



The Political Economy Of Cultism And Social Deviance In Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Abudullahi Garba Kangiwa, Phd

FEDERAL CHARACTER COMMISSION, ABUJA

Email: agkangiwa@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

With the increase in cultism and other deviant behaviors in the Nigerian tertiary institutions, students, lecturers and other members of the academic communities are no longer safe. Cult members now employ modern weapons and all kinds of arms to cause mayhem and unleash terror and violence in our campuses. There are now rampant reports of theft, rape, wars, rebellious disrespect to constituted authorities and illegal movements, despite internal security networks within the campuses. This paper discusses cultism as a form of deviant behaviors perpetrated by students of universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study utilized secondary data to explain the root causes and consequences of the campus cults with a view to proffering solutions to the problem. The main objective of the paper is to study the socio-economic and political characteristics, social organization and modes of operation of the campus secret cults with a view to suggesting effective ways of stemming its negative impact on the society, institutions and individual cult members and possibly proffer suggestions and recommendations on how to take positive measures towards eradicating secret cults in the institutions. The paper posits that cultism as a form of deviant behaviours is but a function of the political economy of the society. Thus, the

political and economic factor is the source of cultism and social deviance on campuses since the institutions seeks to reflect or mirror the society. The paper recommends among others that the campuses security systems must be upgraded and security personnel well motivated and equipped to tackle the menace.

INTRODUCTION

Historically secret cults are not alien to our societies. Among the Yoruba's of South Western Nigeria, there has been Ogboni Secret Society; among the Efik of South Eastern Nigeria there has been the Ekpe Society and the Ekine cult of Eastern Delta State (Adelola, 1997;51). Although among the Northern tribes, there were cults and secret societies connected with hunting, fishing, farming and the like there were not worthy, secret societies comparable with Ogboni and Ekpe in prestige and popularity. This is probably due to the strong influence of Islam in this part of the country (Amadi, 1982; 12). In 1977 the Federal Military Government suspecting that some of these secret societies interfered with the administration in the civil service and with justice in the courts, decreed that members should renounce their membership or quit the public service (Amadi, 1982; 8). However in spite of the move by the former military government to rid the public service of members of secret societies, the



cults appear to be growing in stature and viciousness.

Social deviance is one of the distinguishing characteristics of university students and other tertiary institutions and variety of these deviant behaviours are perpetrated within the confines of the student's campuses and their immediate environment. The list is unending but deviant behaviours amongst students in the Nigerian higher institutions of learning include; violent protests and demonstrations; drug abuse and marijuana smoking; statutory and forcible rape, cultism and assault; stealing and shoplifting; damage of public property; forgery of academic and medical documents fraud and embezzlement with regards to union, club, sports or party funds, cheating during tests, and examinations, lying and other forms of intellectual dishonesties; 'kwanan gida' and other hostel rules violations, premarital, extramarital sexual activities and abortions etc (Odekunle, 1982).

A few years ago the nation's higher institutions were highly referred to by all and sundry as citadels of excellence both in academic and moral uprightness. But today this once enviable standard has waned and hitherto dignity of the nation's citadels of learning has been dragged in the mud. They are now no more than jungles where armed gangs organized into all kinds of cults which unleash terror on the students and lecturers who live in perpetual fear of these desperate ruffians.

The activities of campus cults amount to hitch in peaceful co-existence and academic freedom to which higher institutions as molders of youths for societal harmony and progress is concerned. Besides, self destruction from violent interpersonal clashes results in their own death

and those of innocent persons. The Daily Times opinion on the matter reveals that:

The increase menace of cultism in academic communities has baffle most people. Campuses are expected to be centres of reason and scientific outlook and are suppose to be the primary guide to behavior. The rise in the number of associations with weird and horrifying names has polluted the otherwise pacific and serene environments of the campuses (Daily Times cited in Owoeye 1997:28)

Thus the activities of the campus cult's have posed serious challenges to order, security and community peace not only within the campus or their urban locale, but has also threaten the fundamental objectives and performance of such institutions (Owoeye, 1997:23).

It is against this backdrop that the Federal Government promulgated the Students Union Activities (Control and Regulation Decree 47 of 1989) which empowered the heads of institutions with the combined efforts of the security men to closely monitor students or groups found to belong to any of the campus secret cults. They are to be summarily dismissed and made to face the full wrath of the law. Nevertheless, in spite of the concerted effort, cultism and other forms of social deviance have assumed a disgraceful and disheartening dimension. The dimension knows no bound, so much so that most campuses have been taken over by cults dictating the tune to drum to the student's body, to the lecturers, to the institutions authority and to the society at large (Adelola, 1997: 620).

However within the last 16 years, starting from January 1999 to date, the number of the campus



secret cults has increased just like the number of the institutions has scored. The development of secret cult is now becoming fashionable in our institutions of higher learning. New cults are springing up daily; thousands of new members are initiated annually or seasonally and unapproved threats to lives of non-members permeate everywhere. But what is a secret cult? How can we differentiate between clubs and cults? What are the characteristics of cults and their goals or objectives? What are the socio-economic and political causes or factors of cultism in tertiary institutions? Why is it that in spite of the stiff penalties, members face, when caught, students still join cults? These and many more questions agitating the mind of an average sociologist or a criminologist have created the central problem that prompted this study.

This paper is divided into five (5) sections. The first section presents a conceptual clarification by defining the concepts of social deviance, campus cults, cultism, and the distinguishing characteristics of secret cults and clubs,. The second section explains the objectives, social organization and modes of operation of the campus cults. The third section presents the Methodology – Political Economy Approach and Theoretical Framework. The fourth section presents the origin of the campus secret cults and the root causes and consequences of cultism in tertiary institutions. The last section is the recommendations and conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Before the definition of cultism and other related concepts, it is pertinent to define social deviance and its relativity. Social deviance can be defined as any behavior that fails to conform to the

expectations of society. Deviance is a departure from the norms and it occurs when an individual or group does not meet the standards of society. Social deviance is often used to refer to actions which are usually wrong such as prostitution, cultism drug addiction, rape, murder, robbery, terrorism etc. But it can also be used for behaviors which are merely different. For example in a society in which almost every woman marries, a woman who remains single is a deviant (Clinard, 1974; Douglas, 1973). According to Haralambos & Holborn (2004: 360) deviance is a relative concept-that is there is no absolute way of defining a deviant behavior. Actions are only deviant in relation to the standards of a particular society at particular time in history. An act defined as deviant in one society may be seen as perfectly normal in another. For example in a predominantly muslim community a man can have more than one wife whereas in a christian society it is illegal to marry more than one wife. Similarly an act which is considered deviant today may be defined as normal in the future. For instance at certain times in western society it has been considered deviant for woman to smoke, use make-up and consume alcoholic drinks in public but today this is no longer the case.

Campus simply put the ground and the building of a tertiary institution like a College, Polytechnic or University. The term 'secret' means something kept hidden or separate from the knowledge of others, something unrevealed, mystery. It means that the objectives, decisions, strategy and tactics of cults must not be revealed to non-members. An underlying explanations or reasons that is not known, only to initiates (Owoeye, 1997:2; Fawole, 1997:107). A cult may be defined as a group of people who follows a system of worship that is different from the usual and established



forms of religion. Cult could also be defined as a specific system of religious worship especially with reference to its rites and deity. Cultism therefore is an exclusive ideology and a system of practice centered on sacred symbols which are shrouded in a mystery and beyond the knowledge and understanding of ordinary people. In other words cultism is a system of devotion or worship as expressed in ritual. The object of worship in this sense is ideological (Amadi, 1982; Ademola, 1997, Owoeye, 1997:20). For the purpose of this paper therefore a secret cult is defined to mean any form of organization whose activities are not only exclusively kept away from the knowledge of others but such activities are carried out at odd hours of the day and they often clash with the accepted norms and values of everyday life (Ogunbameru, 1997).

These conceptual classifications will not be complete without appreciating the distinction between secret cults and social clubs. Secret cults usually have religious undertones. Often members are required to swear not to reveal the activities of the society. Such oaths are sworn by local deities powerful enough to restrain the swearer effectively as required. In some societies the religious component is restricted to the oaths. While religious rites form an aspect of the activities of secret cults, social clubs may be regarded as open and more practical versions of secret cults. Social clubs may be seen as group of individuals who have common interests, common identity, norms, needs and who act together in common effort to identify common needs. They are found in every sphere of life – religion, business, academics, sports etc. (Amadi, 1982:2; Fawole, 1997:52). Perhaps the two organizations are different because the activities of secret cults are absolutely secret and nothing more, these are

outside the knowledge of non-members. Their activities are only known to members of the cults which they are not ready to divulge to anybody. Even the identities of members are kept secret, only members know themselves (Fawole, 1997: 107).

However, a close examination of these clubs and cults especially at our institutions of higher learning reveals identical characteristics. At the head is either president or chief who undergoes either an installation or coronation at the beginning of his regime after which he can then conduct the initiation of other members. During this event there is usually an enactment of some simulation of secrecy which is a derivation of some sort of myth or mystery. Breaking or eating of kola, sipping of venerated wine, singing of weird songs, dancing of ritual steps, chanting of incantations, pouring of libation, wearing of black dress or attire and bizarre activities are some of the distinguishing characteristics of secret cults and clubs.

Objectives, Social Organization and Modes of Operation of the Campus Secret Cults.

The main impetus of cult activities is best link with the objective needs of such groups in an increasingly complex society. Firstly, all secret cults endeavor to protect their members from harm inflicted by non- members. This protection is usually achieved through the influence of members who are placed in privileged positions. Secondly, secret cults provide security for members in political, economic and even religious spheres. Thirdly, members of secret cults usually strive to gain a psychological advantage over the rest of the population. They deliberately create the impression that they possess esoteric knowledge



and spiritual powers beyond the reach of others. The achievements of such powers make the secret cults irresistibly attractive to people who will otherwise feel psychologically or socially insecure. Fourthly, members of secret cults prescribe and enforce laws especially moral laws within and outside the cults. Sometimes such laws are beneficial to society as a whole; at other times they are devised for the convenience of members of the cult only. Whatever the nature of these laws, they affect moral behaviour in society and this is our main concern here. (Amadi, 1982, Adelola, 1997, Owoeye, 1997: 20).

Like any other social organization, cults are not haphazard in their organization. They have constitutions, procedures for operation and initiation. There are expected norms and values which dictate cult member's duties and responsibilities, cult to cult relations and societal relations. They have their own structures with hierarchical order, functions and roles which vary from cult to cult in titles and nomenclature but in all cases, titles wear a Psydo-military garb mostly in the different type of cap-berets. There exists an infallible chain of command and responsibilities as in non-cult society. The language or motto of the organizations is also military in outlook while each cult has its own unique outfit (Fawole, 1997: 58).

As a social group the need for survival must be paramount, and to do this, there should be group cohesion and definition of the situation that accommodate the 'we' and they relationship. First to make cults distinct from non-cult organizations, secrecy is the divide while spirit de corps is the vehicle to the achievement of group cohesion. Like other social systems campus cults also have their own mechanisms of socializing their new

members. These are in terms of dressing, definition of the situation etc to justify separateness. Internally, social cohesion among cult members often lead to clashes among cults because esprit de corps often blindfolds members objectively. The rule of force is about the manifestation of cult's cohesion. Their operations offer horror, fear, and dreads to non-members who quake at the mention of their various names (Adelola, 1997). While cults have their own organizations aimed at achieving specific purposes, cult to cult relationships could become combulsive such as to create an eruption within the society. According to Ogunbameru, (1997:4) inter and intra-cult clashes could result from the following factors.

- a) The rule of force, dominance and autocratic leadership within the cults.
- b) The struggle to influence decision making machinery of the students union.
- c) The attempt to protect individual cult from what they call injustice from non-members and from members of other cults.
- d) The fight over the ownership of girl friends

Explaining the social organization of the campus cults Adelola (1997:57-64) identified some features which they share in common in their modes of operation. These include membership, secrecy, initiation and test, oath taking, appearance movements, greetings and etc. First, membership of cults cut across all classes of people in the institutions. The Members of the cults includes, student's leaders, rich students, and children of poor and well to do families and lecturers top the list of prospective members. One common feature about their mode of operation is secrecy or better put, protectiveness of self

withholding information from non-members and abhorring interference in the internal affairs of the group. The initiation ceremony is an elaborate occasion for cult members are drawn from other institutions. It is stiffest of cult activities because it is the beginning of the socialization of new members into the cult. The mode of securing new initiates varies. It is easy to join a cult if one could pass the test. It is dangerous to fight a cult and it is even more dangerous to want to leave after being initiated. On initiation the new member takes a cult name. As there are variations in the strength and modus operandi, cults also vary in the types of test of courage and endurance for admission. For instance the Pyrate Confraternity required only proofs of academic excellence as part of the membership requirement.

As part of control, other emergencies or confrontation, and to secure members loyalty or steadfastness, they resort to oath-taking with its attendant rituals. The objects of their oath vary from one cult to another. Another common feature about their mode of operation is masking in their appearance, even on the prowl of their activities in a dead of the night they wear masks. The cults choose the venue of their activities with care and calculated caution, keeping the gory details exclusively within their rank and file. They know everybody but those who know them are few. Whenever secret cult members are moving, everything and everybody must give way or be crushed. Members of the secret cults greet one another in a particular way. Before 1972, members of the Eye Confraternity greet one another by whistling alone, but by 1973 clawing was introduced while others respond with the whole first. (Adelola, 1997, 58).

METHODOLOGY-POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH

Political economy approach provides a ready tool for a deeper penetration of social phenomena. As a methodological approach it assigns primacy to material (economic and political factors) as opposed to cognition on which the latter depends. In general terms this approach postulates that in any society the political and economic factor is pre-eminent and ultimately determines the essence and character of other spheres of social existence such as politics, religion, culture etc. It does not deny that the non-economic factors have impact on and influence the economic base (Abdullahi, 1986). In effect the argument is that if you understand how economic system are organized, that is to say what the material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed and what types of social relations raised from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of that society, its laws, its religious system, its political system and even its modes of thought: political economy emphasize the dynamic and dialectical character of social phenomena. It sees society in a condition of constant change, the change being propelled by the conflicts between thesis and antithesis resulting from the interdependence and interconnectedness of the various facets of our social existence in which various classes play a role, the conflict being resolved for the better or the worse (Osita, 1989).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From the study of deviant behaviors there is a sufficient indication that many of the existing



sociological theories cannot adequately explain the phenomenon of cultism in tertiary institutions. However, some aspects of the Functionalist and Marxist theories seem to provide reasonable explanations.

The Functionalist theory which was formulated by Emile Durkheim, later developed by Robert K. Merton, provided explanation to all forms of deviant behaviors and crimes including campus secret cults. Durkheim (1952:251 & 1964: 375-8) argues that in primitive societies there exists mechanical solidarity where mores and folkways control people's behavior. But as society becomes more complex and change from mechanical to 'organic' solidarity, there is an increasing division of labor and heterogeneity. As a consequence, the traditional forms of social control become ineffective and the state of 'anomie' replaces the former state of solidarity. Anomie refers to the condition of normlessness in which people experience an acute lack of meaningful rules and purpose in their life. Under the condition of anomie, there is a high rate of criminal behaviors (Durkheim cited in Nkpa, 1994:280). A lot of scholars and writers (Olurontimihin, 1982; Abati, 1994; Ogunbameru, 1997) agreed that there is in Nigeria today a general state of 'anomie' or 'normlessness' and there are all forms of deviant behaviors and crimes including campus secret cults since the Nigerian society has replaced honor with dishonor as a standard attitude (Ogunbameru, 1997:4).

According to Durkheim (1964), the hereditary nature of property and thus life chances often makes it difficult for merit to find its appropriate level within society. When this occurs as presently is the case in Nigerian society, some individuals enter into a conflict so as to change the

opportunity structure. This more often results into the experience of anomie of injustice (Durkheim cited in Ogunbameru, 1997:7). Perhaps it is appropriate to explain the meaning and relationship between what Giddens (1972) calls anomie of the advantaged and anomie of injustice and cult relationship. The anomie of injustice refers to a situation in which there are realistic aspirations (in terms of merit) faced with inequality of opportunities. Put in another way, it involves a distinction between higher aspirations and limited opportunities. Since social origins usually facilitate or hamper access to the forms of success represented by wealth or recognition or power, children from the disadvantaged background tend more often to join secret cults to use them to obtain forcefully what they are denied in reality. The anomie of the advantaged is concerned with unrealistic and unlimited aspirations. This form of anomie is common with the children of the rich and high class members of the society. Among the children of the advantaged, there is generally a thirst for novelties, unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations, all of which they believe they can forcefully obtain through secret cult membership (Giddens cited in Ogunbameru, 1997:8).

Merton's theory of Anomie and Social Structure provided more reasonable explanations to all forms of campus crimes and deviant behaviors in the society. According to Merton (1968), society prescribes certain cultural goals which individuals are expected to pursue. These goals are usually accompanied by institutionalized means of achieving them. However, as a result of some problems in the functioning of the social system, the institutionalized means of achieving prescribed goals are not easily available to every individual. Thus, some individuals use non-



institutionalized means to achieve cultural goals (Merton cited in Okunola2002) In Nigerian society, individuals have been made to accept materialism as an important cultural goal, however such a goal is supposed to be pursued through institutionalized means such as occupational skill and education. Owing to certain problems in the functioning of the social system such as inequality of opportunities in the occupational and educational institutions, a substantial number of people cannot achieve the prescribed goals through institutionalized means. These people can be regarded as deviants since they reject society's expected means of achieving prescribed goals. Thus students who joined secret cults have accepted the societal goal of success-materialism but since the opportunity to achieve the goal by legitimate or institutionalized means is not easily accessible to all, they yield to the urge to achieve the goal by the use of illegitimate means (Ogunbameru, 1997:4).

The Marxist theory was initially attributed to Karl Marx who places all social phenomena within the context of political economy thereby relating it to class structure and class struggle in modern capitalist society. The society is divided into class of the haves and have nots-those who control the means of production and those who do not (Marx, 1984). It follows therefore that all forms of cultism and social deviance would manifest themselves in the families of lower socio-economic class. Marx located the driving force behind societal development in the forces of production and relations of production and described the capitalist mode of production as the cornerstone of all contradictions. He explained that the modern capitalist society has eroded the necessary social bonds through the introduction of private ownership of property that generates

tension, competition, hostility and selfish interest among individuals (Marx, 1984). Thus for anyone to understand the nature and rate of cultism and social deviance in tertiary institutions, he/she must take into consideration of the law of development of the capitalist mode of production.

Today many radical criminologists view crime and criminal law as a device made by the ruling class to preserve the existing order. According to the Radical criminologists, the legal definition of crime as a human conduct is created by agents of the dominant class in a politically organized society. They argued that the definition of crime is applied by the class that has power to shape the enforcement and administration of criminal law. They also argued that official data regarding the volume of crime is presented by those in power to indicate that those in the lower classes are much more involved in criminal behavior than members of the upper class (Nkpa, 1994). According to this view, criminal law is the tool the ruling class uses to control the lower classes. As Chamblis says, "the history of criminal law is not a history of public opinion or public interest being reflected in criminal legislation". On the contrary the history of criminal law is everywhere, the history of criminal legislation and court decisions which in effect reflect the interests of the economic elites who control the means of production and distribution of the major resources of the society (Chambliss 1969 cited in Nkpa, 1994). Richard Quinney (1974) also argues that although law is supposed to protect all citizens, it starts as a tool of the dominant class and ends by maintaining the dominance of that class. Law serves the powerful over the weak; it promotes the war of the powerful against the powerless. Moreover law is used by the state and its elitist government to promote and protect itself.



Following the Marxian perspective (which is the anchor of this study) all forms of deviant behaviors and campus crimes including cult activities are as political and economic as they are sociological. Incidentally, this paper assumes that most of the secret cult activities in our institutions of high learning are expressions or manifestations of the behavioral pattern of the mass of the people and the life style of the elite or the ruling class of any given society. In a situation whereby the members of the ruling elite who constitute a tiny percentage of the population openly exhibit ostentatious life style on the one hand, and the vast majority of the people live in object poverty on the other hand, the tendency is to create social anomie and all forms of deviant behaviors within such society. Thus for students in particular, who have not yet climb the social ladder of the ruling elite but are also a social category which does not belong to the middle or lower classes, social hiatus amongst students is only natural. Thus students are likely to indulge in all sorts of deviant acts on campuses to make up for the status inconsistency.

ORIGIN OF THE CAMPUS SECRET CULTS

The origin of secret cults on campuses has been traced back to the emergence of the Pyrate Confraternity at the University of Ibadan (UI) which was founded in 1952 by Professor Wole Soyinka and six (6) other young under-graduates of the institution then. According to the noble laureate, the Pyrate Confraternity was established to act as a correction, reformatory and training center for members so that they could act as shining examples to other students within the campuses. Prof Wole Soyinka said:

We believed that a University education should be fun without the viciousness which was prevalent on campus. We also thought students should map out a character of their own rather than follow sheepishly the norm and traits of our largely European staff. One day seven of us got together in somebody's room whose name I can't remember because some of us lived next door to me) and said, "let's start something". Everybody was enthusiastic and full of ideas. One person suggested the name, another thought of the satire and another of the initiation ceremony. One thing we all agreed on was that there won't be any room for colonial mentality in the 'club' (Prof Wole Soyinka cited in Adelola, 1997.53).

From the above quotation, it could be seen that the Pyrate Confraternity was formed to resist colonial domination, engender reforms, stimulate political awareness, encourage student's harmony and evolve a university culture. Adelola (1997.57) argues that what propelled the formation was the arrogant determination of the then university administrators to impose white values on the students. The Pyrate Confraternity was not created to oppress or terrorize fellow students but to resist oppressions, secure and protect member's rights, aid financially handicapped students, seek academic assistance and promote brotherhood. Prof. Wole Soyinka further said that it was because of the departure from the expected norms



by most of the campus cults that the Pyrate Confraternity had ordered in 1984 that student chapters of the Association in all institutions be closed. Thus, no one should be left in doubt as to the fact that the present menacing cults on our campuses are just mere adulteration of the first one and a serious distinction is being made between them and the Confraternity.

The root causes of cultism in tertiary institutions

According to Adelola (1997:57) one of the major causes of cult's proliferation is the break away from the Pyrate Confraternity and the attendant formation of various rival cults in our high institutions of learning. For a very long time the Pyrate Confraternity was the only known secret cults in Nigerian universities. But because of its rigid standards which many would be members could not meet and internal disputes, splinter groups broke away to form alternative secret cults. Until 1960's the Pyrate Confraternity had the field day. There could be rebellion or disenchantment but it did not immediately produce other variants' of the cults rather it produced cults whose identities could be easily traced to the granny club. Such clubs that surfaced include the Pyrate and the Buccaneers. They are not different from the Confraternity by merely sharing its symbol of the skull and the cross-bones. It is the lack of cohesion and consistency in the Confraternity that has produced the avalanche of cultic groups that have involved the campuses today. It was not until 1968 at the Premier University that the first notable departure came with the formation of the Supreme Eiyé Confraternity and its subsequent spread to other universities (Adelola, 1997). The birth of the rival cults in the history of our universities took place at the University of Calabar in 1972 with the upsurge of other secret

cults. Today cults like Black Axe, K.K.K Ozo, Vikings, Panama, Black Cat, Buccaneers Eiyé Confraternity, Black Beret, Dragons, Frigates, Himalayes Canary, Pyrate Walnut, Barracudes, Amazons (all females) Marpiates and others yet to mature - The Trojan Horse, The Mgba Mgba, The Red Devils, The Blood Spot, The Temple of Eden, Gentlemen cult, Seadogs, Children of Judah have emerged in the nations institutions of higher learning.

The conflicts between two rival cults could be another source of cult's proliferation. For instance in a review, Vintage Tribune reports that in Auchy Polytechnic, during the month of March, 1993 two rival cults engaged themselves in an all out clash that left two students dead. Another report has it that on 23rd February 1991 three (3) undergraduates of the University of Ibadan received a deep machet cut from members of the Eiyé cult. In 1992 six (6) students of the Federal Polytechnic Oko, Anambra were murdered in a cult clash between rival groups. In 1993 Enugu State University of technology lost part five medical student when the Black Axe and Black Berets engaged each other in an open clash. In the same year, a final year student of Industrial Chemistry at the University of Benin was murdered in his hostel. In 1994 a clash between the Buccaneers and the Black Axe left two students dead at the Ondo State University (Adelola, 1997;63).

It is a common knowledge that the conditions of development under which we are now living especially the capitalist and the mixed economy type and the patterns of industrialization and urbanization which we copy from the west all leads to the emergence of different kinds or misdemeanors (Odekunle, 1978). Thus the root



cause of cultism and social deviance in the tertiary institutions is the crisis in the prevailing social, political and economic order of the society. The reign of campus cults and their mind - rending deviant activities are a manifestation of the collapse of the family institution, lack of discipline and parental neglect (Abati; 1994, Ogunbameru, 1997). Due to the fervid race for materialism, parents have abandoned their traditional and moral responsibilities. Parents no longer have time or interest in their children's progress at school. The burden of child upbringing has been pushed over to the school teachers. Abati (1994) argues that many students who join campus secret cults probably have parents who belong to one secret cult or the other. Such children grow up with the awareness that their parents have a special room which no one else is permitted to enter. The rooms are filled with all sorts of emblems and effigies which nobody can touch. These parents are also discovered to go out at night, often times to attend meetings that are never discussed at home (Abati, 1994 cited in Ogunbameru 1997.5). Thus some students who join cults might have been influenced by carry over beliefs and value system which are practiced back home.

The reasons for the re-occurrence and upsurge of secret cults in our campuses may not be too far from selfish manipulation of religion for personal enrichment (Usman, 1987.) For instance, nobody could deny the fact that such anti-social behaviors by members of secret cults is as a result of lack of religious and moral force. Perhaps the most important reason is still the economic factor. This is because cultism is much more peculiar to the culture of people in some sections of the country. If this phenomenon is found to be assuming a national dimension and the spread of the cults

covers all campuses in Nigeria including the institutions in the northern part of the country, then it might not be unconnected with the crisis in education nationwide which has social, political and economic undertones.

The current collapse of the whole educational system, including the status of lecturers under the present economic condition has had great negative impact not only on students but also on the whole academic community. Many of our higher institutions of learning are without infrastructure and extra-curricular facilities. Such facilities include sports grounds, multi-purpose hall, butterfly and art theaters among others (Ogunbameru, 1997:6). Under such condition and in the absence of recreational facilities which could have provided avenues through which students can meet to dissipate energy and tension can force students to all sort of anti-social behaviors including cultism.

Side by side with this factor is the politicization of university appointments and lack of proper screening of students admitted into various institutions of higher learning. The ban, decline and subsequent death of virile and legitimate student unionism in the tertiary institutions have also been identified for the rise in number and methods of operation of campus secret cults. Often times there are insinuations that institution's authorities promote cult activities to dampen powerful students activism because cult members could be used to harass students' leaders (Fawole, 1997.62). Ogunbameru (1997.6) argues that statutory suppression of the student union movement has stifled all legitimate expressions or feelings and sentiments of the student community. This has contributed to the emergence of



mushroom student clubs both open and secret cults and the struggle for supremacy among them.

The current reign of campus secret cults can also be linked with foreign influence (Ogunbameru, 1997;5). Foreign influence as a factor as demonstrated in horror films like 'First Order' 'Demon Lovers', 'In the name of God', 'The House on Skull Hill' etc which scenes of bizarre, cult violence and esoteric practices that go a long way to influence the activities of cult members on campuses. Ogunbameru (1997;5) opined that cultism in the tertiary institutions has been fuelled by the unwholesome foreign influences of violent culture which serve as role models for our youths. For instance the unchecked flourish of Pop movies deficient in instructive aesthetics, but redolent in violence and moral stupor, have combined with other factors to breed new generation, degenerate and decadent Nigerians. One consequences of this is linked to the rising wave of campus based crimes such as rape, use of acid and unrestrained use of fire-arms. According to Adelola (1997) student join cults for ego actualization, while others join to settle some scores with others. Yet others join because they want identification later on in the future. Those who could not have ordinarily become members were hired by promises of inducement; others are cajoled; still others are ignorantly deceived into joining and a few others join for ego expansion, protection, vengeance for oppression or as a result of peer group influence. Olufumilayo Bajomo (1994) explains some of the reasons why most students join secret cults;

Most members of the cult join out of sheer ignorance, out of lack of knowledge of what it all entail, some are members because their

friends are into it, while some are involved to maintain their social status on campus (Bajomo 1994 cited in Adelola, 1997;60)

The current upsurge in number and activities of campus secret cults has also been attributed to the age many students enter higher institutions of learning. Many of the undergraduates belong to the adolescent age bracket, a stage subject to psychological fluctuations while searching for their personalities. In this search, the influence of their peer groups is paramount. Thus many intakes to the campuses are lured to secret cults by their peers who are already members. Youthful exuberance and the spirit of adventurism could be a magnetizer into secret cults. Youths are less tolerant of the society at large and are less cohesive in their approaches. They are known to always ask question about themselves, their environment and their society at large. Secret cults pretend to have answers to these questions and because of the mystery surrounding among them, inquisitive youths are easily convinced to join to find answers to their nagging questions. Some youths are in cults to find fun. They enjoy drinking, smoking and living in elevated life (Ogunbameru, 1997;60, Adelola, 1997:50). However it is the absence of some aspects of our constitution relating to the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to peaceful assembly and association, and the right to freedom of movement that encourage proliferation of cults (Adelola, 1997; 60).

But the fundamental question, which is yet to be answered, is: why is it that in spite of the stiff penalties members face when caught, students still join cults. The following factors may be said to be responsible for the persistence of cultism in the



Nigerian tertiary institutions. Although most people will detest and renounce secret cults, but it is an open secret that the majority of the membership of secret cults are drawn from the children of certain distinguished men of “timber and caliber”. At times senior members of academic and administrative staff are known to be sponsors. Indeed initial arrest of culprits at Obafemi Awolowo University on 23rd February 1991 comprised 16 undergraduate students including a Minister’s son a lecturer (Ogunbameru, 1997:13, Owoeye1997:28). It has been noted that as it is with armed robbery and drug trafficking, so it is with the campus secret cults. The common factor of the three vices is that they have Godfathers’ who ensure that the situation at the bottom is perfectly under control and that there is no cause for dangerous alarm (Osita, 1989). The inability or failure of the campus administrators in tackling the menace is a manifestation of the fact that a number of cult members come from the families of powerful elites in the society.

Another factor is just like any other pressure group under greatly depressed economic condition in the country, many students would be highly tempted to join secret cults as there are apparent material and other benefits for the membership of such ‘clubs’. According to the report of the committee on secret cult’s activities in the Polytechnic Birnin Kebbi (1994) the benefits of campus secret cults include among others:

- a) The desire to pass the examinations especially because of the low level quality of teaching and learning materials
- b) The desire to get undue favours either from the lecturers or the school authority.

- c) The desire to get lucrative jobs by establishing connection with ‘big’ men who may belong to such society especially because some highly placed, but respected individuals are alleged to be deeply involved in cult system.

Consequences of the Activities of Campus Secret Cults

The consequences of the campus secret cults are three fold; cult members, campuses and the larger society. According to Ogunbameru (1997:9) the consequences on cult members include the following among others:

- a) Their initiation ceremonies are generally attended with secrecy and any revelation of its activities and or mysteries is punished with barbarous severity. Potential members who fall by the way side during initiation tests are kept on surveillance for sometime so that they do not leak out the secret about the cults.
- b) The physical operation which members are subjected can be very painful. For instance in some cults, new members are stripped naked, asked to jump over fiery fire, climb very tall trees and jump down, given fifty strokes of cane, subjected to thorough beating, asked to lie on coffins and are trodden on by masked old members among other nondescript rituals.
- c) Individual loss of lives that occur through journeys made during cross campus activities. A lot of members have been known to be killed in motor accidents when travelling to attend meetings at other institutions outside their own.



- d) Some members who are into drugs usually run into health problems. Such members find it difficult in detoxicating when eventually they stop taking drugs.
- e) The academic performance and/or career of members is sometimes affected. This has on several occasions led to premature graduation or spending extra years or passing out with low degree or grade.

The consequences of secret cults on the institutions of higher learning in the last few years have posed serious threat to peace, harmony and security in our campuses. The frequent clashes between members of cults and between two rival cults in which dangerous weapons including automatic rifles, daggers, broken bottles, and acid were used have resulted into the destruction of property and death of innocent persons. Another consequence on the campuses is that any clash between rival cults usually throws the institution into a state of confusion which has on several occasions led to closure of some universities and other higher institutions of learning for some weeks or months (Ogunbameru, 1997: 11). As members of secret cults continue their notorious activities, the atmosphere in the institutions is no longer conducive for learning; lecturers are being intimidated into passing members of the cults even without sitting for examinations; students are being assaulted. Generally students cannot prepare very well and pass examinations as they cannot venture to go out or read after 8: pm. As a result of the activities of campus secret cults, a lot of people have been maimed butchered, raped and a lot of damage has been done on society including destruction of valuable, chemical spillage and other economic malfunctions. Foreign students are seared of admission into Nigerian institutions of

high learning and those admitted live in perpetual fear (Adelola, 1997: 53; Ogunbameru, 1997:11).

Cultism has horrific implications not only to the educational sector but on the whole society. Indeed cult activities affect members, rival cult groups, other students, institutional authorities, security agencies and the society at large. It is a corrosive out growth that menaces the entire society calling for solutions (Adelola, 1997:60).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the effort towards saving our institutions of high learning from the ugly face of cultism, the Federal Government with the institution's authorities should come out with a policy on code of conduct that will regulate the activities of clubs and societies and stamp out this group of metaphysical cults once and for all. Apart from the constant proscription of student unionism, the institutions authorities should ban the activities of secret cults and restrict all social meetings of clubs and societies to day time and subject them to approval by the authorities. They should register and recognize only the clubs and societies which are not directed by the forces of selfish interest and manipulation for material gains. Expelled students who have been known to belong to secret cults should not be readmitted by any institution of high learning in the country. The authorities should ensure that the certificates given to the graduating students are granted only on the basis of character and learning and such certificates remain the property of the institutions and should be withdrawn if at any time the character of the holder brings odium to the institution. Furthermore, any student or staff of the institution found to be aiding and abetting the activities of secret cults should be summarily dismissed.



Since most members of secret cults were recruited as freshers, the institution's authorities should ensure the intensive screening of the prospective candidates before their admission. The institutions should organize orientation programme for the new intake which will be effective if it involves warnings and vital information to students about secret cults and the havoc they wreck on fellow students. The eradication of the activities of the campus cults cannot be achieved without having good relationships between lecturers and students in the institutions. The relationship between the students and lecturers was not cordial and does not encourage the achievement of the purpose for which the institutions were established. The lecturers are supposed to be counseling the students so as to facilitate their studies, rather than dwell on harsh academic environment, making the students life difficult. Good and desirable behaviours by both students and lecturers should be properly identified and rewarded by the institution's authorities. Lecturers must know that they have a great role to play in the moral and social responsibilities of the students in their charge. They must get close to the students while avoiding over familiarity. It is when lecturers show legitimate interest in the progress of their students that they can exhibit confidence and respect for them.

In order to find effective solutions to the activities of campus secret cults, there is need to tackle the issue of poverty in the institutions. For instance, we know that in addition to the high cost of feeding, and accommodation, the price of books, keep on rising on daily basis which makes it difficult for the less privileged students to depend on their well to do colleagues. The situation was worsened by the lack of sporting and recreational facilities. Government should therefore provide

poverty alleviation programmes and recreational facilities to the institutions to make students active out of class otherwise they may get bored and engage in destructive behaviours.

Since it has been observed that cultism in tertiary institutions was largely due to the collapse of family institution and the influence of peer groups; parents should take interest in monitoring the conduct of their children and the type of company they keep in and out of campus. Fresh students should be careful with peer group influence and in selecting their friends. They are advised to stay away from some misguided students who indulge in secret cult activities.

The nation's judiciary should empower the prosecution and punishment of cultic groups. If caught such groups should be severely punished to serve as a deterrent for aspiring cult members and help reduce the number of existing ones. However, this is not to recommend capital punishment for the cult members. Capital punishment is not only brutish but it is doubtful if it will be effective. Besides capital punishment has been tried for armed robbery and drug trafficking in this country but it has not solved the problems, if applied to cultism it will probably increase the desperation of deviants to further brutalize non-members.

Both the print and electronic media should spell out the advantages and disadvantages of membership of secret cults to our youths in tertiary institutions. More lectures, seminars and workshops should be mounted in various campuses and the media should portray the dangers of campus terrorism, vandalism, assault, rape among others to discourage the aspiring



youths from participating in the activities of campus secret cults.

Meanwhile it was observed that most campuses are porous because the authorities did not take the issue of perimeter fencing into consideration when they were established. The campus security systems must be upgraded and security personnel well motivated and equipped to tackle the menace. However in order to eradicate the campus secret cults, the institutions authorities should adopt a comprehensive or holistic security measures which requires the contributions of all stakeholders including the media lecturers, students, parents, journalists, lawyers, government and non-governmental agencies to join the police and other security agencies in the fight against cultism.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing it is clear that secret cults are part of the evolution of the Nigerian political culture. They exist in the former regions of South Western and Eastern parts of the country in Yorubaland, Iboland, Riverine and other stateless societies. These are pressure groups and tribal cults having their own political functions. Secret cults did not exist in Northern Nigeria except at the present moment which is probably due to the political and socio-economic crisis in the country. The spread of secret cults activities in our institutions of higher learning is one of the most unfortunate developments that happened to Nigeria in the most recent times. This is undoubtedly a manifestation of our national and moral decadence.

It is obvious that secret cults in Nigerian tertiary institutions have been identified with bizarre,

warlike and violent activities. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there are no secret cults or clubs that are peace loving that ensures stability, harmony and progress. Such cults were initially functional for social integration; it will therefore be naïve to conclude without facts that all cults are injurious or destructive to the social fabric. Rather efforts should be made to assess cults on the basis of their individual merit or demerit. The main reason for cult membership is psychological, members of secret cults are individuals with psychological needs for affiliation and belonging while its activities are kept secret from non-members. In order to achieve their social, political, economic or academic goals, members use the secrecy to cast an aura of myths around the society thereby striking fear, dread and anxiety into non-members.

The factors responsible for the proliferation of secret cults especially in our higher institutions of learning are political, economic, and sociological. Some of these include rivalry among different cult members, collapse of family institution, the culture of 'anomie or normlessness' in the society, political economic and educational crises, poverty and absence of extra curricula activities, teachers and parental neglect, influence of peer groups and foreign movies among others. Some of the identified consequences of the campus cult activities include society at large, the institutions community and the students. Indeed cult activities are in themselves an outgrowth of the society. It is therefore not surprising that it rebounds back on it, causing feverish reactions. In effect the activities of cults and the reactions of the society constitute a social system. Cultism has both beneficial and harmful effects. In the language of functionalist sociologists, cultism performs important and necessary social functions. For



instance the pioneer campus cult the Pyrate Confraternity had contributed positively towards societal and campus peace as well as growth. However the supposed benefits are inconsequential. Cultism has far reaching negative implications not only in the educational sector but for the whole political economy of the society.

The issue of cultism and social deviance must be related to the society's level of development of the material production. When societies development provide necessary infrastructures E.g. employment, education, shelter, protective and supportive health care system sufficient to secure for its citizens a respectable life and existential assurance, most of the insecurities and pressures that commonly accompany cultism and other deviant behaviours would be significantly reduced.

Since it has been shown that cultism and social deviance in Nigeria's institutions of higher learning is a function of the country's political and economic order, it follows therefore that only a fundamental change in that order would alleviate the problem significantly especially in the long run.

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