



**British Journal of Education, Society &
Behavioural Science**
3(1): 65-75, 2013

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Vicious Hazard to Peace Culture in Tertiary Education: The Activities of the Secret Cults

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors of this paper contributed approximately equal academic exercise to put this piece of work together. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Policy Paper

Received 31st October 2012
Accepted 31st December 2012
Published 2nd February 2013

ABSTRACT

Aims: It is most unfortunate that human rights are no fundamental freedom in Nigerian Universities because of secret cult activities. This article explores the evolution, activities and consequences of cults and cult-like organisations on Nigerian campuses. Cults, both on campus and in society in general, carry serious negative consequences for education.

Methodology/Procedures: In this study, we employed a qualitative research design that used document analysis to evaluate the activities of the secrete cults in Nigerian campuses. This approach was used because it enabled us to obtain and interpret information, its meaning and experiences from a broad standpoint.

Results: The presence of violent cults in institutions of learning has resulted in the death and injury of both students and faculty. Their activities continue to impact feelings of safety and security as well as the more tangible election and/or appointment of student and university governments. While cults have been active on campuses in Nigeria for more than three decades there are a number of steps that can be taken to discourage and decrease their presence.

Conclusion: It is imperative that students, parents, tertiary education administrations, legal

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entities, and government begin to take more immediate, concrete and consistent steps to actively extinguish this threat to education.

Keywords: Peace culture; vicious hazard; tertiary education; secret cults; human rights; theoretical analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected. The principle of universality of human rights is the cornerstone of international human rights law. This principle, as first emphasized in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, has been reiterated in numerous international human rights conventions, declarations, and resolutions. The 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, for example, noted that it is the duty of States to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems [1].

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, gender, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible. Universal human rights are often expressed and guaranteed by law, in the forms of treaties, customary international law, general principles and other sources of international law. International human rights law lays down obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups [2]. However, it is most unfortunate that human rights are no fundamental freedom in Nigerian Universities because of secret cult activities.

Youth violence on campuses of tertiary institutions has increasingly become a worrisome scenario for institution of higher education administrators, governments and members of the civil society. Our tertiary institutions are subsets of the various macro societies and they are a reflection of society's increasing use of violence [3].

Tertiary education plays a crucial role in the supply of high-level work force for the socio-political and economic development of a nation. The effective management of this educational sector becomes indispensable. Education is generally accepted as a major instrument for the promotion of socio-economic, political and cultural development [4,5,6]. However, the most important and uncomfortable problem facing tertiary institutions today as providers of quality work force are the danger and aggressiveness of cult members and cult related activities [7]. The potential for obliteration of lives and damage to property on campuses has escalated so fast and terribly as now. There is hardly any academic session without reported cases of cultism in most Nigerian institutions. There is no single Nigerian public tertiary institution that has not experienced the threat of cultism [8,9].

In defining cultism, dictionaries often include such phrases as activities kept hidden or separated from the knowledge of others, but known only to initiates; something which is popular and regarded as predominantly significant by a certain group of people: a fashion, craze or fad; system of religious worship especially one that is expressed in rituals. Cultism can be said to emanate from the great or excessive admiration or belief in a person or idea. It can be manifested in rituals, praise, songs, chants and worship [10]. Rituals and praises are used to symbolise the individual re-entry into the community and into the new group [11,12]. It is a practice that may be difficult to dislodge even with superior argument and may have negative effects on both members and non-members. Secret cults can therefore be defined as a set of practices, belief systems or ideas whose essence are known only to inner members and is excessively admired and defended even to the point of laying down one's life. It is this doggedness and strong conviction demonstrated by members that reinforce the importance of and awe for the group, especially among non-members. Renown Secret cults in Nigeria include: *The Reformed Ogboni Fraternity*, *Oboni Society* (in Ikwerre land), *Ekpo Society* (in Cross River State), *The Odumu Masquerade* (in Okrika Land), *The Akujane Society* (in Igala land), *The Ejalekwu Society* (in Idoma land), *The Eyo Society* (in Lagos), to mention but a few [13].

2. METHODOLOGY/PROCEDURES

In this study, we employed a qualitative research design that used document analysis to evaluate the activities of the secrete cults. This approach was used because it enabled us to obtain and interpret information, its meaning and experiences from a broad standpoint. Documents are valuable sources of data about research. The categories of documents used in this study include both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include reports and publications that have first-hand information on the theme of this paper. Secondary sources include textbooks, journals, and reports of research carried out by other investigators, relevant to this topic. Primary and secondary documents such as these are often generated contemporaneously with the events they refer to. Hence, they are less likely to be subject to memory decay or memory distortion as compared to data obtained from an interview [14]. When seeking out the aforementioned materials, there was a need to assess their validity and value to this research. To some extent such assessments are contingent on the agenda and approach of this research [15,16,17,18,19,14,20,21,6]. All the materials used for this study were validated using Scott's [22] overlapping validity criteria of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Historical Perspectives

The secret cult phenomenon is not new in Africa [5] However, cult activities first developed on the high seas during the Italian renaissance. It involved notorious and dangerous sea robbers (pirates) who robbed seas merchants of their goods and slaves. Their violent activities accounted for their marine-based names like the Sea Dogs, Vikings, and Olympus Marino, which were signs of ships used by the barbaric German tribes who defeated the Roman army and plundered the Roman Empire in 476 AD. It is worth noting that most colonial discoveries in the West Indies, Asia and Africa were made by buccaneers and pirates [23]. Jacques Cartier of France, a buccaneer by the order of the King of France, discovered Canada in 1534, while his fellow seaman, Samuel de Champlain founded the city of Quebec in 1608. Worthy of note also, are the dreadful exploits of Francis Drake (also

known as the 'iron pirate), who between 1577-1580, set out with the intention of reaching the pacific coast of Spain, thus opening sea routes that were hitherto unknown. He was officially knighted by the Queen of England for his exploits in capturing valuable cargoes in the Spanish ports and at sea [24]. Later in 1861, a white American cult, the Ku- Klux- Klan (KKK) evolved to oppose with violence those who supported progressive change in the status of blacks in that country.

Cultism in Nigeria first began as a campus confraternity in 1953 when Professors Wole Soyinka, Aig-Imoukhuede, Pius Oleghe, Ralph Opara, Nat Oyelola and Muiyiwa Awe, and others registered the pirate confraternity at the University of Ibadan [13,5,25]. Its objectives then were to:

- a. Abolish the colonial mentality;
- b. Abolish conventions (conventions of bribery and corruption);
- c. Revive the age of chivalry; and
- d. End tribalism and elitism.

According to Akani [24], the pirate confraternity was a seemingly social organisation, aimed at fighting the evils of society. The organisation, otherwise known as the Sea Dogs, was a patriotic organisation aimed at upholding strong beliefs in African cultural revival. It stood against discrimination in all forms, injustice, the reckless display of wealth, and class distinction on campus. It also focused on the student/lecturer relationship, opposed sexual harassment of female students, engendered healthy academic competition and generally served as the nucleus of campus cultural nationalism. It was seen as honourable to be a member because of the academic brilliance, gentility and decorum of members. It is always assumed that secret cults have one positive thing about them, they do not harm unless provoked and they could serve as an instrument for cleansing society of any evil act [26].

Unhealthy developments in the early 1970s led to the formation of the Buccaneers and sowed the seeds of the new form of cultism seen on campuses today. These seeds were nurtured in the 1980s by the proliferation of universities and other higher education institutions, increased student enrolment without a corresponding improvement and increase in infrastructure, the erosion of academic standards, examination malpractice, and the politicisation of appointments of university vice chancellors, registrar and other top positions [27]. The subsequent over politicisation of student union offices made it necessary for contestants and their sponsors to solicit support from cult groups. Others factors included long periods of military rule, corruption, and the attendant injustice in both the ivory tower and larger society. Cult groups began to wear dreaded hair and assume violent postures and higher education institutions became jungles where people perceived as enemies were threatened, haunted, brutalised, maimed and killed [28].

The return of partisan politics in 1999 gave greater impetus to cultism as some politicians, desperate to win elections, recruited and armed cultists to undermine popular wishes. This reached a crescendo in the 2003 elections, when many political office seekers recruited gangsters who organised themselves into cult-like groups to aid and abet electoral malpractice. Cults and similar organisations multiplied by leaps and bound in response. Today, cultism has become prolific as it has evolved from an exclusively higher institution-based group to operate in secondary and primary schools as well and has permeated the streets of our cities, villages, waterfronts, fishing ports, and farm settlements - it now exists at all levels of society. Robert-Okah [23] has made note of more than 100 of these deadly groups.

3.2 Why Students Join Cults

According to Ezeali in Ogidefa [29], the following are some of the reasons students join cults:

1. *Search for responsibility*: Some students join cult groups in order to perform certain services. For example, to fight perceived injustice on campuses against their members.
2. *Search for satisfaction of one's aspirations and needs*: Students who are in desperate need of satisfying their aspiration and needs may go to the extent of becoming cult members. For example, a student may belong to a cult whose objective is to ensure high success of their members in academic examinations by whatever means.
3. *Search for security*: Many students join cult groups for protection. Some female and male students join to secure their relationships.
4. *Search for social identity*: Students join cults to be popular. They want to be regarded as powerful people; for them, it is a way of achieving prestige and greatness. It is their belief that they can influence decisions on campus and dictate Students Union Elections through these groups
5. *Search for protection against sanctions*: Some students join campus cults to gain respect and recognition and to acquire protection against sanctions from members of the community.

3.3 Causes of Cultism

Despite the negative consequences of cultism, cult activities still thrive on Nigerian campuses. Ogidefa [29] and Osakinle and Falana, [30] identified some of the causes of cultism on Nigerian campuses. A number of institutional administrators are autocratic and maintain hostile relationships with staff and students. They rarely involve members of the community in decision-making. They ban student unionism at will. This atmosphere promotes violence and cult activities because the peaceful resolution of conflicts has been made impossible. Some institutions maintain boarding facilities but administrators rarely find time to understand what is going on in these hostels. Cultists in educational institutions watch government officials violate the laws of the land with impunity because they are members of secret cults. Governments also fail to apply sanctions against cultists who contravene the law because of the protection offered by those affiliated with cults in the corridors of power. Cultists are therefore given the impression that they can get away with acts of lawlessness [29].

Some parents have abandoned their responsibility for the moral upbringing of their children because of the desire for material wealth. They hardly show interest in the progress of their children at school and rarely attend parents' forum meetings. Schools teach Islamic and Christian Religious Studies so that students pass their examinations without emphasising the moral lessons that can be gleaned from such topics. Some religious leaders also fail to act as good role models for younger generations. The hearts of the young are consequently left vulnerable. Our educational institutions have inadequate basic amenities including accommodation, transportation, and recreational facilities. Students are sometimes encouraged to join violent groups like cults that wreak havoc in these institutions because of the insensitivity of government and institutional administrators to their plight [30]

The mass media also expose the young to all kinds of negative behaviours, occultism literature and obscene behaviour. Advertisements and literature in the media detail the ways in which youths and adults can join cult organisations, both locally and internationally. Youth who suffer from mental illness tend to be more frustrated and fed up with life. In an attempt to express their anger against neglect, they may join cults to unleash terror on the society that has contributed to their emotional distress. Student's participation in cult activities may be influenced by their parent's involvement in similar activities. Parents who are members of cults will not see anything wrong with their children's involvement in cultism. Parents may encourage their children to join cults so that they may maintain the traditional titles given to them. Children from broken homes may also find solace in cultism. A home that is characterised by child abuse, intolerance, violence, insecurity and hostility may be a breeding ground for prospective cult members.

Motivation for joining cults may come from peer group influence. Some students have become cult members because their friends are members. Members of a particular peer group influence one another based on the experiences they have had in their various environments. Nigerian adult society is often materialistic, dishonest, and corrupt. There is intense ambition for wealth and power and some members of society unleash terror on other members in order to achieve their goals. Some recruit young adults to perpetrate heinous crimes and can erase the long arm of the law. They are the fraudsters, kidnappers and ritual murderers. Children who grow up in this kind of environment may see nothing wrong with cult activities that involve the maiming and killing of innocent people. There is also the issue of "Godfatherism" - people who are ready to protect cultists from prosecution. In some institutions, certain administrators and lecturers are members of cults and student cults are used against other members of the community to promote selfish interests. There are allegations that some Vice Chancellors sponsor cult activities in their universities to silence dissent [30]. In addition, many learning facilities in educational institutions are so inadequate that some students cannot cope academically. Because of the enthusiasm for certificates, such intellectually weak students join cults to harass lecturers and administrators into providing undeserved marks.

3.4 Effects of Cultism on Educational Development

The Nigerian institutions of higher education system is characterised by numerous problems [31,25], which have resulted in a poor worldwide ranking based on research output, coupled with teacher-student ratio; proportion of international staff; employers' rating of graduates; and peer review. This is evident in the 2005 report of the Nigerian 'National Universities Commission' (NUC) accreditation exercise. NUC found that non-accreditation of the law programmes of the first generation universities in Nigeria (universities of Ibadan, Ife, and Nsukka), was a direct consequence of structural problems, dearth of qualified academic staff and learning facilities [32].

However, the educational aims and objectives of the Nigerian philosophy of education include the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society [33]. Increases in cultism in our campuses and without doubt, larger society are becoming worrisome. The Nigerian educational system has failed to achieve its aims and objectives in large part because of cult related activities [34].

Wali [35] and Ololube [36] have highlighted some of the factors that have an effect on educational development in Nigeria:

- Cult activities disrupt academic calendars and business activities on campus
- Cult activities disrupt social and recreational events on campuses
- Cult activities on campus lead to the death of students and staff
- Cult members destroy facilities on campus when clashing with rival cults
- Cult members harass, embarrass and humiliate innocent students and staff
- Members of school communities have their movement restricted because of cult activities
- School property is stolen by cultists
- Students and staff are physically injured by cult members
- Students and staff live under constant fear following the activities of cult members on campuses and consequently academic activities are affected.
- Parents and host communities are greatly affected by the activities of cultists

3.5 Remedies to Cult Activities on Campus

Nigeria with well over one hundred and fifty tertiary institutions, has witnessed unprecedented violent behaviours occasioned by students' involvement in campus cultism [3]. Nigerian government at all levels and student-governing bodies in institutions have tried in curbing cultic activities in Nigerian campuses and it seems that their efforts are not enough to arrest the situation. The unprecedented increase in cultism and cult-related activities within and beyond campuses and the attendant tension, insecurity and threats to life and property need to be taken seriously and addressed by those in power immediately [36]. Below are some of the ways that cult activities on campus might be curtailed:

The role of parents: It is the duty of parents to give their children and wards proper attention and training by monitoring their daily activities early in life. They must also show examples of good behaviour and morals/ethics to their children and wards. Parents should be able to provide counselling for their children and wards on continual bases so that they do not deviate from prescribed rules and regulations. Parents should deemphasise materialism as a means of survival.

The role of religious organisations: It is evident that religious organisations have failed in their duty to bring stability to society and overpower the concentration on materialism in their preaching. A deemphasisation on material wealth will go a long way in the reduction of cult activities on campuses.

The role of students: Students also have a greater role to play in curbing the activities of cults on campus. Students should see and speak about cult activity as anti-social and anti-academic. They should realise that none have benefited from cult activity and many have encountered trouble with the law and death as a result. Students should spot, expose and ensure instant punishment for cultists. Students should discourage each other from joining cult groups and remain serious in their academic pursuits. Nigerian students should agitate for independent student unionism and ensure that credible leaders are elected to champion a new orientation for students on Nigerian campuses. On an interpersonal level, students should encourage cultists through seminars, symposia, workshops, and group discussions to abandon their counter-productive exhibitions and channel their energies to progressive activism. In this way, students can redirect their energies towards capacity building that will ultimately usher in a virile society [13].

The role of the government: It is the functional responsibility of government to make laws that will protect its citizens. Laws are normative and play a role in social engineering. As such, laws must prevent anarchy in society and on campuses. Government's failure to secure and protect lives and property is tantamount to serious weakness on its part. It is the responsibility of government to improve facilities and living conditions on campuses so as to minimise perceived strain on the social system which influences cultism on Nigerian campuses.

The role of the institutions: Academic freedom, autonomy and the proper democratisation of education will ensure full participation of students and other marginalised segments of the academic community in the process of policy formulation and decision making.

The role of the society: Nigerian society is engulfed with nepotism, tribalism, favouritism, bribery, corruption, and killing. These activities have set negative precedents in society. Meritocracy has been eroded and replaced with violent activities that hinder developments in the educational systems. All members of society have a responsibility to report unlawful activities to constituted authorities for sanctions.

The role of guidance counsellors: Guidance counsellors in educational institutions are concerned with the overall development of students. Cultism is a deviant behaviour and counsellors should be able to help students achieve self-understanding, overcome obstacles to personal growth and development, and achieve optimum development of their personal resources without resorting to violence [30]. According to Ogidafa, [29] guidance counsellors should:

- Assist students and staff/lecturers to better understand themselves and emotional conflicts that can impact their lives. Offer them effective means of coping with personal problems and assist them in effectively pursuing their positive goals;
- Counsel parents/guardians and seek their cooperation in areas that affect their children and wards;
- Encourage students to expose any secret, unauthorised group meetings of students as this could lay the foundation for cult formation;
- Organise a Vice-Chancellor/Rector/Provost-student dialogue at least once a semester to address student concerns with campus and academic life;
- Organise and execute orientation programmes each semester for new and old students pointing out the dangers inherent in cult membership
- Show films on the repercussions of cultism and other anti-social behaviours such as exam malpractice, sexual immorality, and robbery and give former victims a chance to share their stories;
- Work in close relationship with the students' affairs office and other service units of the institution to facilitate conducive environment for learning.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper evaluated the role of cult activities on educational development. It highlights that the administrative style of institutional administrators, government's lukewarm attitude towards cult related activities, inadequate religious and moral instructions and education, inadequate welfare programmes for students, inability for the mass media to effectively education their audience are among the causes of cultism on our campuses. Others factors are mental illness, parental and home background, peer group influence, the society we live in—where the adult society is often materialistic, dishonest, and corrupt. The support staffs

of educational institutions gives to cultists and the unfavourable learning environments where many learning facilities in educational institutions are so inadequate that some students cannot cope academically. As a result, join cult to be able to intimidate lecturers to award unmerited grades.

Tertiary education system is responsible for the development and production of high-level work force within the context of the needs of the nation [37]. Tertiary education systems in Nigeria has failed to produce and enlarge the quality needed labour force, which is the bedrock of development of any country because it has been bisected with myriads of cult related problems like volatile academic programmes, examination malpractices, sexual harassment, killings, drug abuse and aggressive students' unionism.

However, this paper suggests remedies to cult activities on campus. Parents should give their children and wards proper attention and training by monitoring their everyday activities early in life. Religious organisations should deemphasise material wealth and tell the truth to their audience that there is no food for lazy men and women order than preaching prosperity. This will go a long way in the reduction of cult activities on campuses. Students on their own have a greater role to play in curbing the activities of cults on campus. They should see and speak about cult activity as anti-social and anti-academic. Government has the sole responsibility to make laws that will protect its citizens and punish criminals. Therefore, government should stand up to these responsibilities. Societies worldwide are engulfed with nepotism, tribalism, favouritism, bribery, corruption, and killings. These activities have set negative precedents in societies. The earlier we make a 'U' turn the better for our societies.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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