

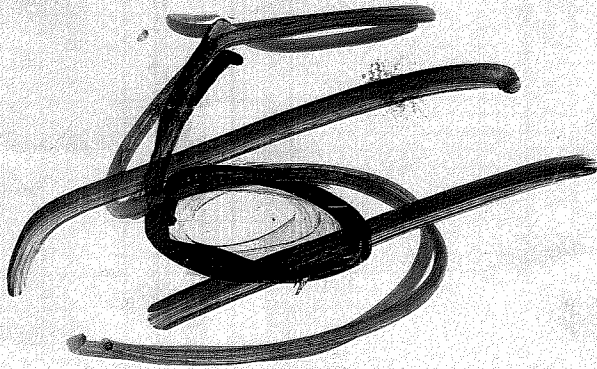
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SECRET SOCIETIES AND CULTIC ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Cultism is a social crime now common in our tertiary institutions in the country. Many lives and properties have been lost to it. Cultism as a social crime is not limited to higher institutions. It is a common phenomenon characterizing our society. What we find in the higher institutions today is just a reflection of the level to which our society has gone. If some parents could be members of one 'fraternity' or the other and their children are aware of it, what behaviour do we expect from the children outside?

Cultic activities are sometimes laden with blood; either that of an animal or human being. Within the university setting, blood flows during initiation rites or during rival group clashes. Some of the times, lives are lost in the process. Blood is sacred. It is the life of the flesh. When it is shed unjustifiably, there are attendant consequences, implications, pollution and grave danger that are attracted to the offender, his seeds (if he ever lives to have any), members of his extended family, his community and the nation.

This paper sets out to highlight, examine and lay bare the evils of cultic activities and the implications of the blood shed in the process, on the present and the future of the country. This is done through the periscope of religions: African religion, Christianity and Islam. Religion generally views the shedding of blood with trepidation and considers it with sacredness. When the human blood is spilled violently it leaves in its track, a catalogue of woes such as political, economic, health hazards, wars, bareness, failures, famine and mortality rate becomes high. Most of the times it might require that some cleansing is done to liberate the land from curses attracted as a result of the pollution.

We have limited our scope to the tertiary institutions in Nigeria using family backgrounds as our instruments for examination. We shall concern ourselves basically with the religious implications of shedding innocent blood and the need to be delivered from the bondage of the evils involved.

All scriptural references are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible and Yusuf Ali's translation of the Quran.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SECRET SOCIETIES AND CULT ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

Secret Societies are close associations, guilds, cult groups with closed membership. These societies are 'fraternities; established by a conjunction of purposeful intentions with a view to achieving specific ends (Maquet, 1971). The societies were branded 'secret' partly because of their esotericism (Offing, 1989). These societies make use of particular rituals, signs, symbols and forms of knowledge which are withheld from non-initiates, and these things are regarded as a special source of power though being kept private.

In Nigeria, secret societies abound in large numbers. These societies are found among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Their activities dated from the pre-colonial Nigeria, and they continue to exist until this day though in much diluted forms.

Going by the external activities of secret societies, they may be broadly divided into three groups: religious secret societies; semi-religious secret societies and anti-social secret societies. It must be mentioned here that these divisions are mere academic exercise as there are no definite boundaries for these different categories.

It is noted that religious secret societies may sometimes take on the function of the semi-religious or vice-versa. Whereas some anti-social activities have been thought to be carried out by religious or semi-religious secret societies. In addition, a religious secret society in the passage of time may degenerate into an anti-social secret society. The unbridled passion of the human nature for power, superiority, position, wealth, revenge and oppression crept in at sometime and made a mess of whatever good motives the founders had. It is almost becoming a shame to be publicly identified with any secret society at this stage.

A secret cult on the other hand, is an enclosed organized association or group, devoted to the same course (Ogunade). It is an enclosed group having an exclusive sacred ideology and a series of rites centering round their sacred symbols (Hamlyn). The members commit themselves to oath and allegiance, which serves as their strong bond. They can be extremely violent in defending their course. Acts of violence came at the level of the fraternity degeneration. There was never violence at the beginning.

It is difficult to separate secret cults (Babangida, 1983-1984) from secret societies; although our focus in this chapter is secret cult in Nigerian tertiary institutions, there is the need for us to lay our foundation in the influences of the secret societies (in the larger community), on these campus cultic groups. Therefore, we shall be alluding to the secret societies, when necessary.

SECRET SOCIETIES

Secret societies evolved out of the need to curb criminal acts and some vices within the community. They were like checks and balances in the past. They were instituted for the purpose of self-preservation and preservation of the community (Adeleye, 1997:38). They perform some political, religious and socio-economic functions.

Politically, the secret societies are very influential in the communities to which they belong. They contribute to the selection of kings and chiefs. They also mediate in time of political crises and dynasty struggles. In those days they have the power to appoint and remove kings by acting as pressure groups.

As pressure groups, they curb the despotic tendencies of any ruler and in certain cases cause their removal from office (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979:225). As a result of this, those with political intentions sought the approval of these secret societies, either by becoming a member or through subtle appeal.

Religiously, secret societies function in connection with the cult of divinities (or spirits), ancestors or totemism. Annual festivals connected with some of these divine beings are the concern of the secret societies. They are looked upon for salvation from epidemics, drought through sacrifices of appeasement to divine being. They are believed to be of superior knowledge and ability because they claim to possess higher esoteric knowledge and mysterious power.

In the past, at social level, they acted as guardians and policemen of public morality (Quarcoopone, 1987). They were the custodians of traditions, customs and beliefs. They determined ritual behaviour and regulated social attitudes. In addition, they disciplined erring members and thereby setting the standard for high morals and ethics.

Another significant social function is the preparation of the young for adult life. An inference could be drawn from *Mmo*, *Ndako Gboya* and *Zangbeto* (Quarcoopone, 1987) secret societies. For the smooth transition of the young boys and girls into adulthood, initiation ceremonies are organized by these societies.

They also function as local tribunals, settling disputes, litigations and other matters that may occur in the community (Adeleye, 1997:40). Some secret societies also take active part in witch-hunting to rid the society of evil forces. This is common with the *Ndako Gboya* (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979:226).

SECRET CULTS

Secret Cults started as fraternities, with the intention of serving the same purposes of maintaining law and order in the campuses which secret societies represented in the larger communities. They came into existence with the aim of addressing acts of injustice, cases of

victimization and other issues capable of disturbing the peaceful atmosphere of the university community. These they achieved through the publication of vices in their respective magazines and in their satirical songs during their nocturnal outings. Their meetings were shrouded with mysteries to create an aura of fear for the group. Their fundamental weapon, was psychological warfare, application of positive intelligence and injecting fear into the heart of the enemies of the academic environment. This was why their membership target were mainly the 'egg head' students. Those who led their various units and departments in intellectual matters.

The first of the fraternities is Pirate Confraternity. In fact, the legendary founder of the group was lionized via the Nobel Prize for Literature. Indeed, the successful image of this personality and others who have passed through the cult crucible belies the ragamuffin mould in which cult members are frequently cast.

One public document (The Sunday Tribune, 1990), revealed the laudable objectives of the pirate: enhancing social life of the campus while maintaining discipline and orderliness through their guiding principle of "Sworn Enemy of Convention: No friend, No foe!!".

In the olden days, they maintained so much peace and orderliness in the campuses which they were found. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s (Akinbami, 1998), the University of Lagos authorities employed the social services of the panama pirates confraternity to usher in distinguished visitors into the University. These were the good old days.

The dreg of military leadership dragged with it oppression, torture, death, economic hardship, insecurity and chains of organized woes while it lasted. Some of these vices took their toll on our tertiary institutions. They even filtered into the secondary and primary schools.

The unbuttoned arrogance of military rule could not march the superior intelligence of the Ivory Tower. The positive results of years of teaching students by lecturers gave birth to liberated individuals who though without guns challenged the unbridled passion for power of the military in students' unionism. The military's move in checkmating this is evident in the arrival of violent secret cult groups.

Young and aspiring military personnel were sponsored to obtain degrees, with the aim of infiltrating the fraternities and polluted their goals and objectives. Therefore, apart from Pirates Confraternity, intra-cult dispute has produced others like Buccaneers (University of Ibadan), Dragon (Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife-Ife). The desire to produce a neo-campus cult with a pan-African bent led to the emergence, at the University of Benin of the Neo-Black Movement, better known as the Black Axe – its notorious weapon against black oppressors.

Over the years, the situation degenerated so much until now. Just as the country decays, it also reflects in the cultic activities. Students are now forced into membership, with so much extortion, torture and pain. Members hide under the association to oppress innocent students and destabilize the peace of the academic environment.

The use of hard drugs, under which influence their dastardly acts are carried out, is a testimony to the fact that the association is no longer addressing its initial laudable objectives. A replica of what their 'fathers' in the secret societies did. They also engage in the use of all manners of lethal weapons ranging from razor blades to AK 47 Russian assault rifles. Students are synonymous with libraries, textbooks, lectures, seminars, tutorial classes, big notes, pens and, the use of productive intelligence. But our tertiary institutions have become battlefields, garrison with commanders, Captains (capone) and all manner of warfare tactics. This is a pity! This is a shame!

There are various secret cult groups now. Pirate Confraternity is almost vanishing. The prominent ones now are: Black Axe, Eye, Buccaneer, Family Mafia, the Dragon, Vikings, the Belf Boys, Red Fox, Klamon, Jurists and so on. It is generally believed that there are about thirty-six (Offiong, 1999) cultic groups. There are also female cult groups such as Daughters of Jezebel, Black Bra, Virgins and the Amazons. They are always in conflict with rival groups. They always strive to outdo each other. The most unfortunate thing is that all these are done at the expense of their lives, academic career, future and, bringing so much agony and loss to their families. They hardly do well. They are disillusioned! They need help!

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BEING A MEMBER OF A SECRET CULT

Man is naturally drawn to anything if there is an attraction in that thing. You rarely find a madman being attracted to a public latrine. There is no gainsaying about the fact that there are advantages in being a member of any secret cult, to those that find 'sense of belonging' there, in spite of the obvious grave disadvantages.

We live in challenging times, in the time of harvest which all the fruits of our past errors, negligence, misdeeds and wrong living are thrust back on us in torrents. Working class parents, especially those 'very busy' ones usually do not have time for their children. Children are left in the care of nannies or househelps. Those parents rarely know their children.

In other cases, some parents do not take time to understand their children. They are so unconsciously selfish that the needs (emotional, psychological, sometimes material) of their children are not considered. For example, a girl of thirteen was raped (she shared her experience with us) by her male contemporaries in school. She could not tell her parents, since the first reaction would be to pounce on her heavily. She bottled up the pains. She is a ready victim for the Daughter of Jezebel female cult, where they would pretend to 'love' her.

How many times have we shouted down our children when they 'disturb' our busy schedules? They have many questions unanswered. Many fears unattended to. Some of the affected children desire to be loved so that they can love someone else in return. Some of

them wanted care and attention, which are not available. They try to reach their parents, but they are 'busy' making money. These are some of the factors that developed into the advantages that the secret cult groups provide.

Firstly, it creates a sense of belonging. The deprived child quickly responds to the 'communion' that the cult has to offer. At least, some people are now reckoning with him. They consider him important and give him attention. It also gives room for recognition. He is accepted and recognized within the group. He might even rise to the position of leadership, where he also earns himself an alias. This 'boosts' his otherwise dented ego and self-esteem. Every man wants to be recognized.

It creates an atmosphere of 'power' and 'protection'. Fellow students tend to be wary of any cult member. They do not want to offend him, or cross his path in any way. He in turn moves about with an aura of confidence. He dares anybody knowing fully well that his fellow cult members will readily come to his aid. This is done (some of the times), to other members of rival groups, degenerating into conflicts that are usually very bloody and deadly.

It brings about 'fame' and breaks down class barrier. Although physical strength or the build of an athlete plays a major role in this regard, otherwise, rich people's children would have ordinarily related with themselves. So you find children from poor financial background dining and rubbing shoulders with the rich because of their brute strength that is useful to the group.

On the other hand, the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages. In the first place, it exposes the child to a lot of vices – indulging in the use of hard drugs; blood letting, rape, violent tendencies, possibilities of contacting AIDS, rebelliousness to parents and State, haters of themselves and untimely death.

The psychological torture they go through in terms of fear and loneliness in their sober moments cannot be over emphasized. Something in them tells them that what they are into is not the solution to their needs and problems. Yet there is no turning back. They wished they had never joined, since they soon discover the truth of the matter. They yearn for help, in painful silence. They desire freedom. It is like being trapped. Since wanting out of the group is a betrayal of allegiance, they cringe, suffer and ultimately die in silence.

They become everybody's enemies – fellow colleagues, their families, school authority, the society, the state and even enemies of themselves. They are living on borrowed time. They could be victims anytime, since they mostly pick on each other. They do not have time for their academics. They always want more money. This exposes them to getting money at whatever cost, not minding the consequences. Their future is bleak and not certain. They are nocturnal characters hence they meet at night and in absolute secrecy. They are afraid of their shadows. They live in suspicion. They do not have peace. They do not have plans in life to succeed. They do not have hope.

If now these people in the ripeness of time begin to torment us from all angles, we have nobody but our negligence and error to blame.

Often, many people adopt a holier-than-you attitude to the ills of the society, blaming every other person (especially government) but themselves for it. You will know them by their garrulous nature. In this matter of societal decadence, we all without exception have contributed to it in one way or the other. And in this as we continue to stress, parents bear the greatest guilt. If we had stood aright and lived aright, matters would not have taken this turn. The state of affairs in our country is a reflection of the inner-being of majority of us, in it we see our true nature, not what we pretend to be outwardly.

EFFORTS TO CURB AND ERADICATE CULTIC ACTIVITIES

The callous murder of five students of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife on July 10 1999 provoked a renewed concern about the menace which campus cults had become. It was simply unbelievable that the hitherto peaceful atmosphere of a campus would be shattered in such a brutal manner by gun wielding masked cultists.

Arising from the concern expressed over the incident therefore, was a very wide and popular agitation that the Ife cultist, especially the perpetrators of the July 10 evil act, be brought to book. To ensure that this would be done, The Students' Union of the University, National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and the numerous pro-democracy organizations as well as branches of University's alumni association strongly demanded the establishment of an independent panel of inquiry on the OAU killings. In particular, it was suggested that such a panel be composed of representatives of bodies like NANS, Academic and Non-academic Staff of Universities and independent groups like the Nigerian Bar Association and Human Rights bodies. Government has since then set a judicial panel to look into the OAU killings and related incidents on other campuses (Arogundade, 1999). Beyond the campus cults, part of the terms of reference of the panel is to investigate the activities of other student organizations and determine if their existence is in the public interest.

Vice-chancellors, Provosts and Rectors were given three months ultimatum to critically investigate and bring to book activities of cultists in the tertiary institutions. These academic chief executives swung into action immediately (since they knew their jobs were on the line), by placing advertisements in national newspapers to create awareness for parents to sign letters of undertaking for their wards. Non-compliance automatically attracted dismissal.

Forms were also issued out, requesting members of staff and students (who are members), to denounce membership of any secret cult. Also, security and anticultism committees have been inaugurated.

Some of the chief executives (Gasper and Akesode) have openly declared that cultism is a very mild word to describe the activities of cultists. They feel that the appropriate term is "armed robbery". They also decried the non-existence of a definite legislation that deals directly with the vice. They feel that whoever is found guilty of cult activities be placed on death sentence.

Also, Ukene Offing (1997), a one time notorious secret cult member when at the University of Uyo, Uyo, now an evangelist is campaigning in all secondary and tertiary institutions. He has been spreading the gospel of "war against cultism". One of such meetings was at Estate Secondary School, Anthony Village, on the outskirts of Lagos on the 16th of February 1999, where he mounted the podium to speak on "Beware of the trap of cultism". The forum was organized under the auspices of his organization, "Day Spring Foundation", a Christian Ministry. To Offing, most youths got trapped by cultism with a vain sense of security and promises which later turn to hostility and deceit.

On the other hand, while speaking at the annual converge of the National Association of Seadogs (Larewaju, 1999) in Abeokuta, in August, the Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka said that it was absolutely impossible for university Vice-chancellors to find a solution to the cult menace on their campuses within three months as directed by the Federal Government. Rather, he is of the opinion that the nation's universities be closed down for a year or two to find solutions to the aberrations of which cultism is mainly one aspect.

He also challenged the new generation of students at the converge to rise up to the challenge of cultism and "not allow the university system to be taken away from you" (Larewaju, 1999).

However, some of the efforts have witnessed some cultists in some universities denouncing membership of cultic groups. They also laid down their lethal weapons, regalia and requested for forgiveness of their past wicked deeds.

So, much as the government would try to curb cultism at the institutions, if the attendant spiritual implications of the innocent blood shed is left unattended, all government efforts about its eradication will be fruitless.

THE RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF CULTIC ACTIVITIES

God created man and gave him intellect. He made him superior to all other creatures. Of all that man has dominion over, his intelligence is yet to fathom how blood can be created. He lacks the mechanism of blood creation. He can only supply diet for multiplication of blood. He cannot make blood originally. Since this aspect of the human life transcends the capabilities of man, it behoves naturally that man must not spill blood unlawfully. Drawing an innocent blood means taking the life of a man (Gen. 9: 4).

The three basic religions in Nigeria frown, with heavy penalties, the unlawful killing of a man. Although there are a few variations in their perspectives regarding this issue, they conceptually agree to the fact that it is an abomination. "The youths of today are the leaders of tomorrow", the popular saying goes. If the majority of today's youths have their hands stained with the blood of their colleagues, what sort of future lies ahead of us?

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, we can rightly say that most of the problems our tertiary institutions are witnessing are implications arising from the blood of the innocent students and members of staff that were killed. When we cast our minds back, we would observe that the decay of our educational sector came about just at the same period that cultic activities escalated. We have witnessed several industrial actions by lecturers; we have witnessed students boycotting classes time without number; we have also seen killings of students by policemen.

Again, many of our brilliant and productive lecturers have been scattered abroad (Ps. 106: 38-42). We have lost our educational integrity. We constantly witness losses of students to automobile accidents whenever they are coming back on holidays; many families have been thrown into agonizing moments because of the loss of their loved ones (members of the University Community), who have died mysteriously. The level of our academic excellence and standard has drastically degenerated.

We do not need a Seer or a prophet to tell us that our citadels of learning are cursed; that our bastions of knowledge need revival. We therefore might require that the federal government would declare some days of mourning that will be accompanied with petitions, repentance, prayers and fasting, requesting God for forgiveness, mercy and deliverance.

This exercise will cut across the three levels of faith and all the dwellers of our tertiary institutions nation wide. It might also require that the clergies, Reverend Fathers, Imams, Priests and believers in God would join faith and minds with the university communities during this exercise. This is crucial in the sense that whatever efforts that are going on right now, by the government, institutions, committee and individual, the spiritual angle is vital for any positive result to be achieved.

However, coming down to the unmitigated violence being perpetrated in our universities and elsewhere, it is a step in the right direction when we are inwardly pained by (whether we are directly hit by them or not) for it means we are able to recognize the inherent evil in them. Whoever is not inwardly touched by these untoward events, whoever feels unconcerned about them, regarding them as normal occurrences, which should not bother him/her, may be considered as dead within and incapable of coming to recognition except through a mighty inner jolting.

For those who are piqued by these evil happenings, lamentations and curses to the perceived perpetrators will not help. Rather our thoughts and prayers should go out to them that they may come to recognition and change for the better while there is time.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. D. A Offing, (1989) *Continuity and Change in some Traditional Societies of Nigeria* Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd., p. 26.
3. Raymond Ogunade, "Secret Societies and Cult Activities with Reference to Nigerian Tertiary Institutions" (An unpublished lecture note, University of Ilorin.)
4. Hamlyn, *Encyclopedic World Dictionary*, p. 402.
5. 'Secret Cult' is a terminology coined by Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. Going through most of the daily newspapers between 1983-1984, one would clearly see this fact. Prior to these times, these gangs and groups had always been referred to as fraternities. It was as if an evil force(s) stepped out of this coinage and possessed all the groups. This is because this country started to witness a lot of carnage since then.
6. O. B. Adeleye (1997). "The Christian Church and some Secret Societies in Nigeria" B. A. Dissertation, Department of Religions, 1997), p. 38.
7. J. O. Awolalu and P. Ade Dopamu (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press, p. 225.
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10. J. O. Awolalu and P. Ade Dopamu (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press, p. 226.
11. The Sunday Tribune Periscope of April 18, 1990, titled "The Pirates and Campus Terrorism".
12. Gbolahan Akinbami, "Curbing Campus Cults" (*Daily Times*, 22- 07-98). P. 4.
13. Ukene Offiong, claims that there are about 36 cultic groups in our tertiary institutions and more than 70 of such in our secondary schools. Also see the *Guardian of 19th February 1999*, p. 9.
14. Sade Omotehinwa (not real name); was raped by her male friends (classmates) while in school. She shared her experience with us.
15. Lanre Arogundade "Suspect Approach to anti-Cultism war", *Vanguard 22nd Aug. 1999*, p. 8. Also see the *Guardian*, 26th Aug, 1999.
16. Engr. Olawumi Gasper of Lagos State Polytechnic and Professor Fatiu Ademola Akesode of Lagos State University, have bitterly spoken against the cultists in public. The two institutions have witnessed series of arson and killings in the past.
17. See Ukene Offiong, (1997). *The Way out of Secret Cult*, Lagos: Day-Spring Publishers, p. 4.

18. See Kolade Larewaju, "Cultism: Close down Varsities for two years", *Sunday Vanguard*, 22nd Aug. 1999, p. 8.
19. Hundreds of cultists have denounced their membership in Edo, Benin and Uyo Universities lately.
20. J. O. Awolalu, (1979). *Yoruba beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, London: Longman Group Ltd., p. 137
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22. An interview with Professor R. A. Raji, the Imam of the University of Ilorin, on 17th Sept 1999, at 6.15 p.m.