Perception and Control of Secret Cult and Gang-induced Difficulties for Quality Living and Learning in Nigerian Universities: The Case study of Universities in the Middle Belt Zone

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ABSTRACT

Content and Survey methodological approaches were employed in the examination of the trend in the phenomenon of 'secret' cults in Nigerian Universities in the last two decades. From the early 1980s to 1990s rapid increases in the recorded incidences of violence attributed to cult subcultures were witnessed. The violent outburst of otherwise recreational student associations as well as cult groups that should remain 'secret' were linked to military-style administration of institutions of higher education, underfunding, the decay of infrastructures and other facilities and the collapse of the culture of academic excellence and discipline. The problem of secret cult infestation was observed to be structural and therefore requires a structural response in form of increased funding, reduction in the brain drain phenomenon and globalisation of the academic culture and standards.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study Problem

Contemporary University campuses and even the University institution itself are under intense pressure to change. Although some of the changes are by all intent and purposes meant to benefit the entire society, the consequences of current trends of changes taking place in Universities seem to outweigh the benefits. For example, while the rising demand for University education by Nigerians (Adeyemo, 2000 and Lebeau, 2000), is intended to create more job opportunities for them in the increasingly competitive global employment and information technology-driven environment, such increased demands are not matched with expansions in infrastructure to make learning conducive. Student enrolment into Universities seems to have quadrupled since the last two decades in spite of increasing joblessness in the employment market.

Part of the larger framework for the problems of higher education in Nigeria is the shift from the motives for the demand for higher education by the independence nationalists to the present problems and agitation bordering on the management and funding of higher education by the stakeholders. During the last two decades or more, tertiary educational institutions, especially the Universities have experienced repeated strike actions. These, within short intervals, with different labour unions taking turns, were connected with demand for improved working conditions and welfare packages for members. Labour unrests had characterised Universities in the last two decades than in those earlier years when both academics and students engaged in demonstrations to defend or fight against poor government economic or foreign policies. University administrations and the Federal authorities (who dictated the tune because they paid the piper!) became more high-handed and militarised against students and staff unions and associations ordinarily meant for Professional and recreational purposes. Also, over the years there have been declining funding of higher education, even though more and more Universities are being established in the country. Brain drain was an option for those who could not cope with the situation. As a result of the underfunding and related problems of higher education over the last two decades, many well-trained Nigerians and expatriates have left the services of the

Universities. Recently, a National Universities Commission's document revealed that Universities (represented by the NUC) presently are able to meet only about 30% of their academic staff needs. The Staff-Student ratios have been very unproportional, presently averaging 1: 700^{+}.

This put a challenge on the quality of teaching and research by staff and students. In fact, the World Bank recently observed that graduates of Nigerian Universities of the last ten years were unemployable, partly due to the paralysing effects of the management and funding of the institutions as well as because of incessant strike action by industrial unions operating on campuses.

The cumulative effects of such scenarios are wide-ranging. For example, one of the critical fall-outs of such situations is the pervading presence of secret cults among students. Most students are unable to cope with long periods out of school due to strike actions. Also, the result of high student-staff ratio means low supervision of the students by staff. It is clear that the quality of higher education and students' benefit of the University depend not only on the content of teaching and the curricula but also on the life of the campus. In many African Universities, unrest, criminality and insecurity seriously harm the study situation. In Nigerian Universities, a specific form of such social problems is the presence of secret cults.

Both the epistemological and ontological properties of secret cults have been the subjects of no small concern and debate among scientists, viz whether secret cult as the name suggests is amenable to scientific inquiry. This study was not centred on the veracity or otherwise of the feasibility of a secret cult study. But what has been widely reported and described as "secret cults" in the literature and the independent media reports in Nigeria have ostensibly done a lot of harm to the University learning and living environment in the past decade or more. These have come in the form of killings, harassment and intimidation ostensibly occasioned by rivalry or inter-cult wars of supremacy. Technically, these social problems translate into criminality and social insecurity, which generate fear and anxiety. The restiveness, anxiety, fear and insecurity arising from this scenario give vent to the formation of more and more alternative sub-cultures that more than counter the utilisation of opportunities available for the expression of natural, youthful energies. The emergence of secret cult

subcultures more importantly creates an enabling environment for the perpetration of moral evil as adaptive mechanisms or strategies in the face of increasing decline in the national spirit. In other words, the emergence of cult sub-cultures is a response to the decay in the quality of higher education in Nigeria over the past two decades. This is a form of coping strategy by youth to the societal decay and apprehension in the national objective of self-reliance drive.

This cultism problem as a form of students' unrest is quite different in relation to the students' problems in the past. It has caused parents, University administrators and policy makers as well as researchers and educational planners concerns. For example, a former Honourable Minister of Education, Dr.Iyorcha Ayu once recognised the seriousness of the secret cult phenomenon in institutions of higher learning when he observed that:

> Our collective psyche has been assaulted by tragic wave of secret cults on our school campuses…Blood sucking members of these cults have no respect for life and property…wealthy enough to be able to purchase guns, pay for expensive midnight parties where they engage in bizarre rituals…kidnap heads of institutions and force them to sign agreements that violate the rules and regulations of a decent society (Ayu, 1994:1)

The consequences of such bizarre activities are wide-ranging and far-reaching. For example, many students have lost their study opportunities, others have died, while others have been maimed, raped and harassed.

Given the backdrop of the secret cult phenomenon in Nigerian Universities, the study's fundamental research questions to be answered focused on:

- What the nature of the secret cult phenomenon was on campuses,
- What difficulties were generated and encountered in the course of living and learning on Nigerian University campuses, and
- What measures were put in place to control or manage secret cult activities on campuses in Nigeria.

The specific objectives for the study were to:

- Assess the nature/structure and extent of cult organisations,
- Assess the extent of difficulties generated and how they affected living and learning conditions in Universities, and
- Suggest what should be done to control/manage secret cult problems.

These objectives were analysed using a sample drawn from the population of six Universities located in the Middle Belt zone of the country.

This paper which is based on the findings of the study addresses the socio-cultural and eco-political contexts within which secret subculture and related violence emerged on campuses. It also suggests ways of reducing the insecurity that student' cultism generates. In a broad context, the paper summarises the factors, nature, extent, consequences and control of student cultism in Nigerian Universities.

METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

We here observe that so long as student cultism falls within the purview of human activity or experience, it is amenable to scientific probing. But this is a methodological issue. And the natural problem (question) associated with such an issue is whether we can actually observe what is secret. Of course, that depends on whether a participant or a non-participant observational approach is employed in the exercise of data gathering. In this study, neither of the approaches was employed in the collection of data, because we did not set out to study the internal workings of secret organisations. Rather, our objective was to assess the difficulties induced by violent cult activities in Universities.

In a sense this is a self-admission that cults exist in Universities, and we are interested in both the indicators and how they affect campus living and learning. That is why a rather indirect approach was adopted in understanding how frequent the phenomenon of cult was from the University communities, not from cultists, even though they could have been part of the samples. In other words, cultists themselves are not spirits, even though they may use mediums and spiritism in their operations. But we are only interested in the "evidences" of their presence and activities, using the

people with whom they live.

The perception survey of the difficulties of secret cults was carried out among Students, Academic staff and Administrators of the Universities of Jos and Abuja, University of Agriculture Makurdi, University of Science and technology, Minna and Benue and Kogi State Universities in Makurdi and Ayingba, respectively.

The method employed in the collection of essential data for the study relied on the *step-wise approach*, which allowed for a gradual self-determination of the nature of research activities leading to the final stage of the research project.

In addition, the content analytical method was employed in an extensive bibliographic review of the extent of cult related problems in Nigerian Universities, which provided additional data for the study.

The Collection of Primary Data.

The *step-wise* approach guided the execution of the activities of the research as outlined below:

Preliminary Fieldtrips.

Cognisance trips were carried out to the selected Universities before actual fieldwork commenced. While in these Universities, the Researcher engaged students and staff alike in discussions that bordered on the issues of secret cults and their implications for fruitful academic activities. This 'ethnographic survey' was a great eye-opener to the fact that many people would want to be involved in not only discussions on the subject but be practical about ensuring peace on the campus. One student however, gleefully replied to a question on the extent of the problem in his campus that, "they may come for my head, o!"

It was realised that campuses of Universities nowadays could hardly support free intellectual discussions on local and international issues, talk less of serious security ones such as cultism. Generally, our discussions all point to the phenomenon of secret, or at least, gang subcultures that pose some danger or threats to peaceful academic activities, if not checked.

Search for Secondary Data and Administration of Questionnaire.

Academic Research Assistants carried out the search for recorded incidences of secret cult activities in the respective Universities. But this was not as fruitful as anticipated for the data were non-existent. However, this Researcher undertook a conscientious search for media reports including University System News, a publication of the National Universities Commission as a way of supporting any possible secondary data from the Universities. But by the end of the fieldwork in February 2001, only a University 's Security Division admitted the presence of secret cults by giving three official incidences and one Student Affairs Division releasing 3 confirmed and ten cases under investigation. The situation was partly compounded by the uncooperative attitude of the officials of some of the Universities.

The administration of the questionnaires was on the basis of **cluster- random sampling technique** in all the Universities. The staff samples were selected on **a random basis**, but in respect of students, care was taken to ensure that the questionnaires were randomly administered to an equal number of males and females. The persons in the study samples were literate people. Except in a few instances where respondents were highly placed University administrator and scholars and would hardly find the time and had to be "interviewed", all the questionnaires were subject-self administered. Each Academic Research Assistant administered 50 questionnaires each among academic staff and University administrators as well as was oversight for the administration of student questionnaires by student assistants. 200 questionnaires were administered among students in each University in the equality of gender.

Data Presentation and Analysis**.**

The major formats for the presentation of data obtained from the fieldwork were tables. Simple statistical techniques, such as ratios and percentages were employed in the analysis of the data.

FINDINGS

The major findings of the study consisted of the following sub-headings.

Description of Sampled Universities.

Most of the selected Universities were established in the 1970s and the 1990s. For example, the

University of Abuja and Federal Universities of Agriculture Makurdi and Science and Technology Minna were established in 1988. Benue State University Makurdi was established in 1992. Only the University of Jos and the Kogi State University, Ayingba were established in 1973 and 2000, respectively. This shows that the majority of Universities are likely to be afflicted by lack of adequate infrastructure since the economic crunch of the 1980s laid the foundation for infrastructure underdevelopment in Nigeria and accomplished in the 1990s.

Most respondents among students and academics were male (i.e. 50.55% and 70.27%, respectively), indicating the willingness of males to volunteer discussions on the subject than females. Christianity was the predominant religious belief of the respondents (55.39% and 51.01% for students and academics). The religious belief trend in these Universities will not be unconnected in part by what James (2000), for example described as Islam's influences "…in Central Nigeria were only pronounced along the trade routes and Diaspora commercial centres" (p.46).

Similarly, most students and academics reported living on- campus (77.74% and 41.33%, respectively), with the majority of respondents among students and academics being Nigerians (92.69% and 77.33%).

Perception of the Social Structure of Campus Cult/Gang Organisations

Information from table 1 reveals that most students (67.9%) and academics (69.23%) were aware of the existence of certain cult-related organisations on Campus. Of course, a typical campus of Universities in Nigeria could have as many as 40 cult groups besides other supposedly non-cultic, non-violent socio-cultural organisations (Ogunsanya, 1998).

There was an overwhelming agreement among students and academics that cult /gang groups operated violently (69.63% and 60.64%). The violent nature of their *modus operandi* does not suggest that anywhere a cult or a gang member is found, violence of necessity would ensue. On the contrary, cult members exhibit recognisable humility among other students. "Recognisable" humility as expressed by a discussant at one of the Universities is meant that the gang/cult member would usually carry an air of pride and friendliness in him/herself, until however provoked. The provocation, which

is however over a 'turf' of alleged influence usually, involves rival cult members.

Often too, this conflict is used as a ploy to carry out criminal activities, such as armed robbery, threat, sexual intimidation and theft. To quote one of our respondents:

> The students in this category seem to enjoy the activities of secret cults with the view of having access to women (female students) through intimidation, cheap grades through intimidation of staff and in some cases purchase of question papers. Some members are naturally violent and academically lazy. Hence, they use cultism as a way out (**Transcript of a note in our questionnaire**).

Table 1: Nature and Structure of Campus Socio- cultural Organisations

	Students	Academics	Administrators
Awareness of existence: yes	(641) 67. 90%	(198) 69.23%	(111) 62. 35%
No	(301) 32.09%	(88) 30.76%	(53) 29.77%
I don't know	(0) 0.00%	(0) 0.00%	(14) 7.86%
Percent total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Nature:			
Ethno-cultural	(296) 34.57%	(99) 33.67%	(na)
Religious	(261) 30.49%	(91) 30.95%	(na)
Recreational	(298) 34.81%	(104) 35.37%	(na)
Others not listed	(1) 0.11%	(0) 0.00%	(na)
Percent total	100.00%	100.00%	
Knowledge of named cult/gang groups: Yes	(184) 33.39%	(198) 69.23%	(na)
No	(184) 33.39%	(88) 30.76%	(na)
I don't know	(39) 7.07%	(0) 0.00%	(na)
Percent total	100.00%	100.00%	
Modus operandi:			
Violently	(626) 13.69.63%	(168) 60.64%	(na)
Non- violently	(123) 13.68%	(33) 11.91%	(na)
Violently/ non-violently	(150) 16.68%	(76) 27.43%	(na)
Percent total	100.00%	100.00%	
Students' knowledge of number of cult groups	**a)** None = (164) 28.08%	**b)** One to ten = (329) 56.33%	**c)** Ten and above = (91) 15.58% (a+b+c=100.00%)

Source: Fieldwork (February 2001).
Note: Percentages outside brackets.
(na): = Question not applicable.

What is the extent of cultism on University campuses in the Middle Belt zone of the country? The

Perception survey compared observed incidences in the contexts of Federal and State, Technology-based and Conventional Universities. Table 2 is useful in the analysis.

Table 2: Perception of the Contextual Existence of Cults/Gangs in Universities

Existence of cults in Universities	**Federal** (N = 368) *	**State** (N = 253)#
Yes	(245) 66.57%	(104) 41.10%
No	(97) 26.35%	(141) 55.73%
I don't know	(26) 7.06%	(8) 3.16%
Percent total	100.00%	100.00%
Existence of cults in Universities	**Technology** (N =364)**	**Conventional**** (N = 368)
Yes	(184) 50.54%	(213) 57.88%
No	(162) 44.50%	(135) 36.68%
I don't know	(18) 4.94%	(20) 5.43%
Percent total	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Fieldwork (February 2001)

Notes: * The two Federal Universities included in this comparison were Universities of Abuja and Jos

The two State Universities were those of Benue and Kogi.

** The two Technology-based Universities included in this comparison were Universities of Technology and Agriculture Minna and Makurdi, respectively.

++ The two Conventional Universities included in this comparison were Universities of Abuja and Jos.

Comparison of the extent of Cults in Federal and State Universities

According to the information in table 2, 66.57% of student respondents reported (to researchers) more cult cases in Federal compared to 41.1% in State-owned Universities in the study area. It is clear why this appeared to be so. In Federal Universities, students come from a much wider diversity of cultural backgrounds than in the State Universities. That is, heterogeneity of cultures provides a hiding place/breeding ground for students who feel they are far away from home and could do anything they pleased. They feel they are not so much within the glare of their parents, as the case is for State Universities that provide opportunities for the immediate indigenes of the States. In a situation like that, cultism may not usually become a tool to fight certain intolerable levels of deprivation if the indigenes were not initially prone to cultism.

Comparison of the extent of Cults in Technology-based and Conventional Universities

As table 2 shows, the reported cases of affirmation to the existence of cults in these Universities were both statistically significant (compare 50.54% in Technology and 57.88% in Conventional Universities). That points to the fact that the appeals of secret cults knew no disciplinary boundaries. Thus, the objectives of student cultism, such as getting money fraudulently, buying of examination papers, securing grades in examinations, rape and destabilisation of University administrations are valid. Based on the data in this table, we must immediately dismiss the cultural façade that Science Students have no time to engage in the practice of cults as both sets of students share in the basic human needs and wants, particularly in a demoralised society. In fact, since cults are practiced by students even in anticipation of graduation so they could easily get employment, it suggests that there is no exception to the rule that cultism is one of the entry qualifications into professional careers. Some scholars, such as Santos (1994) and Arrous (1996) agree that African societies, especially urban centres are built on secret and open societies, village or town associations, school associations and certain professional associations, which promote inequities in society but are the basis for benefiting from the consumerist corporate urban economy. As long as the entire fabric of the society, polity and economy of the nation encourages social differentiation, such associations and even cults would continue to appeal to the younger generation.

In the context of regional comparison, the identities of cultists in these Universities are hardly known. It will be premature to make any scientific conclusions based on mere widespread media reports of more cult organisations in the Universities in Southern than Northern Nigeria. Even violent cases of cultism are reported in some of the institutions more or less dominated by indigenes of the Middle Belt origin. For example, Odey (2001) reported that the College of Arts Science and Technology, Keffi, just about 50km from the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and owned by the Nasarawa State Government was recently involved in violent cult activities leading to the death of two students of the institution.

Akani (1999), Awe (1999), Ogon (1999) and Okoli (1999), among others, indicated that, cultists

involve in nocturnal initiation ceremonies in which initiates are animalised. They also entered into blood covenants and perform occult rituals, engaged in violent opposition to any kind of oppression, slight, real or imagined. They engaged in liberal consumption of alcohol, drug abuse, employed intimidation by threats or use of violence, extortion, stealing, arson, armed robbery, sexual abuse and rape, examination malpractice, fierce defense of what each cult considers its domain of operation, maiming and manslaughter and murder (Awe, 2001).

On the **pattern of cultism** on campus (table 3), students observed that it was "increasing" (52.29%), due principally to "the collapse of the economy"(48.63%). Academics observed that cultism/gang violence was also "increasing" (67.28%), due to the "collapse of the economy"(53.88%). Administrators observed that cultism was "increasing"(53.7%, table 3), due also to the "collapse of the economy"(58.62%).

Table 3: Patterns of campus cultism/ Gang violence.

	Students	**Academics**	**Administrators**
Increasing	(513) 52.29%	(181) 67.28%	(87) 53.70%
Decreasing	(110) 11. 21%	(83) 30.88%	(55) 33.95%
I don't know	(110) 11. 21%	(5) 1.85%	(20) 12.34%
Percent total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Why increasing?:			
Collapse of economy	(250) 48.63%	(40) 22.22%	51) 58.62%
Victimization by the University/ system/Community	(201) 39.11%	(97) 53.88%	(16) 18.39%
Collapse of societies values	(163) 12.25%	(43) 23.33%	(20) 22.98%
Percent total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

SOURCE: Fieldwork (February, 2001)
Note: Percentages outside the brackets.

Going through the information supplied by respondents, one could wonder whether they could be reliable for an objective understanding of the many social problems typical of University campuses.

First is the conceptual problematic: did the respondents actually describe gangs or cults? Even if cults or gangs were actually observed and reported, can the extent so far identified be trusted? Are these problems isolated or widespread enough to warrant or justify meaningful conclusions? Do outsiders or insiders of the University communities perpetrate these criminal activities? And even

more fundamentally, were the legitimate socio-cultural activities of students misrepresented as cult/gang operations? For in the 1960s in US and at certain other periods in Germany, institutions of higher learning had such student groups pursuing the expression of their youthful energies. They had tattoos inscribed on their bodies and other secret signs known to each member only.

Well, every sound research should be concerned about these issues. However, even when there were no official statistics to back up the claims and observations of focus group discussants and questionnaire respondents, the very evidence supplied by the members of the University communities attested to the existence of such social phenomenon. For example, Government Visitation Panels to Universities provide the public the rare opportunity of understanding the internal dynamics of such institutions. As such, Visitation Panel reports show the whole world the secrets of the Universities. Even if the panelists would hide anything from the public, the independent press and media, which is very vibrant in Nigeria, is not likely to gloss over such anti-social /delinquent behaviours, if for nothing but for the *profit motif*. In this regard, one recent Federal Government White paper on the recommendations of Visitation Panels to Federal Universities (1986-1998) is very instructive. In part, it says of a University that between 1986 and 1998, the University " …experienced the menace of secret cults. From some of the memoranda submitted to us, and views expressed by those interviewed, it is clear that cult is still in practice, though operated underground" (p.51). It is clear that the situation has not receded by every objective assessment, and basically remains a feasible issue for research that its findings are reliable. In fact, the June 2001 issue of the University System News, a publication of the National Universities Commission has an item on the alumni of one of the Universities in the Middle Belt. The alumni "noted with regret and condemned in its entirety, the recent resurgence of cult and other criminal activities on the campus" (p.14, col.1). This is not surprising to keen observers and researchers of campus life, since the very structural problems that gave rise to student cultism in the first place have not been removed or assuaged, and that is poverty in its material, cultural and psychological ramifications.

As a further indication of the on-going cult activism on University campuses in this region, within the week of February 4-11,2001, violent cult operations took place in two of the Universities. One of them is the University of Ilorin. This was widely reported in the independent mass media.

One lecturer in one of the State Universities summed the situation up this way:

> "Well, there may not be as serious a case in this university as in some places, yet one has to be careful how has says things, as you don't know who you are talking to…could be a cult member who could put your life on the line" (Transcript of Interview).

The Impact of Cult Violence in Universities

There are many social problems that are allegedly associated with cult and gang activities on the campuses of Nigerian Universities. In the study, fear, killing/violence and "support networking" were reported in the Universities as a result of cult/gang activities. This table describes the impact of cults.

Feelings of Fear on Campus

The feelings of insecurity/fear of cultism on campus were high. We can observe that due to the combined effect of the knowledge of cult/gang groups on campuses and their *modus operandi*, the feelings of insecurity and fear about cults were extremely high (76.35%) among students. 82.54% of female students reported being fearful. 79.51% of male students reported that they were fearful about cults. 82.54% of administrators admitted being fearful about cults/gangs. This relatively high reported fear of cults and feelings of insecurity among both male and female students does not deny that females may indirectly feel more insecure. This is because many times they are objects of fights between cult members as was the case in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus in 1995. Most physical victims (who suffered injuries or death) resulting from cult attacks were males. But fear is a natural fact in- built in people.

Sixty-seven percent of lecturers encountered with cultists/gangs, most frequently in examination halls (66.5%). Such encounters were usually mild in nature (71.62%) and in the evenings (46.34%), which mostly produced feelings of fear in them (63.9%). This developed a lasting impact they described as "fear and distrust of students and colleagues"(61.65%).

Reported/Observed Killings/Deaths

From the data we also note that over 15% of students had either observed or reported cult/gang-motivated deaths on the University campus between one and two times in the past few years. The student respondents consisted of 53.01% males and 22.38% females. In other words, for every one female student observer/reporter of cult/gang victim, there were over two males (ratio of 1:2.4). These suggest that male students were in the forefront of cult activism on campuses and understand what a cult situation was like. This fact was corroborated by the indication that the percent of female students who did suffer physical attacks or observed such attacks were not half the rates for the males (compare 22.38% and 53.01%) in the 1-2 times category.

With respect to University administrators, 37.43% had also either observed or reported 1-2 deaths on campus due to cult/gang activities. About 14% of them had either observed or reported attacks of the death of 3-4 cult/gang victims. Students reported 30.82% of these. Also in table 4, students, academics and administrators reported observing or were personal victims of cult/gang attacks (36.47%, 67% and 42.93%, in that order) in their Universities. That also was even why those who did not fear cult activities had support networks for their security (95 respondents or 41.3% of student respondents). We must not simply accept the accounts of respondents as accurate representation of fact, for example, the cases of personal harms experienced by respondents. It is possible that some other forms of attacks were classified as cultic? Also, it is possible that the numbers of deaths on campuses were exaggerated or one incident reportedly observed by many of the respondents on their campuses?

In any case the emergence and perpetration of such violent sub-cultural societies were partly to counter the harassment unleashed on students and staff by state security operatives during the military eras. As Alemika (2000) rightly observed:

> Under Babangida and Abacha military dictatorship, Vice Chancellors, Provosts and Rectors derived, or arrogated to themselves, untrammelled powers to harass, intimidate and cause the arrest of progressive students and academics … a culture of authoritarianism and impunity was institutionalised during Babangida and Abacha regimes. All sorts of

> security were brought into campuses… (Alemika, 2000: 5, emphases added).

Legitimate students and staff socio-cultural associations were banned at will and were forced to operate underground. Students were not taken serious as responsible part of the University communities. They were rarely listened to or involved in the governance of Universities. Cultism got them the attention they desired but not in achieving the objectives of a decent society. Some of the cult groups terrorised, intimidated and harassed lecturers for marks in examinations, and other students who offend their members in matters relating to membership and sex-partners, as well as other groups considered rivals were wasted in the most horrendous manner. In fact, inter-cult rivalry is one f the main reasons for cult violence in institutions of higher education in Nigeria.

"Support Networks".

The 'support networks' essentially consisted of being a cult member (54 or 22.88% of the sample of 230), having friends among known cult members (92 or 38.98%) or paying protection fees. The number of those who paid 'protection fee' (20) made up of largely those who paid less than N5, 000 per semester. This was in form of periodic support towards the needs of those who constituted the top echelon of the organisations, and thus was closely related to neighbourhood collections in cities for running community watch organisations.. Why was this a problem for this study, when there are many forms of coping strategies that are adopted by students on campus? For example, Dinah Mwinzi and Jacinta Kinoti's study, which focuses on students' adjustment to government's withdrawal of bursaries in Kenyan Universities, include trading and operating business outfits by students in Nairobi and Moi Universities in Kenya. In this study, the payment of protection fee is first of all coerced, not voluntary. It is forced on students by fellow students, who have the wherewithal to force, coerce or secure compliance. It is a dangerous practice that University authorities must put an end to, because in a sense it is a form of "armed" robbery.

Campus Disturbances

Of the number (864) of students who responded to the question whether they knew of any campus

disturbance that was motivated or overtaken by cult activists, the greater majority (56.94%) affirmed. This meant that cult activities were widespread on the campuses of universities in the Middle Belt. But one should be clear whether these incidents were actually cultic. In any case, the most common factor in cult violence was traced to 'conflicts of membership by rival cults'. In fact the death of the student from Rivers State University cited earlier was due to the discovery by the Police that rival cult membership forms "…filled by potential cult members were recovered inside the victim's pockets"(Akpe, 2001:4). The victim might have failed to decide in favour of the cult group to that his assassins belonged, for which he paid the supreme price. In the University of Port Harcourt, cult rivalry over membership also resulted in open warfare, killing two students on the 13th of July 2001.

Furthermore, most students (47.73%) perceived that" knives, machetes, cutlasses and daggers" constituted the main weapons used in cult violence. This was followed in percent ranking by the use of modern "guns with live ammunitions"(22.85%). In any case, moments of such campus inter-cult wars are quite unsafe for both the cultists and non-cult members of the University community. Due to the dynamic nature of cultism, academic activities were reportedly disrupted during academic sessions. About 56% of respondents reported that sessions were temporarily brought to a halt. The most notable reason for such disruption in academic activities, according to University administrators was "cult invasions from other campuses"(37.5%). The inter- campus movements must have been motivated internally, which nonetheless point to weak internal security of University campuses. Other than academic excursions/study visits from campus to campus by students, mass movements of unknown individuals must ordinarily be checked in hostels. The actual logic for cult invasion of campuses is the simple scientific of logic of "immunization" in which a cult group from one campus moves to another campus to strengthen its kind against attacks by other cult groups.

While University campuses must not be turned into military barracks where every visitor must have to show their identities, a reasonable level of careful planning must be incorporated into the strategic plans for the Universities to guarantee a minimum level of security/safety for members of the respective campus communities.

The observed trends of campus insecurity show that cult activities have negative impact on campus life in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. In other words, each University offered and harboured a measure of threats to its cordial coexistence due to perceived trend in the vicious activities of cults and violent gangs.

Perception of Associated Factors for the Occurrence of Cults/Gangs

From the views expressed by respondents the following constitute the major factors they held responsible for the incidents of campus cultism.

Lecturers' Jobload and Job Satisfaction.

Majority of the University lecturers in the sample for this study, taught courses taken by a thousand or more students last semester. This is because of explosions in University admissions. As Asun, et al (1997) show, University enrolment in Nigeria in 1984/85 stood at 126,285 only. This however jumped to 200,456 in 1989/90 and further to 301, 273 in the 1992/93 session. This trend has multiplied many times since (Adeyemo, 2000, Lebeau, 2000). But the population expansions have not been matched with adequate infrastructure development, like building of hostels and equipping laboratories and lecture halls. This is tied to poor funding.

A good reflection of the background of the poor conditions of contemporary campuses of Nigerian Universities finds expression in the words of Osha (2000), when he wrote that:

> Perhaps the problem with which all of them are faced is chronic underfunding. Brain drain has also become a widespread problem. We have the question of unprecedented decay in University infrastructure. The explosion of the student population must be mentioned. Finally, we have the pervasive problem of secret cults (Osha, 2000:93, emphases added).

A good illustration of the point of underfunding is the summary of Federal Government's Budgetary allocation to the education sector generally, released by (ASUU, 2001). According to this source, Federal allocation to education as a percentage of total budgets rose from 7.82% in 1994, to 12.96% in 1995. But this declined to 12.32% in 1996, 11.59% in 1997, 10.27% in 1998, and slightly rose to 11.12% in 1999, but dropped sharply to 8.36% in 2000 and 7% in 2001. In the year, 2001

federal allocation to education was rather too small, an action that portrays the government as not committed to education, especially when UNESCO recommendation for Governments is to commit 26% of their federal budget to education with effect from this year. ASUU even had to embark on a nation-wide strike between April and June 2001 to press for the enforcement of the UNESCO recommendation. The FGN agreed to the demand but this has been regarded as belated and still shaky (Ofeimum, 2001), as damage has already been done. The democratic government of President Olusegun Obasanjo is thus not showing interest in funding education, especially that from the 1994 date it is only his administration that has allocated the least amount to education with the inception of his government in 1999. The problems associated with trend are numerous, but principal of them include wastage arising from deteriorating infrastructure, equipment and tools needed for the industrial, scientific and technological development of the country. In addition, many lecturers who are unable to cope in such a situation have found migration as the most convenient option. This is an indirect indicator of waste. Recently, the World Bank report showed that Nigerian graduates of the last ten years are generally unemployable. This is a reflection of the wastage of human resources needed for national development.

Poor funding and the attendant brain drain syndrome have continued to plague the University system. For example, a Press Statement by the Calabar Zone of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU, 2001) tagged in part "Budget 2001 and University Education in Nigeria", point to some issues of interest to researchers. It in part reads:

> The Calabar zone of ASUU notes that the allocation of the Education sector in the Budget 2001 by the Federal Government is grossly inadequate…the present government stands out as having performed the worst in comparison with previous governments in the matter of funds allocation to the Education sector. The obvious implication is that there will be widespread crises in the various Universities with staff agitating for even the payment of their salaries and many more of them leaving the system to compound the brain drain syndrome (ASUU, 2001:4, emphases added).

According to Bassey (2001) the ASUU says the Federal Government should take the blame for the decadence in the school system, arguing that " there is a bit systematic destruction of education…

from primary, secondary and then the University where the final destruction is melted" (p.9). As Akinkugbe (2001) argued, there seems to be no turn around unless funding is addressed positively and aggressively.

A very high percent of academics (59%) expressed dissatisfaction with their present working conditions. Under funding and lack of adequate teaching facilities affect job satisfaction and job performance in many respects. Today, many countries and international organisations are employers of many well-trained Nigerian experts in various fields of endeavours. With job dissatisfaction among many lecturers who have remained in the services of the Universities, the chances are that most of them would tend to "commercialise" their time and commitment to imparting knowledge to the students. In a situation like that, students lack the needed challenges and rigour that school work imposes on students. Of course, a saying goes that 'an idle heart is the devil's workshop'.

The consequences of such neglect and derogation were very severe, including cultism. There were many forthright staffs on the campuses of tertiary educational institutions that have become discontented because of constant harassment by the Federal Government through dismissal threats and eviction from quarters.

This represents a dramatic shift from the scenario of demands for higher education in Nigeria in the 1930 - 1960 periods. Now the situation is more of problems of managing higher education in the 1970s upwards.

Students' Living and Learning Conditions

With respect to conditions of learning and living on campus, over 68% of student respondents reported the hostel accommodations were very inadequate/poor (see table 4). This was probably because many of students crammed into 'straight corners' due to the "squatter" phenomenon. Some of them described the accommodations as "pig holes". Also, since there was an explosion of student admission in the Universities compared to the previous decades or two without expansions in infrastructure, such a scenario would prompt deviancy due to congestion (Shaw and Mckay, 1942).

Library facilities were described as poor (74.52%), indicating the inadequacy of texts and current

journals in University libraries. In some of them there were insufficient seats. Classrooms were also described as poor (34.4%), reflecting the inadequate and dilapidated nature of infrastructure and furniture in most Universities in Nigeria. Students stood outside, hanging on the windows while taking lectures. This was not conducive for proper learning.

However, most respondents however, described transportation networks within the Universities as good. Although most of the Universities in this part of the country fall within the second and third generation Universities (established in the 1970's and 1990's), and are largely on temporary sites, the students largely lived within accessible/trekking distances to their lecture halls and other places of recreational activities. Where transportation services are needed, University buses and the public transport systems connect these 'satellite' campuses and places of activities. The challenge for campus transport interconnectivity, however, lies in the affordability by students.

Since the influence of transportation impacts positively or negatively on the development process, some students' violent protests in the past have been motivated by either inadequacy or hiked fares, such in the University of Jos in 1995. This goes to underscore the relevance of a reliable transport system, which Oyesiku (1994) sees as cardinal in the development of cities, of which the University is a part.

With respect to the quality of science (practical) laboratories, students described these as good (37.16%). However, it is widely known that the quality of learning infrastructure, including libraries and laboratories are a far cry of the past two decades.

Further more, as high as 42.62% of students perceived that the quality of campus infrastructure is important in understanding the nature of campus social life and its development.

Students also described how the following indicators were **important** (using *'important', 'fairly important'* and *'not important'* scales) in defining the quality of campus life: campus security (58.79%); impact of University administration (60.1%); economic situation (66.59%); accommodation (53.09%); and teaching quality (59.19%). In other words, the qualities of these indices were important in defining the nature of campus life.

For many students, the style of university administration is a very important indicator of peace and harmony on campus. Scholars, such as Adeola (1992) and Alemika (2000) have argued that University administrations were oppressive and employed draconian measures in handling student issues, especially in military eras, hence the latter in turn became equally aggressive. The political authoritarianism and tyranny that were meted out to students in part led to despair and discontentment. Part of the effort in resolving the apparent discontentment with the system and the emasculation of their activities and muzzling of their lives was to go underground and operate as cults. In a situation of this nature, even a society that is legitimate may have to take on the apparent form of abnormality, hystericism and cultism.

One other 'welfare' indicator that facilitated learning and living on campuses was students' income. For the majority of students, the main financiers of their studies were their parents (36.75%). Of course, the increasing de-investment by the Government in higher education and other social sub-sectors would continue to burden the shoulders of parents. Cuts in public service expenditure were an IMF/World Bank conditionality, which came through the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme. This had been in place since 1986 under the General Ibrahim Babangida military regime.

For example of the life squeezing effect of the policy, real wages and salaries of workers in the public service for grade level 01(lowest cadre) declined from N182.68 per month in 1993 to N126.45 in 1994 and further to N79.08 in 1995. For grade level 08 (Middle class cadre), the declines were from N352.18 in 1993 to N262.75 in 1994 and to N189.21 in 1995 per month. For the upper class (level 15), the declines were from N700.03 in 1993 to N550.94 in 1994 and to N379.66 in 1995 per month (see FOS, 1996). These figures were arrived at after deductions. Of course, such trends eliminated the upper class and reduced everyone in the society into the extremely rich and the

Table 4: Students ' Description of Living and Learning condition

	Very adequate /Excellent	Adequate /Good	Very inadequate/ Poor
Hostel accommodation	(46) 5. 47*	(221) 26.30	(573) 68.21
Library facilities	(226) 24.04	(88) 9.36	(626) 66.59
Classrooms	(289) 32.07	(302) 33.51	(310) 34.40
Transportation	(312) 33.40	(319) 34.15	(303) 34.40
Laboratory facilities	(173) 33.14	(194) 37.16	(155) 29.69
Factors affecting campus life	Important	Fairly important	Not important
Campus Security	(578) 58.79	(375) 38.14	(30) 3.05
Campus administration	(287) 29.13	(592) 60.1	(106) 10.76
Economic conditions	(656) 66.59	(310)31.47	(19) 1.92
Accommodation quality	(480) 53.09	(314) 34.73	(19) 12.16
Teaching quality	(541) 59.79	(541) 59.79	(301) 32.93
Infrastructure quality	(367) 42.62	(194) 22.53	(300) 34.84
Source of income	a) Self = (302) 30.65%	b) Parents = (362) 36.75%	c) Bursaries = (321) 32.58% (a +b+c =100.00%)
Whether comfortable with income	a) Yes = (367) 37.33%	b) No = (612) 62.25%	c) I don't know = (4) 0.4% (a+b+c =100.00%)

Source: Fieldwork (February 2001)
Note: percentages outside brackets.

extremely poor. The middle class varnished. Yet the responsibilities for the education of children and provision of shelter and clothing were heavier on parents a large proportion of who were public servants.

It is important to observe that in spite of the varied sources of income for students while on campus, and the supposed improvement in the lives of their parents since 1999, they were not

generally comfortable financially (62.25%). This may also explain the phenomenon of cultism which were also used for stealing and armed robbery (Awe, 2001).

Also, other main indicators explaining why cult groups disorganised campuses, were "poor feeding, poor economy, and poor infrastructure"(34.37%). This again brings to the fore the underlining economic factors in the phenomenon of cultism. Poverty promotes alienation and anti-social behavior by the weak of the society. In different circumstances, the children of the rich who are unable to face their academics squarely also took to cultism as a coping strategy.

Therefore, in the Universities located in the Middle Belt, it is the question of expression and not that of the existence of cults. With cultism came fear and insecurity, death and human rights abuse within the University community. These in varying extents hindered free association and integration among students and staff and rather demoted the universal culture, for which the University stands. The indicators analysed here indeed had important influences on the quality of living and learning in Universities in the Middle Belt zone as well as in other parts of the country, and to varying extents were contributory factors in the occurrence of cult/gang problems.

WHAT UNIVERSITIES SHOULD DO TO CONTROL/MANAGE CAMPUS CULT/GANG PROBLEMS.

In spite of the various measures taken both institutionally and otherwise, campus cultism was reportedly high on the campuses a s indicated by a Federal Government media on July 19th, 2001, alleging that activities of cultists in Universities are unrelenting. This means that cultism is still one of the major social issues attracting comments and discussion not only on the campus, but also outside of it. The control aspect is still a major issue. It will thus appear that Universities have failed in this direction. Something more tangible is therefore desirable from University administrations.

Respondents identified the authorities that should have the mandate to intervene in the control of campus cults and what that mandate entailed. Students were of the opinion that they should be considered the most ideal (41.2%). Academics and Administrators shared a common understanding of the problems, which bordered on the legality of constituted authority. They suggested that the

University should have the mandate (66.22% and 40.22%, respectively). Since Academics and Administrators consist of the more stable populations on the campus, it is reasonable that they should, (as "parents and foster parents") be adequately involved in any major steps towards the control of cultism.

The views of respondents on the most important conditions that would bring peace and development on the campus further underscore the need for proper funding of the education sector by proprietors of education. For example, for students, the most important factor was to "arrest the brain drain syndrome" (35.64%). It was the same for lecturers (44.48%). For administrators, the most important thing to do involved " removing unnecessary retrains on University administration" (39.35%). This means that lack of funding is the "mother" of many campus problems such as brain drain, the closure of certain academic programs and of course, cult/gang violence and insecurity.

What Should Universities Do? : A Recommendation

What Universities must do does not involve a compilation of normative *dos* and *don'ts*. There already exist enough indications of the paths to a glorious University life in Nigeria as shown in the recommendations of respective committees and in the authority establishing higher education agencies such as the National Universities Commission, NUC. But some fundamental questions need to be asked, if we must locate the obstacles to peaceful University education in Nigeria, now and in the future. These questions are:

*Why does the Ministry of Justice not clearly and unambiguously define and classify all behaviours that have any link with student cultism in form of a bill and send same to the National Assembly for passage into law?

*Why are cult members only expelled and not handed over to the Police to be prosecuted for the criminal acts so committed under the guise of cultism but are re-admitted into same/other Universities?

*Why do Universities not ensure the establishment or strengthening of University Security Committees (USC) and Security Divisions and equipping them with the needed skills/tools to make

them capable of handling internal security problems without involving the Nigeria Police?

*Why do University authorities not undertake the pictorial identification, display and publication of all student cultists as a way of checking their impact on others in the campus where they had committed cult offences?

*Why are University authorities shying away from admitting the presence of dangerous and criminal activity groups as if they are benefiting from them?

* And why are the federal and state governments and other related bodies and agencies refusing adequate funding of Universities as if such funds are not tax payers'?

A genuine answer to these policy questions would more than probably make University campuses attractive and secure to students and staff from different parts of the country and the whole world. It will also motivate investors to donate funds and infrastructure for the rapid development and transformation of the University living and learning environments in this age of technological advancement and globalisation.

In fact, no generation should lose grip of the education sector. Particularly, tertiary education should be adequately funded. This is because it is the level of education that frees the minds of citizens from the shackles and mentality of dependence, ignorance and poverty. Besides, it is a universal culture. Writing on the universality of the University, Odelowo, et al (2001) observe that the University is a unique institution world wide. It has evolved over several centuries and spread across the globe with its tradition and culture remaining unattenuated. Indeed, it is this universality of the University culture and tradition that opens the door of the University to a true intellectual anywhere in the world and facilitates his integration with colleagues. Therefore, any attack on the University constitutes an affront on the soul and essence of the University. True intellectuals will obviously migrate (brain drain) or resist such attack.

Unfortunately, such attack has led to widespread migration with the bulk of new recruits serving as vanguards for the actualization of the dictatorial tendencies of some University administrators. All over the campuses of Universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the policy of

'indigenisation" seem to be enforced, partly as a result of government's de-investment in the education sector. This tends to erode the culture and tradition of the University as centres of excellence for research and development. In some instances they have become battlegrounds for ethnic rivalry and nationalism. Falola (2001), for example, reported of an allegation leveled by students of one of the Universities in the Southwest that the Vice-Chancellor sponsored "cult attack on six Union leaders of the University" (p.37).

From all these, the only way forward for the Nigerian University system is to undertake an urgent and a massive sociological (social research), economic (funding) and psychological (mental reorientation) "reconstruction" of its past and present. The failures of this will jeopardise the future of the country.

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