

## **The Role and Interplay of the Family in the Perpetuation of Campus Cultism**

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**Abstract:** In Nigeria, cultism as a form of student unrest has assumed different dimensions compared to its forms in the past. This social menace has been a source of great concern among stakeholders (parents, university administrators, policy makers, researchers and educational planners) in education sector. On account of cult activities many students have lost their study opportunities, others have died, some have been maimed and not a few were raped while some are still being harassed. The existence of and the attendant nuisances which this group of people have unleashed on the society have cost the country the services of her well trained indigenous and expatriate staff. Though previous studies have discussed this issue and have suggested various solutions to the problem, the present study specifically focused on the role and the interplay of the family in stemming the tide of campus cultism. It is a study that was based on archival research whose discussions were clustered into 4 sub-themes, namely; cult, campus and cultism, cultism on campuses: Sorrow, tears and blood, parents and social control and family-school interplay.

**Key words:** Role, interplay, family, campus cultism, Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

If the Nigerian public is asked to make a list of problems currently bedeviling our society, the result of that exercise will no doubt include activities of secret cult members in the higher institutions of learning. The mass media and direct experience of many that live close to those institutions where secret cult activities are rife have been largely responsible for creating awareness about the problem. In the context of Nigerian tertiary institutions, it has been shown that secret cults exist as rival power blocs. Reports on the activities of these cults within Nigerian tertiary institutions have dampened the hope of many people. The unabated moulding of the character of many Nigerian students in the context of cult culture has continued to worsen the ugly situation. Generally, cults are recognized as destructive organizations, dreaded as monsters in the wider society (Ogunbameru, 1997) and treated confrontationally. It is in this context that academics and the generality of the citizenry have cast around for solution to the incidence of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions. In fighting this problem, there is no doubt that several steps have been taken at several levels of the social structure including the current fad of dramatized revocation by religious groups on campuses. The basic objective of this study is to examine the role and interplay of the family on the proliferation of campus cultism and in stemming the tide of the menace.

### **CULT AND CULTISM**

It is difficult to offer an embracing definition of secret cult (Ogunbameru, 1997) given its several variants. A brief attempt will be made here to describe some variants. Cult typically refers to a cohesive social group devoted to beliefs or practices that surrounding population considers to be outside the mainstream or that which runs counter to generally accepted norms and values. This perception may be positive or negative. Thus in some common usage, cult has a positive connotation, especially for members of a devoted group in the domains of poetry, music, writing, fiction and fashion. But when used to describe a new religious group, extreme political parties, questionable therapeutic alliances and pyramidal business groups, unholy alliances, criminal gang groups, the word usually has a negative connotation. In the context of sociology of religion, a cult is seen as one of the four terms making up the church-sect typology. Here, a cult is seen as referring to a group with high degree of tension with the surrounding society combined with novel religious beliefs as distinguished from sects which have a high degree of tension with society but whose beliefs are traditional to that society. Ecclesia and denominations are groups with a lower degree of tension and traditional beliefs. The psychological definitions tend to focus on the individual person and factors relating to the choice to become involved, as well as one subsequent effect on individuals.

Table 1: Typology of gangs

| Types                     | Features                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hedonistic/social gangs   | Moderate drug use/offending with little involvement in crime, especially violent crime                                                                                         |
| Party gangs               | Relatively high use and sale of drugs. Involved in vandalism and may involve both male and female gender                                                                       |
| Instrumental gangs        | Involved in property crimes and abuse of addictive drugs such as cracks, cocaine; may engage in selling drugs but not in fashion                                               |
| Predatory gangs           | Heavily involved in serious crimes and the abuse of sedative drugs such as cracks and may engage in selling drugs                                                              |
| Scavenger gangs           | Loosely organized; preying on the weak in inner cities and often involved in petty crimes but sometimes violent                                                                |
| Serious delinquent gangs  | Heavy involvement in both serious and minor crimes                                                                                                                             |
| Territorial gangs         | Associated with specific area or turf and do get involved in conflicts with other gangs over their respective turfs                                                            |
| Organized/corporate gangs | Heavy involvement in all kinds of crime, heavy use and sale of drugs and may have several divisions for marketing and goods handling, strict in especially promotion and merit |
| Drug Gangs                | Smaller than other gangs, more cohesive, focused on the drug business, strong centralized leadership with market define rules                                                  |

Shelden *et al.* (2001)

From a sociological perspective, Ogunbameru (1997) defines cult (secret) as an organization whose activities are kept away from the knowledge of others. The activities of cult groups are essentially covert, disguised and are usually carried out behind closed doors (Aguda, 1997). There is a sense in which cults (as social groups) can be likened to gangs, as a group of individuals with a recognized name and symbols who form an allegiance for a common purpose and engaged in unlawful activities. In this broader view of cults as gangs, there is a location dilemma for cults within the Nigerian case (Shelden *et al.* (2001) for classification on types of gangs).

However while gangs have been shown to be racially or ethnically homogenous, cults as they present themselves in Nigerian campuses, are to a large extent, multi-ethnic in membership and the range of their activities make it difficult to pigeon hole such groups into any of the sub-group highlighted in Table 1. However, they can be safely placed in the territorial gang category.

The earlier mentioned not with standing, literature has shown that secret cults, especially the type commonly found in Nigerian tertiary institutions are composed of people whose activities are carried out in exclusive locations and unusual times without being exposed to the uninitiated and whose members are in a high degree of tension with the surrounding society, particularly the campus social setting. The basic features of such social groups are:

- Exclusive membership
- Use of signs/symbols/passwords/similar materials creating identity for the group
- Group objectives and shared experiences of rituals and beliefs

Thus, cult groups have been found to manipulate, exploit and control their members with attendant indoctrination. As a social group, cults are situated in a larger society whose values they are either directly opposed to or from which they develop alternative values

as a sub-culture or a counter culture. In the light of this, there is need, at this point, to briefly examine the campus as a template for campus cultism.

The campus is a microcosm of the larger society with its own share of the combined vices and virtues that it is made up of. As an institution, it was created for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge. As a tertiary body, it confers degrees and engages in academic researches. The campus can be likened to a factory that absorbs students (raw materials) from secondary school into a more sophisticated cosmopolitan environment where ideas are planted into the fertile minds of the students. Doing this requires the assemblage of technically and academically competent officers (academic and non-academic) leading to a relatively complex structure and sub-structures. Thus, the campus recruits staff and admits students from diverse backgrounds but the point of convergence remains that academic pursuit is the rallying force which mandates interaction and goal setting. As a society, it has its own rules and regulations stemming from the norms and values which are derived from the larger society. As a society to itself, there are social differential criteria for measuring power and success. Yet, the rallying point is the quest for academic excellence.

The campus setting is a locale for change and there are several change agents within it. One major agent for this change is academic instruction but there are so many other change agents that are expected to contribute to developing individuals that are worthy in character and in learning. These are the human dimension which parades a horde of sophisticated human elements, a complex context that most students have never experienced before stepping into the campus. These human elements are often difficult to arrange neatly into the cognitive repertoire of (especially) new students. All these elements constitute cues that are constantly competing for the attention of the students and could serve as distraction from the major objective the academic pursuit. In this physical environment and human dimension interplay emerged several social groups of which the cults/cultism is a major phenomenon.

### **CULTISM IN NIGERIAN CAMPUSES: SORROW, TEARS AND BLOOD**

Literature has demonstrated that the secret cult phenomenon is not new to Africa (Adelola, 1997; Evbuoma, 2007; Smah, 2001; Rotimi, 2005; Alemika, 2000) but the origin of secret cult in Nigerian Universities can be traced back to the Pyrates Confraternity, also known as National Association of sea dogs that was founded at the University College, Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) in 1953. The association was conceived as part of the panoply of social life of the university. This original confraternity did not swear to oath of secrecy, no binding of blood and the identity of members were known to both students and staff (Adiamoh, 2003). However towards the end of the 1960s the social, political and educational changes which were occurring in Nigeria began to affect the operations of the confraternities, as a group formed by people who shared common interests (and who operated in the open) to secret cults with adherents of an exclusive system of religious (or occult) beliefs and practices wreaking havoc on the campuses.

According to Adelola (1997), the first notable departure came in 1968 with the formation of the eye confraternity at the University of Ibadan as a breakaway group from the buccaneers which also sprung up from the sea dogs (Owoeye, 1997). The major force for these new splinter groups was basically doctrinal. From that point, protestant groups have sprung up. Today, there is hardly any tertiary institution which has not suffered the adverse effects of the activities of secret cults. Thus by the 1990s, many confraternities largely operated as criminal gangs, called campus cults and aside their criminal alliance (on campuses), they have been linked to political violence as well as the conflict in the Niger delta. In fact from the 1980s, confraternity spread throughout the over 300 institutions of higher education in the country. It is also difficult to make a guess of the number of such campus cults across the federation, although Ugwulebo (1999) listed 43 male and 8 female cult groups. The period of the 80's saw a dramatic change in the role of their operations, especially with the Ibrahim Babangida coup of 1983 which caused a large degree of political tension. Military leaders began to use cult groups as hatchet men to check the growing influence of students unions and staff as groups opposing military rule. Confraternities now worked as violent contractors and were provided weapons to use against students' activities. University Vice Chancellors began to provide protection for cult groups while conscripting them as enforcers or to attack students deemed troublesome. The weapons supplied to these cult groups by their recruiters were often used in

deadly inter-cult rivalries. From the 80's cult groups began the untoward tradition of ritual initiations including voodooism before embarking on any other activity. By the 1990s, all female confraternities began. Such female confraternities supplied spies for allied male confraternities as well as acted as prostitution syndicates.

### **WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN GANG?**

Domash (2000) contends that joining gang is a complicated combination of social, political, family, education and community factors. In his own contribution, Rowell (2000) noted that gangs grow because it provides kids with basic human needs which include the need for security, love, friendship, acceptance, food, shelter, discipline, belonging, status, respect, identification, power and money. Furthermore, the most frequently cited as reason why people join gang is the need to belong. This argument holds that most gang members are underachievers who come from broken homes or homes with no strong male authority figure and membership of such groups provide both psychological and physical security (Wroblewski and Hess, 2003).

Michael and Langone gives three different models regarding joining a cult. These include deliberative model, psychodynamic model and thought reform model. Under the deliberative model, people are said to join cults primarily because of how they view a particular group. Langone notes that this view is most favoured among sociologists and religious scholars. For the psychodynamic model which is popular with some mental health professionals, individuals choose to join gang for fulfillment of subconscious psychological needs. Finally, the thought reform model posits that people join gangs, not because of their own psychological needs but because of the group's influence through forms of psychological manipulation. Langone (1996) states that the mental health experts who have more direct experience with large number of cultists tend to favour the latter view.

Extensive literatures exist on the recruitment patterns that often take place during the early week of school year. Typically, confraternity alumni and members swarm campuses, working on the ambivalence and inquisitiveness of Jambites (a slang term for new university intakes who have sat and passed the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB)). The predator cults use various tactics including persuasion, luring, coercion and often offer of assistance to unsuspecting students. Initiation ceremonies normally involve severe beatings (to test endurance), as well as

ingestion of a liquid often mixed with blood. There are some additional hurdles which are group specific including raping, sexual intercourse or a fight with a stronger person. Majority of confraternities do engage in a variety of money-making criminal activities ranging from Armed Robbery to Kidnapping. Members may also get money from political figures who wish to intimidate their opponents. There are equally a large documentation on the activities of cult groups on campuses with a general agreement on the trademark of Sorrow, Tears and Blood (STD). An insight into the activities of these groups was captured by a former Minister of Education in Nigeria thus:

Our collective psyche has been assaulted by tragic wave of secret cults on 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 documents that violate the rules and regulations of a decent society (Ayu, 1994).

The exact death toll of confraternity activities is unclear, although there is an estimate which puts cult related murder at 250 people by 2002 and the exams and ethics project lobby group estimated that 115 students and teachers had been killed between 1993 and 2003. The general submission about the activities of cults on campuses is that they are brutal and sadistic. This bestiality has often been traced to the gruesome initiation rites as well as the need to rise through the hierarchy of the group. In summary, cult groups by dint of their activities have contributed greatly to insecurity of life and property on the campuses.

Cult groups, like street corner gangs, offer opportunities to members during school and after graduation. Cults do have extensive connections with political and military figures. They thus offer excellent alumni networking opportunities. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why they are attractive in the face of mass graduate unemployment in Nigeria. There is also a rich literature on the reasons for the emergence of cultism in Nigerian campuses which can only be highlighted in this presentation:

- Social changes in the education sector:
  - Demographic changes
  - Falling standard of education
  - Reduced and inadequate funding of education
  - Disintegration of infrastructure
  - Emergence of the culture of violence in tertiary institution

- Military coups which marked the official introduction of violence as a way of resolving political conflict
- State-sponsored violence, especially between 1983-1998
- Political intolerance/assassinations
- System breakdown
- Emergence of ethnic militia
- Religious clashes
- Incoherent youth policy
- Erosion of family influence

That the average family in Nigeria has failed in its function to provide a solid moral foundation for children is no longer new. Thus, children are not equipped with the right skills to resist negative peer group influences which they encounter daily in their interactions with others especially on campuses.

## **PARENTS AND SOCIAL CONTROL**

As the discussions so far have shown, a cult is like any social organization and its emergence results from the basic features and divisions in society. As a deviant social group, it can be properly fitted into youth gang studies which emphasize the role of conflict in integrating collective behaviour with the development of a tradition, structure, esprit-de-corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness and attachment to local territory.

One of the contributions of studies to the understanding of youth gangs is that such groups emerge as an alternative or sometimes as a supplement to the family (Hobbs, 1992). This is because youth gang as a variant of play group is one of those primary groups with which youths often have contact. Gangs can, therefore become alternative agencies of socialization especially for young immigrants for whom mainstream economic integration was problematic (Hobbs, 1992). As alternatives, they can override the position of the family when parents fail in their obligations to the children. In the context of the discussion herein, one cannot but agree with Adelola (1997) that the environment where campus cults thrive (in Nigeria) cannot be divorced from the *raison d'être* of their existence. The environment (campus) and indeed the larger Nigerian society from which the life of campus flows becomes the nurturer and facilitator of the organizational tactics of the cults. Where the family system or as institution collapses and the school as *locus parentis* is found wanting, the children are at the mercy of other alternative agencies, one of which is the cult group.

In the causation search, therefore the position of this study is that multi-factorial explanations might not adequately explain why individual students join gangs. If anything, such multi-factors explanation has tended to

apportion a larger share of the blame for upsurge in the activities of campus cultism to the society. But, there is need to draw attention to the bigger debate between the deterministic and free-will perspectives in the search for crime causation in society. Under the deterministic view, the university administrators (and to some extent the Nigerian society) have over time been on the firing line for their inability to administer and keep the seed of cultism from germinating on the campus. However, as studies on personality development have shown, by the time students arrive in the University, the core of their personality would have been developed (Fig. 1).

Although, there are several theories of personality development that provide explanations for the phases in the growth process (Rathus, 1993), it is agreed that individuals undergo a variety of phases. Each phase possesses myriads of variables that range from environmental, through hereditary, sociological, inter personal and parenting style to situation specific factors that exert influence on individual and pose upon him personality label he would eventually be identified with.

Flowing from the earlier mentioned, students have a character or presenting personality that the university is not so much in a position to alter. It is instructive to note that the earliest age of arrival at the university is 16 years. At that age, the student is already in a cognitive position to exercise his or her free-will in the choice of association outside the academic instruction which the school exercises control over. The basic structures of this raw material (for the tertiary institution) are students and they would have been processed, though at the earliest levels of socialization agents especially the family. According to Otite and Ogionwo (1979) the family is the most important socializing agent in the early years of life. The child learns his very early social responses as a result of interaction with parents and other members of his family. Although, every family serves this basic societal function of socializing the young, the socialization method (parenting styles) and their effects differ. It is the parenting styles

that became crucial in the formation of the personality and ethical notions that eventually show itself at the gate of the tertiary institutions.

The search for causation in deviant studies in the positivist school has been diverse, ranging from pathological, social disorganization, sub-culture, learning theory and anomie to explain conflict, neo-classical explanations and post neo-classical explanations (Okunola, 2002). One thing that is common to all these theories is the question why do deviants do it? But, Emile Durkheim had long suggested that we asked instead why do not they do it? It is along this line that control theorists argue that conformity occurs only when people have more gain from it than they have to gain by deviance. That is, if they have a stake in conformity. The theory also gives further insight into the situation by offering an analogy of society, as a cafeteria of temptations and that such temptations are rewarding. Thus, the causes of conformity are traceable to the social bonds between the individual and the group (Bainbridge, 1997). It is the social bond to positive forces that do not make people yield to the temptation that abounds in the social environment. This bond results from four elements, namely: Attachment (degree of interaction); investment (stakes built up); involvement (participation which results from the first two) and beliefs (internalization of norms).

When these bonds are strong, the individual conforms when these bonds are weak, the individual deviates. The strength of these bonds can fluctuate over time, hence the possible shift from deviance to conformity and vice versa over a person's lifetime. This raises the crucial issue of proper management of bonds for higher effectiveness or the use of parenting style or a combination of styles in the management of the bonds by the family, as a social group to ensure conformity from group members, especially the children.

Social bond can be generated between an individual and non-deviant or deviant groups. As shown in the previous discussion on cult as a cohesive social group, it follows that the attachment, investment, involvement and beliefs in the cult group can lead the children to become criminal deviants in society, especially when they have weak bond in positive social groups. The question here is: What is the degree of bond that exists between the family and its members especially that between the parents and the children? Put differently is this bond (if it exists at all) strong enough to enable the children to withstand the temptations available on the campus as society (Fig. 2)?

Erikson (1968) adopted a psychosocial viewpoint in three stages of ego development in which children establish a series of orientation to themselves and their social world. Eight stages were developed by him:

- Infancy (<2 years)-Trust vs. Mistrust feelings
- 2-3 years-Autonomy vs. Doubt
- 3-5 years-Identity vs. Guilt
- 6-11 years-Industry vs. Inferiority
- 12-18 years-Identity vs. Role confusion
- Young adult-Intimacy vs. Isolation
- Middle age-Generativity vs. Absorption
- Old age-Integrity vs. Despair

Fig. 1: Erikson's stages of ego development

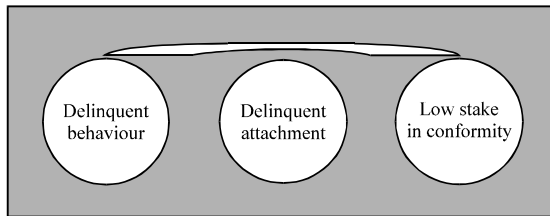


Fig. 2: Model combining social control and differential association theories (Rodney, 2004)

Looking at the current state of the campuses, the social control theory can be supplemented by the different association theories. In the framework in Fig. 2, delinquent alternative (substructures) becomes a social reality of the campus setting and one of the alternative options available especially to curious students as well as those with stakes. Lower stakes in conformity, as derived from their family background is the attraction to the delinquent sub-culture, as manifested in cult group in this context. This low stake in conformity students at point of arrival on campus can be easily altered towards delinquent alternatives. It becomes more so for students with personality problem that is, anti-social personality disorders (Elegbeleye, 2005).

At the interplay level, socialization is a lifelong process whose agents are many. Family (a primary social group) was identified as a major agent but there are several others including the educational system of which the university as a school is one. Otite and Ogionwo (1979) have argued that as the individual spends more and more time in formal school activities away from home, she/he will also spend more and more time interacting with her/his peers not only in the classroom but in many types of extra curriculum settings as well. From these contacts and extensive interactions, intimate (primary) time relationships are established and out of these emerge important value definitions which are significant in influencing or in shaping character. This makes imperative the need for family to go out to monitor and ensure that other agencies are not working at cross purpose with the values that they stand for and as prescribed by the decent society.

To what extent are the two major agents of socialization in this present situation acting together to forestall or checkmate the bonding of the students to negative cult groups? What is their influence on the quality of students that are produced and who are the core values of society? A common group was found between the biological parents and the school authority, as locus parentis the educational development of the child

for proper fitting to societal roles and the perpetuation of a decent society. Herein lies the need for an interplay the family and the school have stakes in the anti-social activities of the cult culture that is ravaging the campus as macrocosm of society.

### **FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP**

In concluding this discussion, there is need for family-school partnership in the drive towards the production of graduates that are worthy in character and in learning. Family as a concept here denotes the parents. The parents and the school will need to build up a relationship in which there will be constant dialogue and exchange of notes, especially as it relates to the conduct of the students. While the university strengthens the technical and mechanical measures of cult activities, control and prevention, the joint partnership will begin to explore ways of building students who will have high stakes in conformity. The students' affairs and faculty/department will have to explore more and better ways of active interactions with students through various programmes that will ensure attachment, investment, involvement and beliefs in ideal values of a good society. On both sides of the fence (the family and the school) there is need for setting up of structures or developing schemes that will build a relationship with the students. The family should be reminded that as primary processors of the raw materials for the university, the state in which they present their own output as raw materials ultimately influences the tertiary processing and its final product. On its own part, the school has the responsibility to check and determine the suitability of the raw materials that are supplied to them. There is need to devise a means of checking the background of the recruits in order to determine their suitability for recruitment or admittance.

Some have argued that the students in question are adults in their own right. However, researchers need to remind ourselves that the improvement in nutrition status over the years owing in itself to improved affluence, especially for the middle class at a point has had improvement on the physical health and growth of children without a corresponding improvement in the quality of their reasoning. They appear grown physically and enjoy the freedom of choice that has been brought about by advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) but their thought process is weak and may not necessarily be able to withstand the temptations of the delinquent sub-culture. They need to be guided and such guidance and influence will require the development of a relationship with them as a group and as

individuals. It is in this context that the re-emergence of the interactive sessions recently introduced by the University of Ibadan becomes timely and a welcome idea. It is also a project and idea that should be emulated by other tertiary institutions. The composition of such interactive panel should be made to include psychologists and experts in deviance studies. After the screening exercise, developing a programme for those found to have personality problem also becomes imperative. By extension, this will serve as the university contribution and service to the society.

The emerging trend of parents/teachers forum in some universities and in some cases in some faculties should be welcomed and be facilitated to blossom as a major facet of the needed interplay. The forum should be utilized for frank exchange of ideas and discussions on how to rehabilitate cultists and wrestle the university from cultists and create an environment that will not be supportive of cultism. There is an increasing need to move away from confrontational approaches which in-itself is reactionary to a rehabilitative stance. The school needs to engage more with the students as well as their parents. More investment in areas outside the classrooms in order to engage the students more meaningfully is necessary. This will require partnership with other bodies and institutions especially the private sectors who are mostly the end beneficiaries of these students.

### CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that children have developed their unique personalities before being admitted into the university due to parenting style in family setting. This informed the incapability of the university staff to effectively influence their students against the tempting destructive activities available on campus. It was equally revealed that the children were engaging in anti-social activities like secret cult due to weak or fluid nature of bond that exists between the family and its members, especially that between the parents and the children. It was believed that a strong bond between them would have enabled the children to with stand the temptations available on campus. It is most often poor children who join cult groups to gain a sense of power. The study recommends, among other things that the re-emergence of the interactive sessions recently introduced by the University of Ibadan should be emulated by other universities and that the composition of such interactive panel should include the psychologists and experts in deviance studies. The students should be constantly engaged in screening

exercises in which these professionals should be involved, as well as development of programmes for those found to have personality problem after the screening exercise.

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