

SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CULT ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES AND THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF OLABISI ONABANJO UNIVERSITY, AGO-IWOYE

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Abstract

Cultic activity in any society is always in the context of such socio-environmental factor. And there is no society without the problematic aspect(s) of cultism. This is to suggest that not all the cultic activities are inimical to the society. We are undertaking the sociological analysis of cultic activities in the Nigerian Universities in (he light of recent and past social problem cultism is constituting to the Nigerian society and academic culture in particular. Focus on this subject matter becomes all important because of relative and casual responses to its growth, spread and concomitant evils by the government. And this in particular is affecting policy focus on education, especially at tertiary institutions. This study provides answers to such fundamental questions like: why do students resort to cultism? What are the socio-cultural attractions "embedded" in cultism? How has this affected Nigerian University system? And why in all these government has not come up with an effective national policy on cultism on the campuses, and how these problematic effects can be mitigated? While giving support to the fundamental right of association, the study frowned at the culture of violence that characterized cult groups on campuses and proffered suggestions for (effective) policy formulation for effective check of such negative culture. The study is divided into the following segments: Introduction, Conceptual Clarification, Statement of Problem, Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Literature Review, Socio-cultural variables that motivate participation in cultism, Socio-economic background of cultists, Assessment of efforts to curb Cultism, Finding and results, Recommendations that will bring about a National Policy on Education in Nigeria and Conclusion.

Introduction

The prevalence and proliferation of secret cults and their activities in Nigerian tertiary institutions despite various effects to curb such should provide a source of great concern for every segment of the Nigerian society.

Violence within the Nigerian University campuses has in recent times reached unprecedented proportion. Such violence is ascribed to the phenomenon of fraternity groups or societies commonly described as "secret cults". This violence has resulted in damage, not only against private and public property but also resulting in grievous bodily harm and in extreme cases, deaths of students. While the existence and activities of secret cult in the tertiary institutions have been under-looked for a long period: their orgy of violence has, however, received extensive media coverage, in recent times and have sent waves of panic and fear through the university communities and a shocked and outraged Nigerian public. Of greater concern in the fact that there is evidence to show the existence of secret cults in the secondary schools (Guardian, March 23, 1994).

The paper is concerned with sociological analysis of the activities of these cult groups, and (he growth of the culture of violence on our campuses. The origin and growth of secret cults, their characteristics and activities will be examined: with the socio-cultural variables that motivate participation and all reasons why it has been sustained. While a theoretical explanation is given to the prevalence of cultism, the socio-economic background of cult members is also examined and a cursory look taken at why existing laws and efforts by authorities have failed to effectively curb this menace on the campuses. Recommendations made here are meant to be of assistance to university administrators, law enforcement agencies, and government policy makers in dealing effectively with the cult groups and their accompanying culture of violence.

Conceptual Clarification

Secret Cult: - The word "cult" is derived from the Latin word "cultus" meaning worship. This is responsible perhaps for the fact that wherever cult is defined, religion forms an integral part of the definition. The dictionary meaning posits cult as "a system of religious worship, especially one that is expressed in rituals".

The term "secret" attached to cultic operations denotes something kept hidden or separate from the knowledge of others, that is cryptic, only known to initiates. What is secret actually belongs to the realm of the unknown, the unseen, the unheard of, the untouchable, the unapproachable and the indescribable. The secret can only be imagined, guesses can be made, and the secret is mysterious and mystically mythical as well (Adelola, 1997). One thing that is uniquely common to cult group is secrecy, or properly put, protectiveness of self, withholding information from non-members and abhorring interference in the internal affairs of the group.

The term campus simply refers to the ground and buildings of a university.

Statement of the Problem

Cultism has more or less become an integral part of our academic culture. The notoriety which cultism has engendered however calls for a serious rethink. The operation and activities of cult groups have been the major concern of all and sundry: more specifically, government, university administrators, parents, and perhaps, some students of institutions of higher learning. The society consists of social institutions like the family, education, religion, politics which are relatively stable clusters of social relationships that involve people working together to meet some basic needs of society.

We need to ask fundamentally why is formal education no longer seriously valued by trainees and trainers and even the government that sponsors it? The social milieu of campus cultism has not only endangered the orderly sustenance and progressive continuity of academic work in the tertiary institutions, but has eaten deep, like a cankerworm, at the extolled academic culture and objectives of such institutions, putting a question on the functionality and effectiveness of university education and the authorities that run such organs in our society.

In this study answers are provided to such problems as why do people join cults? Who are those who join? What are the socio-cultural attractions embedded in cultism? What damage has cultism wrought on the social life of the people, particularly the campuses, and the society in general? And why the government despite obvious negative consequences of cultism has not come up with an effective national policy for cultism on the campuses?

Theoretical Framework

For this study, we shall attempt to explain the cultism phenomenon through the Anomie Theory and Gang Subculture, **The Anomie Theory**

The main thrust of the Anomie Theory is basically that people violate laws or norms because they lack opportunities to achieve legitimate goals through legitimate means.

The great French sociologist, Emile Durkheim used the concept of Anomie or Normlessness to explain deviant behaviour. Anomie is generally taken to mean that under certain social conditions such as during times of rapid change, traditional societal norms and rules lose their ability to regulate behaviour, thus resulting in the state of what has been called Normlessness. In such a state, said Durkheim, pressure towards deviant behaviour develops because aspirations no longer seem to match the possibilities of fulfillment. Legitimate desires that cannot be satisfied through conformity are said to force the individual into deviance. There is a breakdown of existing social rules, laws and values, and crime becomes the normal response to the existing social environment and condition. During the 1960s and 1970s, the US was reported to have experienced many social upheavals and rapid changes, urban riots, assassinations, campus disorders, the Vietnam War etc.

This period was said to have witnessed a large increase in crime and delinquency. The simultaneous occurrence of these events lent support to Durkheim's ideas about the association of anomie and deviant behaviour. The concept of Anomie and its relationship to deviant behaviour was refined and developed by another sociologist Robert Merton. Merton believed that the roots of deviant behaviour could be traced to the social structure itself, because there is an imperfect coordination of the goals and means of

a given social structure. This leads to a strain toward anomie and subsequent deviant behaviour.

Specifically, delinquent behaviour arises out of the attempt of a given person to adapt to stress. A stress brought about by a social structure that encourages the achievement of certain goals, but does not make the means for achieving these available to everyone. Merton said that delinquency could be regarded as a symptom of dissociation between culturally prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenue for realizing their aspirations. Merton went further to describe five types of individual adaptations under anomie situation viz, conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. The adaptive type most conducive to delinquent and criminal behaviour, he said, is innovation. Because of the strain of frustrated ambitions, an orientation toward chance and risk taking is encouraged and a tension toward innovative practices that depart from institutional norms and rules are created. In this instance, ambition actually promotes deviant behaviour. Judging from the anomie theory, some underlying reasons for youths joining secret cults are explained, considering the dissociation that accrue to goals set by the Nigerian society for the youths and the dysfunctionality of the institutions and subsystems outlined for matching such goals. For example, the deplorable economic situation of the nation with its attendant multifarious hardship on families obviously exposes students to stress, difficulty and frustration in the bid to achieve their academic goals. However, the make-it-easy tradition and orientation pervading the society, to which the student have been exposed leaves them only with the strong option of joining the cult groups as an alternative means of achieving their erstwhile difficult academic goals.

The Gang Subculture

Some similarities can be, drawn between the Nigerian concept of secret cult and gang subculture. A subculture is a group within a culture that shares some of the beliefs, values and norms of the larger culture but also has some that are distinctly its own.

Literature on gang subculture, which are mostly American, deals with the criminal behaviour of adolescent youths from working class background i.e. street corner gangs: whilst in Nigeria it seems that the problem is the criminal and delinquent behaviour of college youths, although there is evidence to show .the existence of secret cults in the secondary schools. The characteristics of delinquent gang as described by Thrasher (1927) have been compared with Tamuno's (1991) description of secret cult groups in Nigerian universities (Ifaturoti, 1994).

The modern day campus cult is a deviation from what cults hitherto stood for. They have metamorphosed from mere secret societies to gangs in order to achieve their heinous intentions. In fact, it has been argued that what we have now is a case of gangsterism and not cultism (Newswatch, March 28, 1994).

Methodology

The study area is the Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago-Iwoye. In the study, we gathered responses through sampling method by using Questionnaire instrument. The questionnaire, one hundred (100) in number were distributed to two groups of students:-

- (A) Those perceived to be involved in cult activities; and
- (B) Those not involved.

However, only eighty (80) were returned, with twenty for group A and sixty (60) for group B. We also elicited responses through in-depth interview.

The people interviewed consist of unionists (Student Union and Staff Union) top school administrators, management and senior lecturers.

The findings and results will BE presented based on the two research methods employed, viz. questionnaires and in-depth interview.

Literature Review

Historical Development and Growth of Secret Cults in Nigerian Universities

Historically, cultism could be said to be old as the society itself. The existence of secret cults all over the world is not a recent phenomenon, and its metamorphosis should be considered in both global and national perspectives. Owocye (1997), argued that cultism is a kind of counter culture comparable to terrorism in both urban, domestic, and international violence. He posited that the youth dimension of secret society in

the tertiary institution in Nigeria finds its archetypes in the larger society of which it is just a microcosm. "It is observed that even the policy elite and lower officials often belong to such cults be it, in government, business, military, academic, law enforcement, judiciary, religious and other sections of society". According to Fadipe (1970), there existed in the past the Ogboni Secret Society associated with the making of legislature, and administration. The Ekpe society existed among the Efik of South Eastern Nigeria, and Ekine cult in the Eastern Delta State.

However, with increased complexity of society and monetization of the totality of life came the Ogboni (ROF), to be known as Reformed Ogboni fraternity, Oro, Awo Opa, Owegbe cult and the borrowed ones from colonial metropolis such as the Freemasons, Lodge, Rosicrucian (AMORC) etc.

It is widely believed, however, that the present day secret cults originated from the concept of university fraternities. The first known fraternity in any Nigerian University was the Pyrates Confraternity otherwise known as the National Association of Seadogs. This confraternity was formed by a group of seven (7) young students in 1953 at the then, University College, Ibadan, led by Prof. Wole Soyinka, Nigeria's Nobel Laureate. The other six were Olumuyiwa Awe, Nathaniel Oyebola, Ralph Okpara, Pius Oleghe, Ikpehare Aig-Imoukhuede and Ifegbale Ainata. Actually, this first fraternity was neither violent or antisocial, and in fact, its aims were:

- (i) To abolish convention;
- (ii) To revive the age of chivalry;
- (iii) To end tribalism and elitism.

Thus, the early student fraternities began as harmless social clubs. The Pyrates Confraternity was formed to demonstrate resentment to colonialism and colonial way of life, hence, members behaved in a particular way but were non-violent and had identifiable focus.

Members were well-behaved and even called erring ones to order. In fact, they regulated the moral conduct of their members and were not associated with mayhem of any sort. Professor Muiywa Awe of the University of Ibadan who was also one of the pioneer members of the Pyrates Confraternity avers that when he started the confraternity alongside Professor Wole Soyinka and five others, it was not a secret society and there was no sinister motive behind it. He insists that the group was not a dangerous one as it was not meant to shed blood while its aims and objectives were to abolish convention and promote institutional chivalry (Daily Champion, March 11, 1998). Professor Wole Soyinka corroborated same view about the first Confraternity (Adelola, 1997).

Owoeye (1997) has noted that while the Pyrates Confraternity developed to arrest certain social ills, it later degenerated presumably, in line with the advancing anomy in contemporary society. Surprisingly, though, while the founders of the Confraternity who are still members (and godfathers) are not only still alive but also occupy high places of authority and influence in the society; they have not been able to curb the violent degeneration of the present day Pyrates Confraternity. Hence, the adage "if the foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do? Becomes true in this case. The Pyrates Confraternity held sway until the 1960s. As the cult expanded however, internal problems began to creep in which gradually threatened the foundation of the Pyrates Confraternity. As a result of this internal conflict, Mr. Bolaji Carew and Mr. Ebenzer Babatope left the Pyrates Confraternity along with some other members to form what is now known as the Buccaneers Confraternity in 1972. Their aims, objectives and identities were however a caricature of the mother confraternity i.e. the Pyrates.

The first major departure came with the formation of the Supreme Eiyeye Confraternity in 1968, which came at the throes of external and governmental oppression which its members thought should be resisted. It was born consequent upon a crisis, hence, its method was not devoid of violence. The objectives of the Eiyeye Confraternity and the need to protect its upsurge necessitated secrecy. Unlike the Pyrates, blood sucking was its bond. That marked the birth of the first rival cult in the history of our universities (Adelola, 1997). This diversion into violence and blood-letting gained credence more with the formation of Black Axe Confraternity in 1977 at the University of Benin. The Black Axe was formed with the aims and objectives of fighting against injustice done to the black race by the colonial masters and to emancipate all blacks and Africans. The Black Axe men are known to be ingenious, daring, fast and very violent. As they would say "there is no compromise in freedom, to achieve peace you must be ready for war" (Ogor, 1997).

Such was the advent of militancy, violence, blood-letting, mayhem, killing and maiming by cult

groups in the Nigerian Universities. With the various breakaways from the early confraternities there has been an upsurge of various cult groups culminating into the proliferation of such groups on our campuses. The list of secret cults which are endless, include, the Pyrates Confraternity, Black Axe, Vikings, Eiye Confraternity, Buccaneers, Maphites, Mafia, Ku Klux Klan, Black Beret, Black Cats, Barracudas, Amazons, Daughters of Jezebel, Black Bra, Red Devils, Temple of Eden, Blood Suckers, Scorpion, Pink Lady etc.

Several factors have been offered for the proliferation of cults on campuses, ranging from leadership problem, internal conflict and disagreement on ideological stance or principle (Fawole, 1997; Ogunbameru, 1997; Ugwulebo, 1999).

Features, Activities and Effects of Campus Secret Cults

As mentioned earlier, the Pyrates Confraternity started like a social club devoid of violence. Nowadays, however, activities of cults is a sort of derailment from course as what started with positive intentions has been bastardized and filled with activities characterized by vices, violence, terror, maiming, killing, rape and the like. These cult activities are shrouded in secrecy while its goals are amorphous and mostly antisocial. Some recent reports and accounts from the Dailies will highlight more the negative derailment of cult activities.

Cultists kill 2 varsity students - *Nigerian Tribune*, 28 June, 2001; Cult war claims five university students - *Daily Times*, July 18, 2002; 4 varsity students killed as cultists clash - *Nigerian Tribune*, July 7, 2002; Cultists kill 4 students in UNN - *Nigerian Tribune* June 6, 2002; Cults kill 9 in Kwara Poly - *New Nigerian*, December 12, 2001; Cultists kill student in Ekiti - *Nigerian Tribune*, August 8, 2002; 5 suspected cultists burnt at Owo Poly - *Daily Times*, July 5, 2002; 20 killed as cultists attack funeral procession - *Nigerian Tribune*, June 11, 2002; 50 students may be killed in Rivers Cult war - *Nigerian Tribune*, July 23, 2002; Cult clash claims 3 in Makurdi - *Nigerian Tribune*, March 14, 2002; Harvest of death in Ivory Towers - *The Monitor on Sunday*, February 24, 2002; Ibadan Poly in the clutch of cultism - *Sunday Tribune*, June 2, 2002; Cults seize Calabar, Unical by the throat - *The Guardian*, August 26, 2002.

Dr. Nuru Yakubu, the Rector of Kaduna Polytechnic, in his address at a mass rally against the evils of cultism chronicled the various violent activities of cult groups over the years in Nigerian universities (New Nigerian, Feb. 1, 2002); Ogunbameru (1997) also confirmed the above while listing cult activities to include nocturnal initiation ceremonies which normally involve the taking of oath of blood brotherhood; organization of opposition against any kind of oppression; both real and inspired, involvement in black magic; use of drug; pure deception, extortion rape, maiming, stealing, arson, examination malpractices and murder, among others.

Membership and Initiation

One notable activity of secret cults is the initiation ceremony, where new members undergo initiation rites and socialisation process into the group. Such exercise have been noted to be harzadous, tortuous, inflicting great pain and shrouded in secrecy. The initiation ceremony of cult groups have been variously described by scholars (Omojuyigbe, 1995; Adelola, 1997; Ugwulebo, 1999). The activities of secret cults enumerated however have direct relationship and bear absolute relevance to their creed. Their initiation rites involve torture, oath taking which requires swearing by some devilish deity, the consumption of human blood and other bizarre and gruesome drills. In a good number of cases, candidates undergoing initiation die in the process. He asserted that, having gone through these arduous and wicked tasks of initiation, members of secret cults could hardly have respect of human lives or limbs, and to them, bloody assaults and even murder become common acts.

Little wonder, then that secret cults have been known, to possess in their armoury dangerous weapons such as acid, dangerous drugs, guns, axes, machetes, grenade and so on.

Another terrible and bloodletting activity of secret cults which has pervaded the institutions of higher learning leaving in its trail many deaths and sorrow to families is the clash between cults. This particular act has laid siege on various campuses at different times forcing university authorities to close down such schools. Reasons for cult clashes often range from competition for dominance, recognition, exhibition of wits and vigour, retaliation, battle for cult supremacy, to flimsy issues like ownership of girl friends. These cult activities have been seen, however, as offshoots of a decadent culture, the heightened intensity, instability and directionlessness of the Nigerian body politics. This is further heightened by the Mafia like gangsterism that has characterized Nigerian politics over the years.

The diverse effects of campus cult operations are characterized by terror and tales of woe just as the activities are. Since a lion cannot give birth to a goat; the nefarious, violent and bloody activities of the cultists cannot but produce terrible and negative effects also. The outlined record of activities of secret cults (listed above) taken from the Dailies also reflect some of the effects of campus cults. The consequences of the activities and behaviour of members of campus secret cults have been discussed under three headings with a detailed breakdown of each (Ogunbameru, 1997).

In the same vein, detailed effects of campus cult activities, both on students and society, including institutions of higher learning were outlined by Ugwulebo (1999). The views held by Ugwulebo was also confirmed by Dr. Nuru Yakubu (New Nigerian, February 1, 2000).

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Socio-Cultural Variables/Indices That Motivate Participation in Cultism

Diverse social, economic, political and cultural factors have been explained to motivate students in joining secret cults. Some of these factors are outlined below.

The existence of secret cult on our campuses can be traced to the nature and character of the Nigerian society. Society is a network of social relationships which reinforce and influence one another. Nigeria is a society where social values are undermined, customs and traditions are very permissive, survival of the fittest is the order of the day, and is in the state of constant flux. Under this scenario anything can happen, cultism is one of the fallouts of the high level of decadence in the society.

Nigerian society is replete with secret societies, several of them abound in the country. These secret societies are peopled by influential, highly placed, well-connected and respected persons who are the parents, guardians, uncles, brothers, and sisters of these students in the institutions of higher learning. The enormous influence of such people, as significant others, on these students makes them to see nothing wrong with membership of secret cults (Ugwulebo, 1999). Some of these parents and guardians actually do initiate their children and wards into secret cults when they are still infants, while some encourage their wards to participate in occultic practices even at primary and secondary school levels. This explains the prevalence of secret cults in the secondary schools, as confirmed by reports in the dailies as far back as mid-90s (Daily Times, June 6, 1995),

Moreover, the campus cults are encouraged and protected by their senior colleagues in the society who give them the necessary assistance financially and normally assuring them of safety no matter what happens,

It has also been argued that the society, especially the bourgeoisie, has a long hand in the existence and menace of cultism in the campuses. The larger percentage of cultic students are children of the who is who in the society. Chief Segun Okeowo, one time student's leader in the 70s emphasized that cultism is a reflection of the society, consisting of the children of the elites in the society (Nigerian Tribune, Dec. 22, 2000). With the various arrests of cultists in time past confirming this, it also shows that efforts to bring such culprits to book is always scuttled by the elitists and wealthy guardians and sponsors of the cult members. For example out of 25 students of the Federal Polytechnic, Ede in Osun State arrested for cult activities, only five were charged to court while others including the daughter of a military administrator in one of the northern states then were released (The Guardian, August 14, 1997). One of the students arrested during the anti-cult war in the University of Lagos in 1994 was the son of a Professor of Social Science in the University (Newswatch, March 28, 1994). Recently, in the Adeseun Ogundoyin Campus Eruwa, a satellite campus of the Polytechnic Ibadan, 18 cult members were arrested after performing a mourning procession for their dead colleagues in broad daylight. They were subsequently detained at the Iyaganku police station in Ibadan but later released

after two weeks (Nigerian Tribune, March 29, 2002).

The background of the cultist is an important factor motivating and keeping cultism alive. Investigation shows that most students arrested for cult activities since the anti-cult decree was promulgated in 1989, were children of influential persons either within the university communities or outside it. Such parents have been known to frustrate the prosecution of their children.

The founding fathers and financiers of secret cults who are wealthy and influential members of the society, though former student members of the early harmless associations, are seen by later generations of students as the product of the features of a closed society such as cults. Such perception tend to motivate students to join. For instance, the Pyrates Confraternity have as their founding members such prominent people like Professor Wole Soyinka, a Nobel Laureate; Olumuyiwa Awe, a Professor of Physics and others: while key members include Tunji Tubi, a Lagos based medical practitioner, and Olu Agunloye, a former head of Federal Road Safety Commission FRSC, (Newswatch, March 28, 1994) and Minister of State Defence Ministry in the present democratic government of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The Buccaneers have as their founding father Bolaji Carew, Provost of the Lagos State College of Education and Kunle Adegun. Members include a former civilian governor in one of the Southern Eastern states and former SDP presidential candidate from Delta State. The President of the Buccaneers as at 1994 was a commissioner in Cross-Rivers State. In 1989 when 30 members of Buccaneer were arrested, 40 lawyers appeared for the suspects and all the lawyers were members of the Buccaneers (Newswatch, March 28, 1994). The Eiyé cult on its own part is financed by a Benin-based witch doctor. With the above backgrounds of their founding fathers, sponsors and backers it becomes alluring for student to join secret cults (Ugwulebo, 1995:56).

Furthermore, the prevalence of the "Mafia" phenomenon as mysterious groups of persons of power, prestige and influence in society gives the picture of the Nigerian society as culti-oriented, to the youth. The existence of group like Kaduna Mafia, Langtang Mafia, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Odua Peoples Congress (OPC), Igbo Union, etc. meant the existence of mysterious power brokers through which social-climbers and others could achieve their miscellaneous objectives. These groups conjure images which encourage membership of secret cult by youths seeking to reach the heights attained by adults in the various secret groups.

While campus cultism is a crime, the Nigerian society however is a place where vice is usually elevated and placed over and above virtue. Materialism and ill-gotten wealth is celebrated without questioning the sources. Notable are the common incidence of armed robbery, car-snatching, hired assassination, ritual murder, 419 operation, drug trafficking and addiction, political thuggery etc. which is the order of the day and goes unchecked by the government and its incapable representative, the Nigeria Police Force. In a situation like this where vice is the rule and not the exception, it becomes tempting for law-abiding citizens to become law-abusing citizens and indulge in criminal acts.

It is also on record that some university authorities aid, sponsor, and use some campus cults. One key allegation, according to Newswatch is that University authorities have been aiding cult members because they find them handy to use against students union who may not be easily carried along by the university administration. The Universities of Benin and Lagos have been given as example of this practice (Ugwulebo, 1999) while a host of other universities have experienced same. Such cases include school authorities colluding with the police to frustrate efforts by the student body to curb cultism coupled with failure to prosecute cult members by ordering their release.

The ban, decline, and subsequent death of erstwhile legitimate student unionism in the tertiary institutions has also been identified for the rise in number and methods of operation of secret cults (Okeowo, 1994; Omosule, 1994; Ogunmbaku, 1997).

The absence of extra - curricular facilities (Adamolekun, 1995), deplorable and stressful academic atmosphere and environment, and lack of adequate and necessary facilities such as sports games, good accommodation, multi-purpose hall, butterfly art theatre etc motivate students to join cult groups. The implication of this is that the absence of these facilities which could have provided avenue through which student can meet to dissipate energy and tension can force students to engage in illegal and barbaric activities.

Some other indices like the military, peer group influence, psychological immaturity and need calculus have been outlined by Ugwulebo (1999) to motivate students into joining secret cults.

The motivational factors for joining secret cult, has been outlined as remote and immediate causes (Fawole, 1997).

Socio-Economic Background of Cult Members

The background of a cultist coupled with his standard of living are strong factors for consideration before being allowed to join the group. This is due to the in-built mechanism which underline the essential elements of survival instinct. Various studies and investigations have revealed the socio-economic background of cult members. According to Ogunbameru (1997), membership of campus secret cult is not class bound contrary to the stereo-typed belief that such membership is an exclusive preserve of the children of the rich or wealthy members of the society. Children from wealthy background suffering from anomie of the advantaged, and those from poor background, who suffer from the anomie of injustice, have been found to belong to campus cults. Some students who join cults are known to have come from troubled or broken homes, and some from poor families who are usually promised financial assistance. Most cult members are childhood friends who grew up together, went to the same secondary school, live in the same neighbourhood and share a common habit like drinking, smoking and display of high sensitivity (Ogor, 1997). Among the top list of prospective members of the Pyrate Confraternity, according to a source, are student leaders, rich students, and children of the well-to-do and lecturers, which are eyed by most cults (Adelola, 1997).

In recent times, however, the focus on the social and economic background of members of campus cults seem to have pointed more towards the children of the rich, wealthy and influential members of the society; and the university community. This is because such parents can easily provide cover and support for members involved in criminal or other problems with the authorities; while members from wealthy homes often serve as sources of finance for the group. Moreover, of important note is the fact that children of top government functionaries, judges, top military and police officers often have easy and better access to weapons and ammunitions like guns, which have become the common and mostly used instrument by present day cultists. This view was supported by Owoeye(1997).

The victims of campus cults, preferably, must come from a fairly high socio-economic background with preferably a parent that has distinguished himself professionally. In fact, most students arrested for cult activities since the anti-cult decree was promulgated in 1989, were children of influential persons either within the university community or outside it such parents have been known to use their influence to frustrate the prosecution of their children. Such instance is the report in the Nigerian Tribune of March 29, 2002,

The background of cultists is an important factor keeping cultism alive. Chief Segun Okeowo, one time students' leader in the 70s emphasized that cultism is a reflection of the society, while asserting that the ordinary student is not capable of being a cultist because of the very sophisticated weapons you find with them. He claimed that children of the elite are behind secret cults on the campuses (Nigerian Tribune, Dec. 22, 2002).

In the same vein, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), in answer to the reason why cult attacks never seem to end, despite the penalty that stares cult members in the face; makes it known that "we shouldn't look any further because cult members in Nigerian institutions are wards of the rich and influential parents in the country", so they are untouchable. An ex-cultist says "cult groups these days don't initiate the poor ones anymore, because they need the money of the rich and powerful ones to procure sophisticated weapons which they use; and to escape judgement using the connection of influential parents" (Sunday Tribune, Dec. 16, 2002).

Assessment of Efforts to Curb Cult Activities

From the legal perspective, various legislations exist which seek to regulate and control unlawful activities by any student or group of students. While the Nigerian Constitution recognizes and guarantees to every citizen the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Section 35 of the 1979 Constitution) and the right to peaceful assembly and association (Section 37 of the 1979 Constitution). Section 35(4) of the constitution however provides as an exception to the general rule that no person is entitled to take part in the activities or be a member of any secret society. The constitution has defined a secret society as:

A society or association not being a solely cultural or religious body that uses signs, oaths, rites, or symbols: (a) whose meetings or other activities are held in secret; and (b) whose members are under oath, obligations or other threat to promote the interest of its members or aid one another under all circumstances without due regard to merit, fair play or justice, to the detriment of the legitimate

expectation of those who are not members.

To all intents and purposes it appears that the constitutional provision covers all forms of secret societies irrespective of the age, status of sex of such persons who constitute the membership. Therefore, a university fraternity which exhibits these characteristics would fall within the definition of a secret society (Ifaturoti, 1994).

Ifaturoti further noted that while in the first place under the criminal code, it is an offence to be a member of an unlawful society, the provisions of the criminal code also govern various unlawful acts such as arson, rape, looting, murder, assaults etc alleged to have been perpetrated by members of these fraternities.

The ban on all cults and secret societies, both in the larger society and in the institutions of higher learning under Decree 47 of 1989 makes membership of secret cults punishable by five year imprisonment or a fine of 2,000 Naira or both.

Apart from the above provisions by the constitution against cult menace, other efforts have been embarked upon in time past. The government earmarked the sum of N480 million to tackle cultism, although Prof. Kelvin Etta regretted that no amount has been released (The Guardian, July 25, 2002). President Olusegun Obasanjo recently challenged the Federal Minister of Education and the nation's universities to take whether measures necessary to stamp out cultism in the campus while also calling on social scientists to find ways of solving the problems (Nigerian Tribune. July 22, 2002).

The information Minister, Prof. Jerry Gana, after a Federal Executive meeting announced various stiff measures adopted against cultism which include summary dismissal of suspected student cult members, books of shame to be opened for deviant students, public officers found to be funding cult activities to be prosecuted, inclusion of anticult clause in the admission provisions for students and so on (The Guardian, June 8, 2002). The Daily Times, in its opinion of August 25, 2002, commended the forth Tightness and tenacity of purpose of the Cross Rivers State House of Assembly in passing the bill against campus cults which provides for a three-year jail sentence for those involved, no matter how highly placed. The paper further called on other Houses of Assembly in the country and particularly the National Assembly to follow this example. Of great interest though is that the same paper noted that "it is also on record that since the war on campus cult started, nobody has really been prosecuted, convicted and jailed. Hence, cultists are having a field day, misbehaving and wreaking havoc with impunity.

As such, despite the general provisions of the criminal code and the constitution which makes offences committed by cults unlawful and punishable, secret cult related violence still continues.

It is pertinent to ask why all these measures seems to be ineffective in curbing cult activities on the campuses?

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) explained this by declaring that "cult members in Nigerian institutions are wards of the rich and the influential parents in the country", so they are untouchable (Sunday Tribune, December 16, 2001). Some functionaries, governors, commissioners, senators, and legislators, big wigs in the business, economic and academic sectors actually belong themselves to one secret cult or the other, and even encourage their children either directly by initiation, or indirectly by influencing them to join on campus. Such parents also provide support for their wards and actually use their position, wealth and influence to truncate the process of judgement to free their wards apprehended for cult activities.

From the above argument, students dismissed from school having been convicted of involvement in cult activities have found their ways back into the university system.

As earlier discovered in this study, some management of higher institution have been found to be weak and lack the will to prosecute erring students; not only because their children are involved, nor due to pressures from higher powers in the society, but godfathers or financiers. In fact, some Vice Chancellors, Rectors, top administrators and lecturers have been found to be deliberately encouraged and support cult activities in their institutions in order to use them for various sinister motives.

It has been opined that the kind of violence perpetrated by politicians is a microcosm of that carried out by student cult groups (National Concord, Nov. 10, 2000). Such top people in society and official positions involved in acts of violence find it easy to provide arms for their wards and become godfathers for

cults groups, since they can easily be used for their selfish ambitions. The judiciary and the police have been found culpable of releasing secret cult suspects and ordering their readmission.

It seems then that the various legislations and efforts to curb cultism are cosmetic in nature, where symptoms are treated, and causes left unattended to. Although, legislations are made and programmes lauded to solve cult problems, there is no sincerity, seriousness, and the will power or decisiveness on the part of the government, law enforcement agencies and university authorities to decisively effect such regulations. This is because they themselves are implicated in the societal concept and experience of lawlessness, disorderliness, violence, disrespect for law, involvement in secret cults, and so on.

Since justice delayed is justice denied; the failure to enforce the law decisively and make people bear the cost of breaking rules by people empowered to do so, will continue to make whatever steps taking to curb violent cult activities ineffective.

While we need to establish that this study is not against the free association of students in our campuses, however, the violent dimension to the operation/activities of these groups is totally unacceptable. The comment of Mr. Lawrence Alobi, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Area Command (Enugu) is indeed an eye-opener. He said the war against secret cults and, indeed other criminals must be fought by everybody in the society, but regretted that many segments of the society had abandoned this responsibility. He added "it is sad to note that some parents, prominent citizens and even some members of staff of tertiary institutions not only condone, but inspire, encourage and even sponsor and finance secret cult activities. In fact, I have to state without equivocation that but for this overt and covert support secret cult activities receive from families and members of the public, the police action would have reduced the problem to an insignificant level" (The Guardian, July 25, 2002).

Findings and Results From In-depth Interview

One of the methods used to gather information for the study was in-depth interview. This gave some insight into the experience of our case study (O.O.U. Ago-Iwoye) in cult activities and its attendant effects. Those interviewed were randomly, though strategically chosen, both to reflect the varied population of the school, and to be able to gather required information. They include top members of university administration, Heads of Departments, Dean of Faculty, Academic Staff Union of Universities (O.O.U. Branch) officials, student union government executives and non-academic university officials.

Brief Account of Cult Activities in O.O.U.

Investigations revealed that cult activities thrived in the school between 1995 and 1999. The background to this we gathered, was conflict between three warring groups:

- (i) Student Activities;
- (ii) Lecturers (ASUU Functionaries); and
- (iii) School Authority.

The student activists wanted the student union govt. banned in 1998 re-instated, ASUU was on general strike and some functionaries were opposed to the second term of the V.C. while the school administration wanted a second term in office. It was strongly alleged that the V.C. belonged to the Pyrates Confraternity while his son belonged to the Eiyeye Confraternity. Moreover, some key members of the administration were alleged to be cult members or godfathers for the cultists. Some of those interviewed claimed that there was a strong relationship between the school authority and some cult groups especially the Pyrates and Eiyeye Confraternity.

While the school authority refused to reinstate the SUG, it moved to swear in another set of union leadership on Feb. 3, 1999; as opposed to the one elected by the students. It was however alleged that the hand-picked group consists of Pyrates and Eiyeye members sidelining other cult groups.

As such discipline and law broke down, and cultists saw themselves as lords. During this period the Eiyeye Confraternity alone was said to have the membership of close to 3000. The activities of the cultists, apart from being used by the authority to threaten, and intimidate its perceived enemies. include extortion of money from other students, rape, examination malpractices, armed robbery etc. The violence and menace of cult activities was so terrible that cultists disrupted examination sessions and committed other vices

without a check.

For instance, on May 6, 1999, a philosophy student who was a cult member entered an examination hall armed, and in the presence of his HOD and other lecturers, attacked a fellow student and handed him over to the police. Investigations revealed that both the Police Force and the school security were in support of the school authority, and of course, of the cultists and their operations also. It was further alleged that when cultists were arrested by the police, such were released on the instruction of the authorities. The Commissioner of Police, we learnt, wrote to the Registrar, alleging hindrance to the working of his team. At a point, 35 cultists were arrested and later released. In fact, it was a state of anarchy and lawlessness. The cults had in their possession various dangerous weapons especially guns and ammunitions. It was reliably gathered that on June 1, 1997, the cultists took the Commissioner of Police to their armoury at Popoola Hospital in Ijebu-Igbo. Frequent clashes between the cult groups especially in the battle for supremacy was rife. This was fuelled by the open support given to two cult groups (P.C. and Eiye) by the school authority: such closeness to authority we've used to establish their superiority on the campus. This brought the other two major groups-Buccaneer and Black Axe together to engage them in the battle for supremacy. The fracas that ensued on Feb. 3, 1999 where the V.C. was stopped from swearing in his selected student union leadership and eventually kidnapped by students with the aim of being taken to the Governor's office in Abeokuta en route Sagamu, left some bitter memories. Reports had it that while the V.C. was taken on endurance trek, the Bursar invited the police and ordered them to shoot.

The aftermath of the Feb. 3, 1999 imbroglio had a student activist and P.R.O. of the student union government then, Mr. Olumide Onafeso shot by the police, with his right hand amputated. The climax of the school experience during this period came when the state government set up a Panel and the V.C. was indicted of being involved in cultism and eventually removed from office while the Council was dissolved. Moreover, a list of cult members referred to as "69" and "44" cutting across all the cult groups on campus were compiled with about 100 of them dismissed from the school.

With change in administration, and the school policy to dismiss any student found to be involved in cult activities being effected from 1999; there has been great decline in cult activities on the campus, while such is carried out underground and in secret. The renunciation programme had 8 cult leaders withdraw from the groups. The school also embarked upon awareness, public enlightenment and reorientation programmes. Guidance and counselling, and provided for open communication between authority and students.

Of importance, however, is the alarm given by one of the respondents in the course of the interview. He claimed that a great percentage of both academic and non-academic staff are still members of various cult groups. He asserted that the state coordinators for both Pyrates and Buccaneers respectively are lecturers in the school, while claiming that around forty (40) members of staff-teaching, non-teaching and management-belong to cult groups.

The Eiye Confraternity, we gathered, currently have about 1000 members in their environment, while the CE\$AP programme of the school, has become a breeding ground for cultists with a great number of enrollment.

View on Cultism

All respondents interviewed saw cultism as a social problem and menace to the society. It is also seen as a reflection and effect of the larger society on the campuses.

Causes

The following factors were outlined as the reasons or motivation for involvement-peer group influence: disoriented and immoral social values, existence of cults in society; protection from victimization; superiority and inferiority complex, in-conducive environment on campuses, search for power, influence and seriate; being lured, threatened and terrorised into joining by cult members, family background i.e. broken homes and parents involved in cultism; lecturers involvement and backing from school management.

Activities: - Respondents outlined activities of cults as maiming, killing, armed robbery, extortion of money from students, rape, initiation, examination malpractices and so on.

Some of the reasons given by the respondents for the ineffectiveness of efforts to curb cult activities, and suggestions given towards more effective measures are presented later under assessment

and policy recommendations.

Findings and Results (Questionnaires)

Of the total respondents (80), 20 or 25% belonged to the group perceived to be involved in cult activities. This portrays a high rate of involvement in cultism as one out of four students could be assumed to be involved in cultism.

Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents are male, 25% female and 15% give no response about their sex. Out of the respondents in group A, five (5) or 1/4 (25%) are females. While male involvement in cultism is still dominating the involvement of female students is however significant.

Majority of the respondents have spent an average of three years in the school. It is assumed they have acquired average knowledge about cult activities within the period.

The age distribution had 12 (15%) in 15-20 years category, 51 (64%) in 21-25 years category, 15 (19%) in 26-30 years, and 2 (2%) in 30 years and above. Involvement in cultism among youths comes at prime age of 21-25 assumedly.

The following cult groups were listed by respondents as existing in Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye: Eiye Confraternity, Pyrates Confraternity, Black Axe, Daughters of Jezebel, Buccaneers, Vikings, Black Bra, Mafia, Black Gal and White Braizier.

While 75% of respondents in group A see cults as a problem the remaining 25% gave no response: this implies that even numbers of cults know that their activities constitute problems to the society, 60% respondents in group B confirmed this view point.

Reasons why students join cult groups were given by the respondents as protection and security, to acquire power. For prestige and honour, to be recognized and to have best babes.

Some factors that motivate joining cults include anxiety, frustration, intimidation, family background, economic inadequacy, lack of adequate orientation and focus and influence by friends,

15 (75%) of respondents in group A see cult group as performing positive functions for its members, while the remaining 5 (25%) gave no response. Majority of respondents in group B that is 90%, outline cult functions as negative. Some of positive functions listed are protection and security for members, brotherhood, feeling of oneness and belonging, friendship and connection for future benefits, assistance in time of trouble and macho feeling and ability to influence and oppress others.

This shows that while members see their involvement as beneficial and the group as functional to them, such benefits are respected within the group; while cult groups are, however dysfunctional to their immediate environment and the society in general.

64% of total respondents opined that cult groups should be banned from our campuses, 16% said No, and 20% gave no response.

Majority of respondents agree on the following as ways to curb cultism; proper campaigns register cult groups as societies, establishment of agency to regulate cult groups, enlightenment programme for students on effects of cult, jailing anyone convicted of cult involvement and allowing more churches and mosques to teach morals.

While majority of respondents are unaware of existing government policies on cultism, they however suggested policy measures; such as sentencing suspected cultist to life imprisonment, and stopping people in power from sponsoring cult groups and their activities on the campuses.

Policy Recommendations for Education in Nigeria

On the basis of the foregoing argument, we shall give some recommendations and measures to help curb effectively the menace of secret cults and their violent activities, in order to give a better future to education in Nigeria.

Efforts should be directed from treating symptoms, and focused on the causes. The issue of cultism and violence should be treated from the society by effecting a reorientation of feeling for order. The society should be organized in a way that people will bear the consequences of breaking laws and rules. The will to enforce rules, laws and policies should be there on the part of government, school authorities and law enforcement agencies and there should be no untouchable or sacred cows.

While the above will affect the entire societal fabric; in the short term, however, the university administration should be organized in the context of reorientation where people see the university as

institution based on rules and regulations, where you violate rules and bear the consequence. There should be a return to the bureaucratic lines of order and discipline.

While we support the stiff anti-cult measures adopted by the government recently (the Guardian, June 8, 2002); there should be prompt and severe measures taken against alleged cult members, and the process of prosecution swift. Some people must be thoroughly dealt with to serve as a deterrent to others.

Parents have a crucial role to play in curbing, cultism by laying good examples to their children or wards, by not joining secret societies and shunning vices. In addition, parents should give their children good home training, teach them morals and the value in decency.

The government should ensure there is no cover at university management level; cover as being members themselves, having their wards as members of cults, or using the cult groups. As such, the eradication of cult activities should not be limited to students only, but should be extended to university administrators and lecturers. For this to be effective however, same measures should be extended to people in authority at governmental levels, and those holding important positions in society. Until this is done, there might not be any significant change in the cultic menace.

The government should also curb the activities of its influential and powerful members who make it difficult, if not impossible for the police to carry out its normal duties (Ogunbameru, 1997:14).

The laws cannot work except the police force is up and doing. Moreover, the government should raise special anti-cult squad, specially trained for that purpose to face cult members. The Nigeria Police and the State Security Service (SSS) should send their men into campuses of tertiary institutions with a view to bursting cult gangs.

The university should be given more powers to deal with the situation especially in view of autonomy. Criminal offences should be newly categorized like examination malpractice, cultism etc. and such cases allowed to be handled within the system than in the law court both to prevent cases of perverted or truncated justice and to allow for prompt decision taking by school authorities. However, it must be clearly ensured that the university management itself is thoroughly rid of cultists.

The cultists apprehended should be exposed to outside world and university community by displaying their photographs. There should be public enlightenment, awareness and reorientation programmes for youths, making use of the mass media and anti-cultism bill boards. Provision should be made for guidance and counselling where ex-cultists can feel secured and be rehabilitated.

The ban on secret cults, which has driven them underground should be lifted, and these groups be allowed to register with the school authorities like other societies and associations on the campuses. Official recognition should be accorded these groups and right hand of fellowship extended to them with the goal of reinstating them back into the mainstream of the society. This will allow for identification of the groups and their members by the authorities, and greatly help in curbing the trend of violence that characterize the cults.

The government and university authorities should help in creating the right atmosphere, provide necessary and required amenities and facilities to help students achieve their academic goals. There should be good accommodation, sporting facilities, good gymnasium, good cyber-cafe and other facilities to keep these adolescent youths full of creative and adventurous instincts creatively busy. With this, only a negligible few would have inclination towards criminal acts.

Everybody has tendency to do evil with the inborn instinct to deviate and do what is wrong. So it is that evils such as cultism cannot be eradicated with the writing of paper and talks. The solution lies in the change of heart that takes place through the fear of God which is to hate evil. Hence, religious bodies should be encouraged to teach our youths both in the secondary and university levels things that bring the fear of God into their hearts.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has dealt with the phenomenon of cultism in Nigerian Universities via a sociological analysis of the culture of violence that characterize cult groups. While we fully support the rights of students to free association, violent and destructive activities are however anti-thetical to academic and hinders goal achievement.

The rise in incidents of cult related violence shows that various measures employed to curb these by the government and university authorities have to a large extent failed. There is the need to restore the entire

societal fabric to the path of morality, order and discipline with the socio-economic situation of the nation also generally improved. With these done, coupled with sincerity and the will to solve the problem of cultism not only in the universities, but also in the general society; normality will surely soon return to Nigerian higher institutions of learning.

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