

# Teen killers on the prowl: Tragic rise of Nigeria's child cultists

- A new breed of predators haunts the streets — young, ruthless, armed with death
- How campus cults bled into our streets
- Fears heighten as teen gangs recruit primary school minors
- Psychology of a child cultist

By Olatunji OLOLADE, Associate Editor

**T**HE rain fell like silver tears from a mournful sky on that April night. It slashed across the Lagos street, like the sharp blade that would soon strike. Mojirayo, a weary trader, balanced her life on her back — five-month-old Olade, tucked snugly, safe — or so she thought. As she made her way home from Lagos Island, crossing the shadow of the unfinished bridge, at Ten Cinema in Agege, a teenage boy stepped out of the darkness.

“You Otun, aka Drogba, was barely 14, but his eyes held the hollow gaze of someone who had seen too much, done too much. His hands, coarse from wielding weapons, reached out not for help, but for destruction. His fingers grasped at Mojirayo’s thin wrapper, his intent as cold as the steel fork he carried — its tip grotesquely reshaped into a dagger. He wanted her money, her body, her submission. But what he took first was Olade. Startled, Mojirayo spun on her foot, ducking Otun’s frantic grapple. He was by every means too young to “obtain” (rob) her or get between her thighs. “No see ru e. Afi ti o ba fe ku,” she raled, warning him that she was out of his league and any attempt to rob or rape her would spell his death. Instantly, Otun’s crew emerged from the darkness, increased by her seeming fearlessness.

Undeterred, Otun lunged for Mojirayo, barking at her to surrender her money or lose her life. But she ducked once again, and his hand grazed her bosom, attracting a stinging slap to his face. Now livid, Otun grabbed at his quarry, pulling her close, he swung his left hand blindly at her midriff.

Mojirayo turned and a ringing yelp pierced the night — a soft cry, like that of a bird fluttering for the last time. Otun had lunged for the mother, but instead speared her five-month-old daughter on the left side of her temple.

After the scream, came silence. Mojirayo’s world fractured as her baby’s blood ran down her back, warming her skin and mingling with the rain. Frantic with fear, she frantically undid her *opá* (girdle), and took her baby in her arms.

But the nightmare was not over. Otun and his gang, having the embattled mother into a dingy garage under the bridge. There they made her spread her wrapper in the dirt and set the bleeding child roughly at its edge. They held her firmly in the ground, and took turns on her. Six of them. Mojirayo begged them to let her save her daughter, but they sliced her with blades.

By the time it was all over, the five-month-old had stopped breathing. Her pulse had surrendered to the night. The 22-year-old sprang from the dirt bed in which she was defiled, gathering her wrapper around her, she clutched her child, fleeing through the streets, in search of a clinic. The nearest clinic she stumbled into could do nothing. “Brought in dead,” the resident doctor said. But her child had been dead long before — dead in a city that nurtured boys into beasts.

## An Infant’s Final Moments

There is no gory agony and horror. As the sharpened fork pierced the soft, vulnerable temple of her head, the delicate bone structure gave way to the violent intrusion. The temple, a region where the skull is thinner and softer in infants, houses vital blood vessels, nerves, and parts of the brain crucial for life.

At such a tender age, Olade’s skull had not yet fully ossified, making her particularly susceptible to catastrophic injury. From a medical perspective, the forceful penetration of the fork would have caused immediate, severe trauma. The sharp tines tore through the soft tissue of the scalp, broke through the fragile skull, and penetrated the brain’s protective membranes. This region of the brain, rich with blood vessels, bled profusely, leading to acute intracranial hemorrhage. The resulting pressure would have caused her brain to swell rapidly, compressing vital structures that control her breathing and heartbeat, according to clinical pathologist, Tola Dada.

Olade’s agony must have been unimaginable. The pain from the initial stab and the ensuing trauma of the bleeding shockwaves of agony through her fragile frame. As the fork dug deeper into her brain, the nerves responsible for sensation and movement would have misfired in chaotic signals, possibly causing her body to jerk involuntarily. Her eyes, filled with confusion and terror, reflected her uncom-



Primary class pupils of Egan Community School arrested by the Police soon after their recruitment into the Awawa Boys.

able distress as the life drained out of her. In those final moments, Olade struggled for breath as the brain’s swelling pressed down on her brainstem, the control centre for basic life functions. Her pulse grew weaker, her vision fading as consciousness slipped away. But the excruciating pain persisted, ebbing only as her fragile body gave in to the overwhelming trauma. Her death was not swift; it was a tragic, brutal end to a life that had just begun. And the child culprit was 14-year-old Otun.

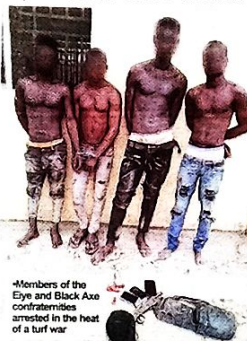
## The Making of a Teen Killer

Peter Otun wasn’t born a monster perhaps. He was once a boy whose fingers danced across a game console, choosing Didier Drogba as his player of choice in Pro Evolution Soccer as he posted for honour and street acclaim across several game centres in Agege. From Olukosi, Agbobotkoya to Old Oke Oba, Otun flexed his depth winning some and losing

some. What his flatfoot didn’t permit him on the pitch at Ilé Pato, Oke Koto, he sought to achieve with his dexterous fingers. He loved football. But the streets of Agege shaped him into something else — something cruel, something cold.

At 14, Otun had already tasted the bitter fruit of survival. He ran with Awawa Boys, a dreaded gang prowling the streets of Mulero, Oke Koto, Powerline, Orile-Agege, and Agbobotkoya, among others. Shirtless, his hair twisted into dreadlocks, he swaggered down alleys with a sharpened fork, a battle-axe, and sometimes, a gun. He was a terror to commuters, traders, even children his own age.

But even in this cutthroat existence, there were rules. Otun’s attack on Mojirayo and the death of her child sent shockwaves through the gang. Some of his own, more empathetic than others, swore ven-



Members of the Eye and Black Axe confraternities arrested in the heat of a turf war

geance. But within weeks, the conflict died down. Blood, they said, had to be forgotten for the sake of unity. And so, Mojirayo’s grief was swallowed by the larger beast — gang loyalty.

Otun’s fate was sealed. His hunger for violence led him deeper into the darkness of confraternity wars. In 2021, Otun relocated to Ilorin, in Ogun State following repeated attempts to “drop” (execute) him by rival cult groups. In Ilorin, he found it difficult to assert himself amid fiercer and presumably deadlier supremacy battles and turf wars between the Supreme Eye Confraternity (SEC) and Black Axe Confraternity. The tussle was more intense within his coterie domicile. It was deadlier in Sango Ota, Arigbajo, Iyana Illogbo, Onihale, Owode, Ika, Sagamu, Abokuta, Ibeju Ode, and other areas of Ogun.

Otun found it difficult to accept his reduction to a “weaking.” He was a General without an army. Thus he resorted to petty crime, occasionally turning himself, as an “external hitman” to cult groups seeking an unknown face to carry out his on rivals. He became an outsider, drifting between Lagos and Ogun, offering his services to those who sought a blade without a conscience.

But no one escapes forever. In 2022, at just 17, Otun’s journey ended in Ilorin. Ogun State, he was “fired” by a hit squad led by his own, all the way from Ilesha Town, Lagos, to a hotel en route to Ife. He was beheaded, and mutilated. His hands and feet were severed, a macabre tradition meant to prevent his spirit from seeking revenge, if summoned by his group. Otun was hastily buried in a shallow grave. His friends who scamped away in the heat of his execution, returned in a rickety cab to collect his remains. The 17-year-old boy whose favourite pastime was to channel the footballer’s glory on the PlayStation console — now rests in an unmarked grave, forgotten by all.

**Zinachukwu Ugwu: Another Baby, Another Loss**  
A world away, in Delta State, four-year-old Zinachukwu Ugwu lay tucked in her bed. The night was calm, her dreams untainted by the horrors that lurked outside. But the quiet would not last. Nobody could tell why Nweke Chukwuemeka, a self-confessed member of the Vikings Confraternity, intruded Ugwu’s room. Nobody knows if his feud was with someone else but in the chaos of the moment, he chose her — just as Otun had chosen Olade.

The strike was brutal and swift as Chukwuemeka — all the little girl’s blood — an act of sheer horror that tore through her tender flesh. From a medical perspective, slitting the throat of a four-year-old leads to immediate and catastrophic damage as the sharp blade severs the windpipe, blood vessels, and likely the carotid artery or jugular vein — major conduits for blood between the heart and brain. This results in massive blood loss, overwhelming her fragile body almost instantly.

The sensation of having her airway obstructed would have caused her to instinctively gasp, yet the wound would make it impossible for her to draw breath. “She died instantly,” said Tola Dada, a clinical pathologist. The medical realities of Ugwu’s death indicates a merciless end to a young girl, an act of unimaginable cruelty that robbed the four-year-old of a future she couldn’t live to see. While confessing to his crime, Chukwuemeka revealed that he killed the four-year-old under the influence of Indian hemp, medium-plethman, locally known as “Mkpuru-mimiri,” and an alcoholic drink that he earlier consumed.



Four underage girls and nine boys rescued from a cult initiation in Lagos



Some of the weapons seized by the Police from Lagos cultists

No thanks to him, Ugwu, once full of life, became just another casualty in a war that cared nothing for age, innocence, or the future. Her killer, though older and more seasoned in the art of violence, was a product of the same machine that had forged Otun. A system where children are fed into the gears of brutality and emerge as guerrilla killers with a twisted sense of allegiance to a violent confraternity.

## The Rise of the Confraternity Wars

From Lagos to Ogun, Edo to Kwara, Plateau to Taraba, Benue to Delta, the streets pulsate with bloodcurdling battle cries of rival confraternities — Buccaneers, Supreme Eye Confraternity, Black Axe, The Jurets, Maphites, Awawa, One Million Boys to mention a few.

What began in the universities as a misguided attempt at brotherhood has spilled into the neighbourhoods, claiming children as its most tragic recruits.

In Lagos, for instance, residents have suffered the proliferation of fearful gangs and cult groups, since the Kaikain gang emerged in Isale Eko — notable for serial crimes including rape, mobile phone theft, pick-pocketing and armed robbery. The leader of the group, “Surtutu,” allegedly relocated from the neighbourhood after he was shot.

And residents of Agbakinle will not forget in a hurry, their ordeal in the hands of One Million Boys (OMB), a gang of hoodlums that terrorised the area. At inception, precisely 20 boys in Agbakinle united to form the group, with the original intent to fight perceived injustices synergised with the township. But as the group grew in strength, it was hijacked by criminal elements and turned into terror gang

responsible for serial robbery and rape of defenceless Lagosians.

Before they invaded any community or street, the OMB usually wrote a letter to inform the residents, sending it through a courier, usually a runner, to the head of that street or the landlord association. And when they visit, they rob from one house to the other, raping young girls and even married women.

Aside from the Kaikain Gang and One Million Boys, several other gangs have since taken over the streets of southern Nigeria to be precise. Many teenagers are recruited into confraternities that were hitherto restricted to the tertiary institutions.

## Mind Games and Turf Wars Spill to Social Platforms

A curious dimension to the crisis is the cult groups’ newfound penchant for posting pictures of rival cult members executed by them on social media. In 2021, Victor Nzubechukwu, a self-confessed member of the Supreme Vikings Confraternity connived with other members of his group to decapitate one Ugochukwu Igboia, a member of rival Black Axe Confraternity. Igboia was beheaded with the murder filmed and circulated on the social media.

Nzubechukwu, a student of the Nigeria Maritime Academy, Oron, Cross River State, revealed how they lured Igboia to a place where they shot and beheaded him. They cut off the victim’s legs, arms and private part and took them to a native doctor in Abia State village, in Abia State, to prepare some charms meant to give them protection from the police and rival cults, he said.

Four months ago, an alleged member of SEC was killed and beheaded during a clash with rival Black Axe in the Iko area of Ogun State. Soon, a rival attendant at a filling station in Iko, was reportedly killed in a reprisal attack. His assailants hung his head on the Iko bridge and made away with his body. Seen was killed to avenge SEC’s killing of a Black Axe leader, Adisa. The latter’s hand was chopped off and a picture of it was subsequently posted on social media.

Popular social platform, TikTok, has become the go-to platform for several cult groups who use it to showcase their activities including their recent killings of rival cult members, initiation parties, reuniting of slain members, and issuance of threat to rival confraternities — more worrisome is their penchant for interviewing members of rival cult groups before murdering them in cold blood.

The consequences of such brazen display of violence and bestiality are better imagined. Fresh rain gangs have sprung through cracks in the socio-moral and cultural foundations and the old gangs have morphed into more organised cults, reminiscent of doleful campus confraternities.

There are the Fashy Boys, Enko Boys, Akala Boys, Ilesha Boys, Awala Boys, Shuta Boys, Noka Boys, No Salu Boys, One Hour Boys, Oshodi Boys, No Many Boys, Agada Boys, Night Cadet, Black Scorpion, Alama Boys, Omo Kasari Confraternity, Para Gang Confraternity (mainly teenage girls), Japa Boys and the Awawa Boys.

The Awawa Boys, which Otun’s six-man gang belonged to, started innocently as a group of minors begging people for money but eventually metamorphosed into a gang of four-some teenage cultists and armed robbers terrorising Agege, Iyana-Ipaja, Shomolu, Ibeju, Ikorodu, Badagry, Dapeju, Ogbia, Iko-Ipaja, Abule-Egba, Iko-Ipaja, Agege, Ibeju, Ota, Ibeju, Alimosho, Agege, Ibeju, Alimosho and Alimosho Villages.

Though predominantly a cult of boys, females including prepubescent girls are recruited into the gang. An Awawa Boy can be identified by a drippy forehead tattoo beside the

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