



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Contributions of BCS to Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage and Transnational Culture in Cross River State

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ABSTRACT

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The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star's annual pilgrimage to Biakpan, in Cross River State's Biase Local Government Area, is seen as a spiritual rejuvenation exercise. This event is seen by adherents of BCS as being exceedingly efficacious as such, the effort is well valued, which they believe draws many people to the sacred site. The religious exercise, however seen as a responsibility, has had a significant impact on Cross River State and Nigeria's tourism sectors. The practice's direct and indirect effects on tourism growth in the area explain why this research is necessitated. Transnational culture is also perceived in the research site due to migration and visitation of pilgrims and religious tourists. Tourism activities observed in the research site includes lodging, transportation, food, memorabilia, and religious items like sacred water, consecrated oil, ceremonial cloths, kerchiefs, crucifixes, prayer beads, head coverings, ceremonial robes, meat substitutes, and spiritual chimes. The above factors attract pilgrims and tourists, boosting the neighbourhood, Cross River State, and Nigeria's economies. The study employed a qualitative method involving the use of ethnography, focus groups, direct observations, in-depth interviews and content analysis of relevance materials. The collected materials were thematically analysed using descriptive analysis. The study found that BCS pilgrimage activities in the region under consideration have economic, social, spiritual, and international cultural benefits. The study suggests that BCS activity has significant ramifications for religious tourism in the research region and nationwide. The research suggests that Cross River State government should promote BCS tourism and pilgrimage religious practises as much as the Calabar Carnival. The annual event has a significant impact on the state's tourist sector's earnings, which could boost tourism in the locality and nation. The study suggests replicating the outcomes in other emerging economies, where religious tourism programmes have been demonstrated to enhance interest and visitation.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines how BCS attracts tourists, pilgrims, and worldwide communities to Cross River State. The religious rituals of BCS in Cross River State have contributed to the global pilgrimage revival, according to Digance (2003; 2006). The state of Cross River has seen a significant increase in pilgrimage and tourism. The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (BCS) world headquarters attracts members from around the world

owing to its religious rites, beliefs, and practises. Hamman, Urry, and Shieller (2006) consider pilgrimage as population movement. According to them, sacred pilgrimages affect politics, economy, society, and culture. This practise may also influence global trade and public health.

BCS adherents visit its founder's birthplace in southern Cross River State in accordance with its beliefs and traditions. This visit is to the Biakpan community in Cross River State's Biase LGA. A stream at this site is said to have amazing medicinal properties by BCS adherents. Thus, members are instructed to attend the annual religious rite, which serves a dual purpose to celebrates the founder's nativity and pilgrimage. Kaelber (2006), Rinchede (1992), and FCCI (2019) argue that religious travel was among the earliest and most common forms of travel. Such excursions have led to faith-oriented tourism, also known as pilgrimage tourism, spiritual tourism, and faith tourism, according to Noga Collins (2018). BCS's pilgrimage and tourism efforts have impacted Biakpan, Cross River State, and Nigeria. The religious event above has promoted tourism, economic growth, social cohesion, wealth development, and cross-cultural interchange in Nigeria and the state.

Santo (2011) stressed the importance of religious tourism, which includes pilgrimage, processions, visits to sacred sites (such as shrines, temples, churches, and natural environments), patron saint visits, spiritual retreats, religious or spiritual seminars, and other events that emphasise religiosity in tourist destinations. The BCS pilgrimage tourism initiative features the Holy Stream, a natural attraction said to heal many illnesses. The revered area attracts travellers from throughout the world, resulting in a spike of visitors. Gravinn and Raj (2018) state that commercialising sacred goods like relics and sacramental materials including anointing water, emblems, oil, and handkerchiefs is very popular scenario at sacred sites. Handrana (2020) and Lee (2021) define religious tourism as visiting a sacred destination to deepen one's spirituality while having fun. According to Di Giovine and Elsner (2015), pilgrimage sites are often associated with sacred figures, historical places related to saints or prophets, apparition sites, buildings that suggest divine intervention, or god images that manifest themselves to pilgrims.

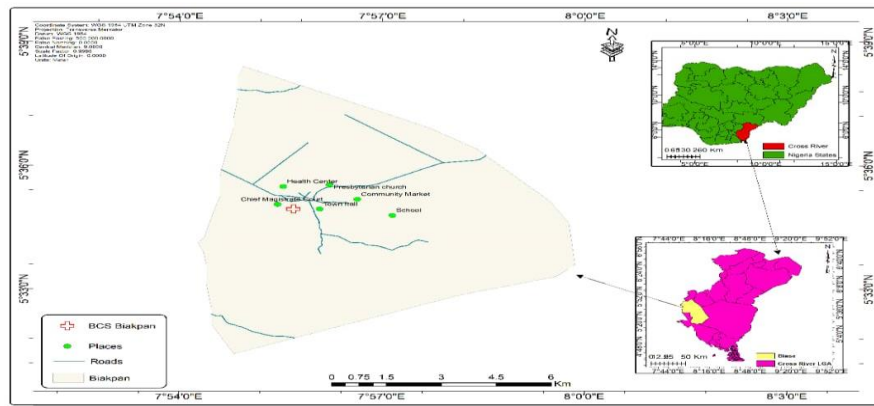
The resemblance between the observed impact of religious tourism and pilgrimage on Cross River State and the findings proposed by Nolan and Nolan (1998), as cited in Mcgettingan's (2003) research, is noteworthy. According to their claim, European Christian pilgrimage sites have three main effects, which include serving as sacred places for pilgrims, attracting religious tourists, and hosting religious celebrations. They say European Christian pilgrimage sites serve as hallowed places for pilgrims, attract religious visitors, and hold religious events. Gravin and Razaq (2017) state that religious places offer religious services, musical events, and secular visitor facilities like museums and treasuries in their ancient buildings. The BCS has acknowledged the impact of religious pilgrimage, tourism, and transnational culture in Cross River State. Thus, this research emphasizes BCS contributes to that understanding.

The BCS season of religious pilgrimage allows people to live a sanctified life, reconcile with peers, and reconnect with their spirituality through meditation (Murat Kocyigit, 2016). Mintel's (2012) research proposes expanding religious pilgrimage to incorporate a variety of activities during the journey such as, meditation, spiritual purification, reconciliation, and purity. Many BCS devotees say this spiritual exercise helps them grow, thus they undertake it annually. They believe that attracting large crowds to this religious ceremony could boost tourism in the state and Nigeria as a whole. Nyaupane, Timothy, and Paudel (2015) found that religious site visitors usually travel with families or groups. The authors also found that these outings are seasonal and affected by weather, holidays, rituals, and work.

Study Area

Biakpan is situated in the Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State. Biase is situated in the central region of the State and is one of the Local Government Areas that constitutes the aforementioned region. The community of Biakpan is situated in the Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, and is positioned at a longitude of 7 degrees, 59 minutes, and 40 seconds east of the equator. The geographical boundaries of the community are demarcated by Etono central to the north, Ukwa-Ibom to the south, ohafia

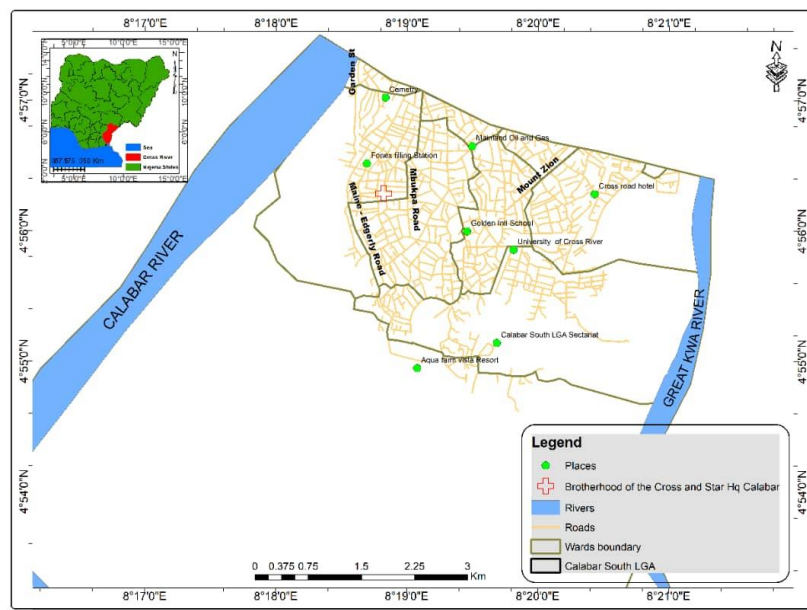
community in Abia State to the west, and Cross River State to the east, which is located approximately 83km away from Calabar, the capital of Cross River State (Ebin, et al 2017).



MAP OF NIGERIA AND MAP OF CROSS RIVER STATE SHOWING THE LOCATION OF BIAKPAN THE RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE SITES

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA, 2023



MAP SHOWING BCS HEAD QUARTER

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE

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METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative method, involving the use of ethnographic processes and was supplemented by focus group discussions, direct observations, in-depth interviews and contents analysis. The data that was gathered was subjected to thematic analysis, which involved the use of descriptive techniques. The research gathered information from the subjects through diverse techniques such as firsthand observation, comprehensive interviews, and group discussions. The research entailed the deliberate choice of a sample comprising fifty (50) individuals. The study's participants were selected from two distinct locations: the BCS universal headquarters, located at 34 Ambo Street Mbukpa, Calabar South,

Cross River State, and the pilgrimage site Biakpan in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State. The criteria for selection were founded on the respondents' expertise and exhibited understanding of the subject matter being examined. The research employed semi-structured interview schedules to facilitate interviews with various participants, including members, pilgrims, tourism officials and the indigenes traders as well as community members.

The research employed direct observation methodologies at both sites to gather information on the tourism process, pilgrimage practises, and transnational cultural elements of the religious ritual. The research carried out two focus group discussions in specific locations with the aim of obtaining perspectives from commercial vendors concerning the impact of BCS's religious tourism, pilgrimage, and transnational culture on the area. Furthermore, the researchers conducted interviews with individuals who took part in the BCS pilgrimage to document their primary experiences. Thematic analysis was conducted on the gathered data utilising descriptive analysis techniques. The methodology employed involved providing extensive explanations of the results, in accordance with the suggestion put forth by Dey (1993), in order to imbue them with significance.

Aims of the Study

- The objective of this study is to examine the influence of the Brotherhood of the Cross and State religious pilgrimage to Biakpan on the tourism sector of Cross River State and Nigeria in general.
- The objective of this study is to document the capacity of BCS religious tourism in contributing to the transnational culture of the research area and Nigeria.
- The primary objective of this essay is to reinforce the notion that BCS represents a religious organisation that transcends national and cultural boundaries. The major concern of BCS is centred on cultural negotiation, redefining citizenship, and establishing a global spiritual identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In his publication titled "Religion and Tourism," Stausberg (2011) proposed a framework for analysing the interrelationships between religion and tourism from the perspective of religious studies. The speaker argued that although the current interpretation of the term "pilgrim" refers to a person who undertakes a voyage to a sacred location or another religious endpoint, its etymological roots in Latin, peregrines, allow for more extensive connotations, such as the exploration of an unknown or non-indigenous individual. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the term "tourist" has its origins in the Latin word "tornus," which refers to a person who undertakes a circular journey, usually for recreational reasons, and ultimately returns to the starting point. According to Smith's (1992) and Carla et al (2023) proposition, the conventional differentiation between pilgrims who embark on a spiritual quest and tourists who undertake a recreational trip conceals the fundamental incentives of travellers. The focus of this study pertains to the religious travel and pilgrimage undertaken by the BCS.

The BCS denotes a Neo-Pentecostal faction in Nigeria, and its yearly pilgrimage activity has engendered a noteworthy economic influence on Cross River State. The objective of this research is to assess the degree to which this particular movement has facilitated the expansion of both the state and the nation of Nigeria. According to Bello and Bello's (2017) assertion, Pentecostalism is playing a significant role in the advancement of religious events and tourism in Nigeria. The prevalence of evangelical events, including conferences, seminars, and festivals held across various regions of the nation, serves as a clear indication of this phenomenon. The objective of the current investigation is to underscore the efficacy of BCS, a Neo-Pentecostal entity, in advancing tourism in the Cross River State locality and augmenting the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation.

Sharman (2013) posits that religious tourism, despite being commonly associated with spiritual quests and individual introspection, has historically been closely linked with economic benefits and secular interests. As per the author's assertion, religious sites have undergone modifications to accommodate the requirements of contemporary visitors. More so, Dorathy Lane (2023) opined that the modifications encompass the procurement of amenities such as parking lots, economical air travel, and bus transportation, in addition to the arrangement of food services and lodging options for both pilgrims and visitors. Notwithstanding these adaptations, the spiritual significance of these sites has been conserved. The latter, referring to religious and cultural tourism, also serve as a catalyst for the consumption of tourist goods and services such as souvenirs, traditional cuisine, artisanal products, and travel-related businesses such as tour operators and agencies. According to Trono's (2017) assertion, there has been an increase in promotional endeavours and cultural occurrences, including concerts, festivals, and shows. The aforementioned modifications, which are in part due to the socio-cultural evolution of the typical tourist, have led to a substantial restructuring of the affected regions, resulting in socio-economic and environmental consequences.

Hughes et al. (2013) posit that the incorporation of faith travel can augment the delivery of services and commodities to accommodate a heterogeneous range of tourists, consequently ameliorating the standard of living and overall quality of life of indigenous populations. The aforementioned assertion presents significant proof that the BCS pilgrimage and religious tourism programme is instrumental in promoting the progress of the Biakpan region in Biase L.G.A., Cross River State, as well as the entire nation of Nigeria. According to Huang's (2011), Miriana Oliveira and Goretti Silvia (2023) argument, the economic potential of faith tourism generates novel business ventures that are consistent with the goals of religious tourism in BCS, thereby leading to an enhancement of the regional economy. Huang argues that the participation of a significant proportion of tourists in religious rituals has the capacity to stimulate economic development within the community. Idris (2019) asserts that the growth in the quantity of tourists has prompted the need for the augmentation of infrastructure at diverse holy sites and destinations to meet the escalating requirements of sightseers. In response to the pressing need for infrastructure development, BCS has recently procured a fleet of opulent buses to facilitate the transportation of pilgrims to the revered pilgrimage destination.

BCS has played a noteworthy role in the increase of population in Cross River State, Nigeria in recent years. As a result, there has been a deliberate increase in the state's tourism industry. The yearly religious ceremony of the organisation is attended with enthusiasm by its members, associates, kin, advocates, and potential adherents. It is noteworthy that individuals hailing from diverse regions across the world adhere to a rigorous schedule concerning the annual observance of the pilgrimage. This occasion serves a twofold objective, operating as a convention and a tribute to the originator of BCS, while also functioning as a religious practise that entails a pilgrimage to the venerated stream. This event is commonly perceived as a momentous occurrence in the annals of history, and it is frequently accompanied by a substantial assemblage of individuals. The religious practise under consideration encompasses a variety of associated occurrences, including rituals, conventions, celebrations, seclusions, proselytising endeavours, awakenings, and other undertakings that are orchestrated by heterogeneous factions, comprising both the indigenous and non-native constituents. The success of the aforementioned event is contingent upon the substantial assistance provided by hospitality, tourism, and travel agencies, which are tasked with accommodating the varied travel needs of both international attendees and BCS constituents.

This particular service encompasses a range of provisions including accommodations, transportation, sustenance, beverages, and religious paraphernalia and insignia. The evident correlation between religion and pilgrimage and tourism studies is a closely associated topic. To assert that religion and tourism are separate indicators would be an inadequate characterization. As per academic sources, the majority of religions integrate the custom of pilgrimage and travel, thus establishing equivalence between the two concepts. According to Rot, Mikinac, and Bogdan (2014), pilgrimage is a widespread practise observed in

various religions. The inclusion of pilgrimage in religious activities results in religion becoming an unintentional participant in the tourism industry, this assertion is also corroborated by Pedro Ricardo and Coelho de Azevedo (2023). Scholars such as Hyde and Harman (2011), Kaelber (2006), Dora (2012), Okokwo and Eyisi (2020), and Nair and Baby (2022) have advanced the notion that religion plays a crucial role in driving tourism. The present study posits that the annual pilgrimage celebration organised by BCS attracts a substantial number of pilgrims, which in turn, has a noteworthy impact on the economy of Nigeria. According to Fleischer's (2003) proposal, income is produced by the transformation of expenditure. This involves considering the wages earned from the output of four subsectors that provide services related to tourism, specifically lodging and accommodation, food services, personal service, and retail trade. The inclusion of financial contributions from individual pilgrims by tourism agencies has prompted apprehension regarding specific procurement practises during the pilgrimage activity. Consequently, there has been a rise in the monetary obligation for both native and non-native pilgrims to enable the performance of the religious ritual. Felsenstein and Fleischer (2003) conducted research in this area of investigation. According to their perspective, documenting expenses represents a crucial preliminary step towards assessing the event's local economic impact. The principal determinant of the proliferation of local commodities is the modification in local public and private income that can be attributed to the act of coordinating an event.

The BCS pilgrimage holds considerable economic importance, given that people from diverse regions of the world journey to Nigeria to participate in the event, leading to a substantial boost in the nation's gross domestic product. Park (1994) and Pourtaheri et al. (2012) have underscored the importance of religious events, specifically pilgrimages, in religious hubs such as Mecca (Saudi Arabia), Jerusalem (Israel), Loretto (Italy), Lourdes (France), and Sabarimala Ayodhya (India). Karar (2010) expounded on the importance of religious tourism in Iran, emphasising its capacity to enhance the economic circumstances of rural areas through religious tourism. According to Pourtaheri et al's (2012) argument, the practise of religious tourism has the potential to bolster local economies by fostering social and economic ties between rural households and tourists. This underscores the importance of religious tourism as a driver of economic development. According to Mu et al. (2007), Dengfeng, a city in China, draws in roughly 3.2 million tourists on a yearly basis, with the majority of these individuals, approximately 81%, being pilgrims who visit the Shaolin Temple or the Zhongyue Temple, both of which hold significant religious importance in Taoism. This exercise exerts an influence on the socio-economic framework of the community. According to Mbanefo's (2016) research, the economic importance of tourism and religious tourism in Nigeria was highlighted through the revelation that the country welcomed a total of 4037,808 visitors in 2013. Additionally, the financial equilibrium for the aforementioned year was ascertained to be 469.47 million, exclusively derived from religious tourism. A certain proportion of the aforementioned phenomenon of religious tourism can be attributed to the arrival of pilgrims who travel to the BCS for the yearly religious pilgrimage. This statement attests to the noteworthy impact of the BCS on the economic progress of Cross River State and Nigeria in its entirety.

According to Mbanefo's (2016) analysis of the 2015 report by the World Travel and Tourism Council, the tourism sector had a direct impact on the Nigerian economy, contributing 1,560.2 billion Nigerian currency to the GDP in 2014, representing 1.7% of the GDP. Furthermore, the sector created a total of 883,500 employment positions. According to Mbanefo's statistical analysis, the pilgrimage and tourism activities related to BCS make a noteworthy contribution to the socio-economic progress of both Cross River State and Nigeria. Thus, it can be deduced that the religious pilgrimage and tourism initiatives undertaken by BCS have yielded substantial benefits for the tourism industry of both the state and the country. The BCS faith tourism initiative is playing a pivotal role in fostering substantial expansion of Nigeria's tourism sector and economies.

It is essential to recognise that the discussion surrounding religious travel, pilgrimage, and tourism is incomplete without taking into account the spiritual motivation that drives the practise. The sacred location is commonly recognised for its ability to facilitate extraordinary events, cleansing, and rejuvenation of both the body and soul (Snezana Brumec, 2023). The observation of this factor holds significant importance as it plays a pivotal role in shaping the authentic inclination towards participating in religious pilgrimage rather

than religious tourism. As per the aforementioned, Kolyigit (2016) asserted that religious tourism aims to rejuvenate the spiritual realm of the participants.

It is noteworthy to consider that a significant number of religions are characterised by the custom of embarking on pilgrimages to holy sites and participating in diverse forms of travel. The participation of BCS in religious tourism and pilgrimage exemplifies the potential for African Christianity to attain parity with orthodox or mainline Christianity in the context of religious pilgrimage. The organisation places a high priority on presenting itself as a global embodiment of African Christianity. According to the organisation, the pilgrimage site exhibits both therapeutic and exceptional properties. Moreover, the website operates as a medium for showcasing African spirituality, with the aim that individuals from diverse regions of the world will access it. According to Rot, Mikinac and Bogdan (2014), pilgrimage is a widely observed ritual in various religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Shintoism. The authors further elaborated on the notion that sacred sites are present in all religions.

People with varied cultural backgrounds participate in excursions to the religious, spiritual, and holy locations of the BCS. The involvement of this particular demographic in such pursuits contributes to the enhancement of cultural diversity, cultural identity, and transnational culture. The aforementioned phenomenon can be explained by the yearly influx of tourists from various geographical regions who bring with them a variety of cultural artefacts such as food, clothing, attitudes, personalities, and dialects. The discipline of transnational culture is being introduced. According to Koeyigit's (2016) assertion, various factors have an influence on the flow of tourists to countries or vacation spots. The characteristics of these movements are dependent on a range of geographical factors, including but not limited to weather patterns, land features, religious and cultural characteristics, and the availability of resources. Hannam, Sheller, and Urry (2006) have provided an extensive analysis of the significant political, economic, social, and cultural implications associated with religious tourism and pilgrimage. The authors have underscored the capacity of these endeavours to impact worldwide commerce and public health. As per their claim, pilgrimage is considered a significant and noteworthy topic owing to its vast territorial influence and magnitude. Akhata and Kreitman (2015) and Franciszek Mroz et al (2023) have posited that a relationship exists between religion and transnational movement, thus augmenting the discussion on transnational concerns in this study. Transnational concerns encompass the mobility and interplay of individuals across diverse geographical boundaries, whereas religion pertains to the propagation of its tenets and the interactions of individuals across multiple locations. The objective of this research is to examine the role of tourism and pilgrimage undertakings in the BCS industry towards the cross-border cultural development of Cross River State, located in Nigeria.

Contributions of BCS to Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage in Cross River State

According to the tourism bureau of Cross River State, the revenue generated from tourism activities within the state is not solely attributed to the Cross River State's "Calabar Carnival". Rather, it is also derived from the influx of tourists and pilgrims who visit the state, as well as the pilgrimage experience, which is primarily facilitated by the religious procession organised by the BCS. The aforementioned comparison provides corroboration for the contentions posited by Nicolaides and Grobler (2017) that tourism is often scrutinised as an expression of human conduct, thereby warranting an inquiry into the destinations that individuals frequent and the motives that underlie their visits. Furthermore, the marketing and promotion of tourism are widely regarded as pivotal factors in achieving prosperous tourism expansion. The tourism industry has experienced a notable surge in both domestic and international travel, attributed to various factors such as religious and spiritual motivations.

The state tourism bureau has released a report detailing its annual revenue generated exclusively from tourism, with the majority of the credit going to the BCS's endeavours. Based on statistical data, the total revenue generated by tourism is projected to be 180 million naira, with a significant proportion of this amount being attributed to the tourist experiences offered by BCS pilgrims. The data highlights that approximately 80% of the aforementioned revenue is attributed to pilgrims originating from the BCS. As per Berhanu's (2018) assertion, the tourism industry is inherently seasonal, characterised by fluctuations in tourist traffic, with peaks and troughs occurring at different times. The cyclical nature of the industry,

characterised by alternating periods of low and high demand, presents both prospects and obstacles. This exemplifies the significance of tourism for a particular location or state. BCS reports that the present study solely focuses on the affirmative impacts of religious tourism in Cross River State, despite Berhanu's observations of both favourable and unfavourable encounters.

Furthermore, it has been observed by the Calabar Airport that the annual convention and pilgrimage of the BCS has resulted in a rapid surge in the population influx of the state, exceeding the established standard rate of one to nine (1/9%). This study aims to establish a correlation between the annual BCS religious festival/pilgrimage and a noteworthy increase in the economic productivity of the state. As of December 2022, it is anticipated that the operating cost for each tourist or pilgrim will be NGN 105,000 (where NGN 1 equals \$78,000 Nigerian Naira). During the period of the yearly conference and BCS pilgrimage, the gross profit amounts to NGN two billion Naira. Hence, it is evident that the presence of religious tourists and pilgrims originating from the BCS region makes a substantial contribution towards the advancement of the state and the overall economy of Nigeria (Calabar Carnival News Bulletin, 2022). As per Orukpe's (2017) findings, it can be inferred that the primary source of revenue for Med-View Airline PLC is its hajj operation, which generates significantly higher revenue compared to other periods. Demonstrating the positive impact of religious travel and tourism on the economic development of a given region.

In contemporary times, Cross River State is widely acknowledged as a favoured location for tourists and individuals seeking spiritual enlightenment, often referred to as a utopia for the masses. The perception of the state as a paradisiacal haven has contributed significantly to the growing number of pilgrims. The state of Nigeria is renowned for its tourism appeal, environmental cleanliness, and tranquil atmosphere, rendering it a preferred destination for members of the BCS. Consequently, many BCS members leverage these advantages by inviting their loved ones to participate in the annual BCS pilgrimage, a religious exercise. As a result of this trend, there has been a significant increase in the quantity of guest houses, hotels, and leisure facilities. As of January 2023, the tourism bureau in Cross River State has reported an increase in the number of hotels, guest houses, and relaxation centres in the state capital to 550 (Tourism Bureau Registration Manual, 2023). It should be noted that this figure excludes establishments that have yet to be registered with the state tourism bureau. The proliferation of hotels, relaxation centres, and guest houses in the state capital serves as a strategic indication that the religious pilgrimage and tourism in BCS have significantly contributed to the economic framework of the state. This supports the findings of Karar (2010) which suggest that rural communities have the potential to stimulate their local economy by promoting religious tourism. Pourtaheri et al. (2012) posited that religious tourism can enhance local economies by establishing connections between rural households and tourists, thereby serving as a means of social and economic interaction. The aforementioned statement confirms the existing proliferation of hotels, guest houses, and relaxation centres in the state capital, which can be attributed to the influx of tourists and pilgrims in the region under investigation.

An exercise of great interest that occurs frequently at the sacred sites of the BCS involves the allocation of goods and services within an economic framework. This exercise allows for the expansion of marketing strategies and inferences. In addition to conventional tourism offerings such as lodging, transportation, and accommodations, a diverse array of merchandise and services are available at pilgrimage destinations. These include the sale of religious artefacts and relics, as well as locally crafted arts, items, and objects. Moreover, a significant number of Nigerian pilgrims avail themselves of the opportunity to procure foodstuffs, including garri, yam, and other agricultural products. The practise of pilgrimage has significantly contributed to the transformation of the agricultural sector, leading to the establishment of large-scale production of garri and other farm products in the region. It is noteworthy to mention that the local inhabitants of this region are recognised as the primary producers of garri on the African continent (Oral Interview gathered from indigenes traders). This phenomenon can be attributed primarily to the frequent influx of pilgrims and tourists to the region on a yearly basis. This statement confirms the scholarly notion that religious tourism significantly contributes to the economic and social development of pilgrimage

destinations. According to Akpan's (2023) oral interview, BCS generates significant revenue from the sale of religious items such as objects, relics, books, magazines, and vegetarian meat.

Contributions of BCS to Transnational Culture in Cross River State

According to the findings of Sanchez et al's (2016) study, traditional celebrations have social and cultural dimensions that provide benefits to host communities. These benefits include the promotion of communal identity, social cohesion, preservation and revitalization of traditions, educational development, conservation of arts, improvement of lifestyles, and enhancement of social capital. The proposition put forth by Sanchez and colleagues presents an accurate portrayal of the events that occur within the Biase community, where the pilgrimage site is situated. The local inhabitants capitalise on the spiritual and religious significance of the Biase Catholic Shrine to enhance their economic status. In the context of social cohesion, the individuals in question organise themselves and establish a labour union, which enables them to develop a cohesive marketing approach that places the visitor in a position of vulnerability. Commodity prices are unilaterally fixed, thereby limiting visitors' purchasing options to the prescribed rates.

Moorman and Kreitman (2023) have inadvertently presented the correlation between religion and transnational movement in their views. Transnational issues involve the movement of individuals across different territories, while religion pertains to the dissemination of its doctrines across various locations through human interactions. Just as the former pertains to interpersonal relationships, the latter also pertains to relationships, adjustments, alterations, and dismissals. Moreover, transnationalism pertains to the relocation of individuals to diverse settings and their subsequent acclimation and assimilation to the novel surroundings. Similarly, religion exhibits these attributes. The evolution of religion is often influenced by its expansion into new environments, leading to adaptations in its norms, beliefs, and practises to better align with the local context. The phenomena of adaptation and extinction are noteworthy characteristics of both transnational migration and religion. Upon encountering a novel environment, certain elements undergo adaptation while others become extinct. This phenomenon is also observed during the BCS yearly religious pilgrimage to the study region. Assimilation occurs when foreign members of the BCS community visit rural areas and engage in marketing and religious interactions with the indigenous population. Certain cultural and traditional practises of foreign members have been assimilated. Moorman and Kreitman (2023) have referred to this phenomenon as the process of cultural dispersal. Visitors who engage with local inhabitants tend to assimilate certain cultural practises of the region.

The phenomenon of transnational movement exerts an impact on the development of concepts and advancements. The phenomenon under consideration may have a religious connotation, whereby the emergence, development, proliferation, and dissemination of a given religious entity could engender the creation of another, be it in the form of offshoots or distinct religious organisations, in response to the organic growth of the original entity in a foreign milieu. According to William and Gordon (2023), the co-residents of a particular location constitute a transnational community. Individuals within a community are interconnected in a dynamic relationship wherein they have the ability to impact each other's contributions and overall prosperity. Individuals are also connected through a co-evolutionary relationship, whereby they have mutually influenced each other's evolution. The aforementioned traits of transnational mobility are reflective of the BCS organisation, as its operations possess the capacity to be readily transferred to novel regions or contexts, thereby facilitating the establishment of a new entity in a foreign locale. As individuals assimilate to a particular faith and relocate to a different geographical location, their religious beliefs also spread to that new area. In the newly established region, there is a tendency for the development and evolution of religious practises. The migration of African religion to Western countries such as the USA, Britain, and others is evidently discernible. In line with this perspective, Ogungbile (2010) argues that African immigrants in the United States are engaged in a process of redefining their identity, establishing a unique cultural identity, maintaining connections with their relatives in Africa, and expressing their cultural values. One of the methods employed for achieving this objective is via their religious associations.

Numerous religious institutions arise based on the assertion of widespread proselytization. BCS is not a unique case. In the present era of globalisation, the universal and international dimensions of religion frequently supersede its national manifestations. According to Vasquez and Maraquart (2003), religion, politics, and capitalism are no longer confined to a specific nation or legal framework. According to Peggy Levitt's discourse on the transnational character of religion, it can be argued that religion serves as a powerful agent for transcending boundaries. The individual asserted that the omnipresence of God is feasible as various faith traditions provide their adherents with symbols, rituals, and narratives that enable them to construct alternative sacred geographies, characterised by holy sites, shrines, and places of worship. Through engagement with both native and non-native individuals at sacred locations, new adherents are recruited to the BCS faith. This proselytization effort extends to indigenous individuals who are not currently affiliated with the BCS community. The reason for this phenomenon is that individuals from different regions embark on extensive journeys to pay homage to the revered location, firmly believing that their hardships will be alleviated. Consequently, a greater number of individuals are persuaded and swayed to join the movement. In this study, we will adopt the perspective of Vasquez and Marquardt, who have posited that religion plays a significant role in the process of disentangling culture, establishing its traditional oral references and boundaries, and subsequently reattaching it in new spatial and temporal configurations. This aligns with our research's emphasis on the transnational nature of BCS. Religion serves as a means for individuals to establish novel spatiotemporal configurations and devise fresh cognitive frameworks to orient themselves within landscapes that are perpetually being transformed by globalisation.

Beyer (1994) highlights the adaptability of religion in new environments where it migrates to, emphasising the cultural and religious implications of contemporary globalisation. Using Buddhism as an example, he argues that the increasing speed of globalisation has resulted in many religions becoming multicentre, which is a departure from their previous one-sidedness. Beyer elaborates on the utilisation of Buddhist concepts and customs. Specifically, he notes that the religion has rapidly spread to non-Asian nations. However, this expansion is not merely a shift from the religion's core to its outskirts. Rather, it entails the emergence of numerous new centres, each with its own localised Buddhist interpretations and practises that are shaped by their respective socio-cultural contexts. Prebish and Baumann (2002) asserted that the exchange of information between centres, both in the East and West, as well as between old and new centres, results in a mutual influence and transformation. The interplay between Asian and Western cultures in the Buddhist cosmology has resulted in a dynamic manifestation of "profound mutual assimilation" that is characterised by a pervasive hybridity. The aforementioned statements overtly address the polarisation of BCS customs and traditions, which are characterised by their innovative and dynamic nature, constantly evolving as novel concepts and characteristics are integrated.

White (2010) observed that individuals' perspectives on nature are influenced by their religious beliefs. The actions individuals take with regards to their environment are influenced by their perceptions of themselves in relation to their surroundings. The field of human ecology is significantly influenced by beliefs concerning the inherent nature and ultimate fate of humanity, specifically in relation to religious beliefs. This statement elucidates a significant perspective on the emergence of the field of ecology of religion as an academic discipline in the past decade and a half. Despite being a nascent field, the scholarly examination of ecology of religion is incorporating insights and theories from various disciplines and scholars to advance its practical, historical, ethical, cultural, and anthropological dimensions. The present study centres on the transnational transfer of religion, specifically the relocation of religious practises and beliefs from one ecological context to another. This pertains to the integration of interpersonal communication and interdependence, cultural impact, and ethnic identification among the constituents of a religious institution in a diverse setting, particularly beyond its native region. As per the aforementioned analogy, when faith-based tourists and pilgrims visit a particular region for study purposes, certain aspects of the indigenous ethnic and cultural practises such as cuisine, lifestyle, attire, and cultural artefacts are assimilated and disseminated globally. This process facilitates the transmigration of the indigenous ethnic culture to other parts of the world. Transnationalism has occurred. Levitt (2007) provides supporting evidence for the

notion that God transcends cultural boundaries. Levitt posits that religious traditions equip their adherents with symbols, rituals, and narratives that they utilise to construct novel sacred geographies, characterised by holy sites, shrines, and places of worship.

Table 1: Pattern of homeland-oriented pilgrims and participation

	Yoruba	Hausa	Igbo	Minor Ethnic Groups Ibibios, Anang & Efik	Total
Pilgrims from Ng. Average turnout:					
Maximum	40.6%	5.6%	20%	33.3%	99.50%
Average	37.7%	25.9%	15%	13.3%	91.9%
Minimal	10%	0.9%	14%	7.7%	32.6%
Contributions to Tourism Activities :					
Maximum	37.1%	5.8%	39.1%	60.6%	142%
Minimal	10%	3.2%	22.2%	60.6%	96%
Average	7.1%	1.9%	20.3%	86.9%	
Contribution to Faith-Based acti,					
Maximum	18.6%	44.2%	1.5%	45.9%	27.2%
Minimal	12.9%	23.1%	35.5%	1.5%	9.4%
Average	14.3%	7.7%		13.1%	9.4%

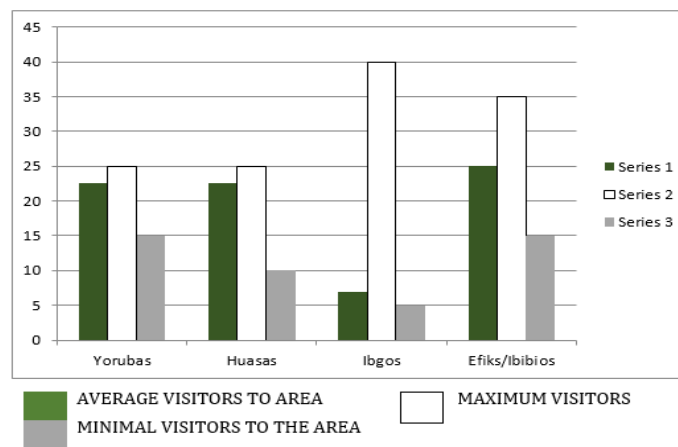


Figure 2: Local pilgrims participation of study sample

Source: National Commission for Museum and monuments (NCMM) records (2022)

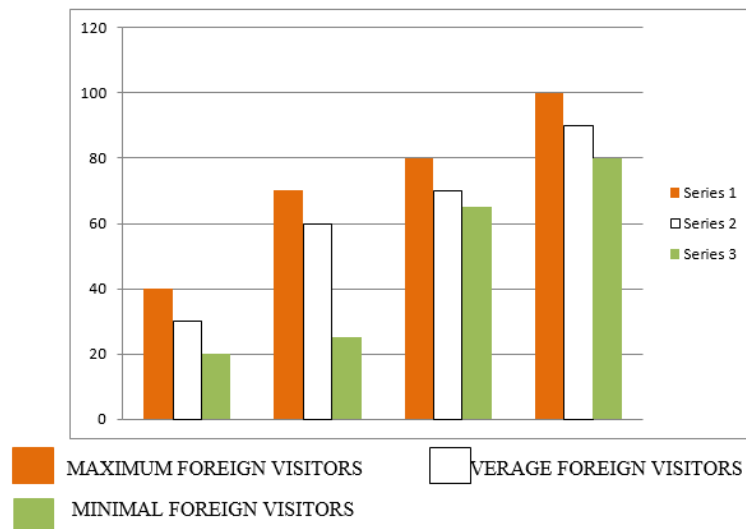


Figure 3: Statistics of Foreign Visitors to BCS Pilgrim Sites

The table and the charts above explain further the dynamics of local and foreign pilgrims participation in the BCS religious rites. The maximum percentage indicates the high rate of local and foreign participants in the pilgrimage rite, the average indicate the low rate of local and foreign participants, while the minimal indicates the lowest turnout of local and foreign participant in the religious exercise.

Hervieu-Leger's (2002) publication titled "Religion as a Chain of Memory" highlights the notion that individuals affiliate with a religion due to the transnational character of the organisation, which harmonises seamlessly with their national and ethnic identities. The individual asserted that religious symbols such as minarets, crosses, and sanctuaries hold greater significance as landmarks in foreign territories compared to national monuments or historical edifices. The individual also posited that religion surpasses temporal boundaries as it enables adherents to perceive themselves as part of a continuum of memory, linking the past, present, and future. The practise of BCS in Biakpan has become an integral aspect of the local ethnic culture, thereby endowing the movement with an indigenized character. As a result, adherents of the movement have come to regard it as an inseparable component of the cultural heritage of the Biakpan people. The founder of BCS is a local resident, and as such, the organisation has incorporated certain cultural elements from the surrounding area into its practises. This has resulted in foreign members and visitors becoming part of a larger network of Biase indigenous culture and collective memory. The interplay of culture, creativity, and memory has facilitated the revival of a diverse network of interconnections between tourists and locals. During the visitation of pilgrims, some individuals have leveraged the opportunity to establish international trade by facilitating the import and export of local goods and services to various regions of the world. This has been made possible through the mutual interaction that occurs during the pilgrims' visit.

The primary objective of this essay is to reinforce the notion that BCS represents a religious organisation that transcends national and cultural boundaries. The major concern of BCS is centred on cultural negotiation, redefining citizenship, and establishing a global spiritual identity, given the recognition of these fundamental realities. According to BCS, churches play a crucial role in establishing and monopolising a specific market segment within the progressively expanding religious market. The term "divine gifts" refers to carefully crafted plans that are designed to achieve socially measurable success, such as the recruitment of a large membership base, acquisition of funds, increased social visibility, and enhanced prestige. These strategies are both socially and functionally oriented. The various BCS pilgrimage processions exhibit distinct doctrinal and ritual foci or areas of expertise.

The abridged student edition of Ebaugh and Chafetz's book, "Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations," (2000) offers valuable insights into the environmental

impacts, opportunities, and constraints faced by immigrant churches. The book delves into the structural adaptations necessary for immigrant congregations to thrive in their new context, as well as the role of social services in facilitating immigrant adaptation. Additionally, the book explores the ways in which ethnicity and language are reproduced within immigrant communities. BCS has adopted the Biakpan language as its religious vernacular, and adherents, both local and foreign, receive sermons in this official language. To accommodate non-native speakers, interpreters are employed to facilitate comprehension. Additionally, BCS promotes the Biakpan language as a universal means of communication within the kingdom.

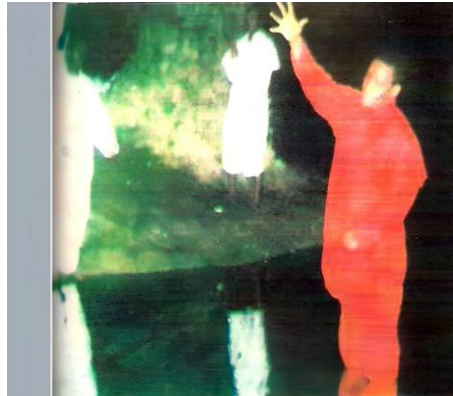


PLATE 1: The Leader of BCS his Holiness Roland Obu Blesses the Biakpan Healing water for Pilgrims

Source: Authors 2023

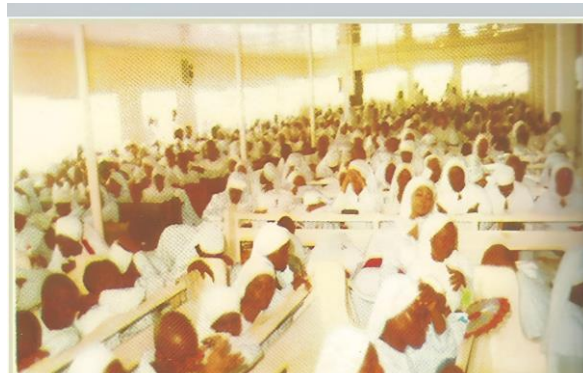


PLATE 2: A Cross Section of BCS pilgrims at Biakpan, Biase LGA Cross River State

Source: Authors 2023



Plate 3: BCS Pilgrims Procession

Source: Authors 2023



Plate 4: Cultural Display during the BCS annual convention and pilgrimage
Source: Authors 2023

Recommendations

This study suggests that in order to achieve optimal and sufficient tourism delivery efforts, it is recommended that the government, private agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) make substantial investments in tourism development in Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole. This strategic investment is expected to result in the generation of significant revenue for the country.

The government of Cross River State should consider providing financial support not only for the Calabar Carnival but also for the religious pilgrimage organized by the BCS. This is because the religious tourism associated with the pilgrimage also contributes to the state's revenue generation.

Furthermore, when there is a transition of power within the government, the subsequent changes in administration inevitably impact the management of the state, consequently altering the appeal of the state as a tourism destination. This study suggests that it would be beneficial for states to enact legislation aimed at preserving the existing state of tourism attractions and promoting cleanliness in Cross River State, previously renowned for its pristine environment.

In situations involving accidents or potential hazards, it is imperative to establish readily accessible emergency task forces and rescue teams.

This study suggests that in order to achieve optimal and sufficient tourism delivery efforts, it is recommended that the government, private agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) make substantial investments in tourism development in Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole. This strategic investment is expected to result in significant revenue generation for the country.

It is imperative to provide comprehensive training and ongoing education for event managers in order to effectively handle population management. This is crucial for ensuring efficient service delivery and maintaining control over traffic flow, particularly in situations where there is a significant influx of tourists and pilgrims.

Furthermore, when there is a transition of government, the resulting change in administration inevitably impacts the management of the state, consequently altering the appeal of the state as a tourist destination. This study suggests that it would be beneficial for states to enact legislation aimed at sustainable tourism endeavours.

Conclusion

BCS has made a significant contribution to the current population growth in Cross River State, Nigeria. As a result, the state's tourism business has intentionally grown. Those who belong to the group, as well as its

friends, family, supporters, and potential followers, enthusiastically attend its annual religious celebration. It is interesting that people from different parts of the world follow a strict schedule for the annual celebration of the pilgrimage. This event accomplishes two goals: it functions as a conference and a memorial to the BCS's creator as well as a religious ritual that involves a visit to the revered stream. This incident is generally seen as a significant point in history, and it is frequently accompanied by a sizable group of people. The religious practise under consideration includes a wide range of related events, such as rituals, conventions, celebrations, seclusions, proselytising endeavours, awakenings, and other initiatives that are organised by diverse factions made up of both indigenous and non-native constituents. The aforementioned event relies heavily on the support given by hotel, travel, and tourist businesses, which are responsible with meeting the diverse travel requirements of both international participants and local BCS members.

This particular service covers a variety of goods and services, such as lodging, travel, food, drinks, as well as religious accoutrements and insignia. A closely related topic is the obvious connection between studies of tourism and religion, pilgrimage, and journey. It would be an inadequate description to say that tourism and religion are two distinct indicators. Academic sources claim that most faiths incorporate both the practise of travel and pilgrimage, creating a parity between the two ideas, thus, demonstrating BCS's capability to increase Cross River State's economic potential.

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