i) examine the emergence of a group which we may refer to as the 'rural hybrids';
- (ii) investigate the life-style of this emergent group and
- (iii) ascertain their impact on the rural area.

**DISARTICULATION THEORY**

Attempts at analyzing or at explaining development in the Third World countries have been diverse. However, one of the main strands is that of the Neo-Marxist perating on the need to understand the modes of production in such societies. Within this strand is the work of Ake, C. (1981) in which he posited the lack of co-ordination or inter-sectoral integration in planning in African countries.

This lack of co-ordination he referred to as dis-articulation and proceeded to use it to explain development in Africa. Thus, he theorized that a dis-articulated economy is that those parts or sectors are not complementary. Within the African development context this dis-articulation has led to a situation in which investors tend to concentrate on areas where there are support services of access to markets; while government over-concern with foreign exchange for projects has led to the development of a narrow-based economic structure. The manipulation of the economy by the multi-nationals creates further dependence and consequent reinforcement of the dis-articulation.

In this paper, a structural dis-articulation is assumed in Nigeria particularly between the educational sector and the general economy. Here are, the 'received' educational system which is metropolitan oriented and the satellite rural economic structure.

### METHODOLOGY

Ososa community in Odogbolu in Odogbolu Local Government of Ogun State was used as a case study. It is located some few kilometres from Shagamu junction of the Benin-Sagamu express road. The inhabitants are predominantly farmers with some few diversifying into trading.

Three major methods were adopted in the collection of data – direct observation, key informant and in-depth interview. Given the non-availability of statistics on the group in focus, accidental sampling had to be used in the selection of our respondents.

Two areas in the community were identified as the points of convergence for the group under study. These are: the community hall, which is located within the market area and the football field. A total of 30 members of the group were in-depthly interviewed in the two locations. In addition, five elders in the community were interviewed as key informants. The time spent in the community hall and around the football field afforded the researchers the opportunity to make relevant observations on the life-style and pattern of interaction amongst members of the group.

Questions asked solicited information about the emergence of the 'hybrid youths', reasons for the emergence; and the influence of the group on the social life of the town particularly as it relates to crime and the culture of violence. Data analysis was mainly descriptive.

### RESULTS/DISCUSSION

The group is made up of three categories of people having a common experience in the secondary school education. In the majority are those who 'graduated' from secondary schools within the community; those who schooled in the urban areas but have returned to the town with their migrant returnee parents; and those still in the secondary school within the community.

Group members stand out in their mode of dressing, which is principally western – jeans materials, branded T-shirts, dresses with portraits of western film stars or musicians, etc. Their haircut equally reflects their urban orientations. Such styles include 'Karl Lewis', 'punk', 'all-draw-back', 'skull', etc. Respondent footwear equally show western tastes or urban references. Their own style of speaking is quite different from other residents in the community. Particularly, their Ijebu dialects, even for those who are not migrant returnees, are watered down. Members generally show preference for FM radio stations through which they keep abreast with the latest in 'sounds'. Copies of cosmopolitan oriented periodicals were found with some members that they often exchange among themselves.

The emergence of the group in the community is recent and all the key informants agreed that its emergence has brought a great change to the community especially with the phenomenon of 'gangsters'. In the words of a key informant:

These boys move in gangs and they constitute a threat to the peace of the community.

Another informant added:

I call them wanderers ... you can see them here and there in the community, roaming aimlessly.

Members are range between 16-25years, and they are known to exchange visits and have collective decisions particularly in the areas of type and style of dressing. Leadership pattern is also discernable. They are predominantly male.

What then do members do for a living? Generally, members virtually do nothing in terms of vocation. They are mostly dependent on their parents. Some are however known to engage in menial jobs while very few are apprentices. The general lack of concrete economic activity by members of the group has been held responsible for the 'new dimension of stealing' in the community. While the community was once used to the stealing of fowls, goats and rams, there is now a growing incidence of house burglary. A key informant narrated an experience of December 1994 thus:

My own very house was burgled and my father's crown stolen, his gold that I inherited was also stolen ... I saw the burglars ... they were teenagers. They are not older than my children in secondary school.

Several robbery incidents in the community have also been traced to the activities of members of the group. Another example is that involving a gang of five youths which resulted in the death of a prominent Alhaji in the community in April 1995.

But why will this group of people not want to work? From the perspective of the key informants, these boys are 'simply and generally lazy'. 'They are not willing to take that which the community has to offer – farming'. In the words of a key informant:

Our children, after western education ... especially after school certificate examinations don't want to farm. They want neat job, which are not available here.

Another informant said:

Once they enter secondary school they don't want to go to the farm again.

However, these 'neat' jobs are outside the context of this community.

It would therefore appear that members of this group do not have a sense of belonging to the community again given their western training and inclinations. The

outward orientation is reflected in the aspirations of members of the group. Such wishes include 'going to higher institutions', 'going to the city to learn a trade', etc. Unfortunately, they cannot get to the land of their dream' given the current crisis in the country.

One can conclude that the group members are merely living in the community without being part of the community. Some have made attempts at 'trying-out' the city but had to return when things 'became difficult'. A key informant said:

Some of them go to Lagos ... but they return later because they said Lagos is filled up.

Aside from the majority 'roaming and waiting for the city dream', what are the other things that engage the other members? Some claimed to be studying with the hope of 'retaking their papers', while some currently attend one of the Arabic college in the community.

Thus, the life of members generally involve 'lazing' and 'roaming' around the community in groups during the day. In the evening, they congregate in the community's major social centres - the community hall or the football field. The key informants generally hold that such boys, while in such centres, 'smoke heavily' and engage in all sorts of deviant activities including crime. A key informant reported cases of rape and inter-group violence amongst members. In addition, said an informant, various criminal acts are hatched in such centres when members meet. One wonders the sources of their expenses on cigarettes, alcohol, etc., especially when most of them have no jobs?

Members however denied any involvement in criminal acts although they hold that the adult or old members in the community could consider some of their traits and/or acts as 'deviant'. According to a respondent:

They see our ways as wrong ...

It is because they are not as exposed as we are.

As far as the members are concerned, they congregate in such centres to 'relax' and 'socialize' amongst 'friends and colleagues'.

On the question of gangs, members do not see themselves as forming violent gangs although they own-up to occasional disagreements and brawls in such centres.

Observation however revealed that members engage in activities that can be termed deviant not only in the perspective of the elders but also in the 'absolute' terms. Members were seen engaging in such acts as hemp smoking, gambling, excessive alcohol consumption, and harassment of girls/female hawkers, among others. It is equally very common among them to use fowl languages without any remorse.

However, members do not see anything wrong in their ways. Instead, they generally express the desire to get out of the community, first to where they think they 'belong' and secondly, and most importantly, for 'greener pastures'. This is because, as they generally submit, the community cannot meet their needs. According to a respondent:

This community has nothing to offer me ... they are just tying me down.

In the final analysis and in response to the growing violence and crime rates, the community now organise themselves into vigilante groups. Iron gates are now a common feature in the barricade of some streets. Some members of the group complain of harassment from such vigilante guards when returning home during night parties or in the course of their late outings.

## CONCLUSION

The necessity of education in the development of any nation cannot be over-emphasized. In spite of this however, there is need to deeply reflect on the type of education necessary for development. The nature of education as a vehicle for development in Nigeria has always been urban centered. It is expected to uproot the rural dwellers to work or to be integrated into the urban centers (or urban economy). Unfortunately, the experience of the late 70s and early 80s, particularly from the mid-80s upwards, in Nigeria, has hindered the extent to which the urban centre can accommodate the uprooted rural dwellers. Yet the nature of education given to the youths has not re-directed its focus. Consequently, a new group of juvenile delinquents are now being created in the rural areas. This is the group we refer to in this paper as rural hybrids.

From the results above, it can be concluded that the phenomenon is of recent origin. It emerged, given the age of group members, most of whom graduated from secondary school between 1988 - 1991, and also given the responses from key informants, because the youths cannot get the kind of 'neat job' which their western training gave them in schools. To these boys and to a lesser degree, girls, farming is seen as a 'dirty' job. This is a classic case of structural dis-articulation in which the western-modeled education system does not dovetail into the rural economic context.

It is not surprising therefore that the kind of jobs the hybrid group now engage in is generally deviant and particularly criminal. They engage in burglary, farm theft and even sale and consumption of drugs. They organise themselves into gangs and inter-group violence is becoming a common feature in the community. It is also not impossible that these children are often used elsewhere during communal clashes and in periods of political crisis.

As evident from our results, these groups (or gang) commute around the community hall and football field in the evening. Interestingly, these are market centres where female juveniles hawk goods/wares. Thus, rape and harassment are not uncommon. The modeling impact of these gangs on the young male and female hawkers is imperative. In future these gangs are therefore likely to swell in rank, first because these young hawkers are probable recruits and particularly if the present economic and dis-articulated development experience persist.

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