



Secret Cults at Niger Delta University

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Abstract

This study examines secret cults in Nigerian Universities, using Niger Delta University as a case study. Both primary and secondary data were employed in this study. The primary data was gathered using structured and unstructured questionnaires distributed to the sample population. The sample population was arrived at using a simple random sampling technique. Data was collected from 110 respondents over a period of one month. To analyse the data, the researcher made use of simple percentages and several descriptive tools of analysis. The findings of the study reveal that the collapse of the Nigerian economy is the major cause of cultism in the country. It is most often poor children who join cult groups to gain a sense of power. The study recommends, among other things, that government improve the funding of the education sector so that the universities will regain their former prestige and reputation as centres of debate and excellence.

Keywords: Secret cult; Higher education; Students; Niger Delta University, Government Nigeria

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Epkenyong, S. N. (2010). Secret Cult at Niger Delta University. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 3(2), 121.131. Retrieved [DATE] from <http://www.ij sre.com>.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world universities have often been regarded as "citadels of learning". Until recently, this perspective also applied to Nigerian universities which have, as a result of incessant secret cult activities, become instead "centres of violence". Indeed, Gimba (2002) in referring to cult activities on campus contends that Nigerian universities now offer a B.Sc in violence and an M.A in cultism. As observed by Eneji (1996), it seems that each day new stories of devilish acts perpetrated by secret cults emerge. Cultism is, very broadly, a belief that individuals with the same ideological orientation gather together to practice.

In the early days of formal education in Nigeria, it was an honour and achievement for any young person to be offered admission into one of the few universities in the country; an occasion that everyone including their parents looked forward to. These were the glory days of Nigerian tertiary education. Today things are much different. It is common knowledge now that studying at university or any other higher education institution in Nigeria is a nightmarish but necessary evil.

Cult activities in Nigeria's education system can be traced back to 1952 when the First African Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka, and his peers, popularly known as the G7, founded the Pyrates Confraternity. The objectives of the organization at that time were to fight non-violently but intellectually and effectively against the imposition of foreign conventions, to revive the age of chivalry, and to find a lasting solution to the problems of tribalism and elitism. Little did Soyinka and his colleagues know that they were making history. Nor did they realize that student and indeed youth radicalism was being given a boost towards the unleashing of a national vanguard (Adejero 1995). While it was beyond their imaginations and far beyond their intent to lay the foundation for an explosion of gangsterism in Nigerian schools, this was in fact the effect.

Cultism in Nigerian universities has existed in many forms for several decades and has now evolved into an institution of violence. In describing the situation, Eneji (1996) notes that stories of violence, torture and unwarranted intimidation emanate from universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, other tertiary institutions and even a

number of secondary schools. The Niger Delta University is no exception to this growing trend. This study is an attempt to provide much needed empirical insight into the problem of cultism in Nigerian universities using the Niger Delta University (NDU) as a case study.

Contemporary university campuses, and the university institution itself, are under intense pressure to change. Although some of the desired changes are meant to benefit society as a whole, the consequences of some of these current trends seem to outweigh the benefits. For example, while the rising demand for university education by Nigerians (Adeyemo, 2002 and Lebeau, 2000) is intended to create more job opportunities for Nigerians in the increasingly competitive global employment and information technology driven market, such demands have not been matched by expansions in infrastructure so as to make learning conducive for all students. Student enrolment in universities has quadrupled over the last two decades in spite of increasing joblessness in the employment market.

It is clear that the quality of higher education and the advantages students accrue from attending university depend not only on the content of teaching and the curricula, but also on campus life. Cultism, as a manifestation of student unrest, is quite different compared to its forms in the past. It has caused great concern among parents, university administrators, policy makers, researchers and educational planners. Former Minister of Education, Dr. Lyorcha Ayu, recognized the seriousness of the secret cult phenomenon in institutions of higher learning when he observed that our collective psyche has been assaulted by the tragic wave of secret cults on our school campuses whose members have little respect for life and property. Owing in part to their criminal activities, they are wealthy enough to purchase guns, pay for expensive midnight parties where they engage in bizarre rituals, and kidnap heads of institutions and force them to sign agreements that violate the rules and regulations of a decent society (Ayu, 1994). In addition to official statements and perspectives, common observation reveals that many Nigerian newspapers and magazines have become bulletin boards for reporting the daily exploits of members of secret cults.

The consequences of such bizarre activities are far-reaching: many students have lost their study opportunities; others have died, while some still have been harassed, maimed, and raped. As a result of these hazards many well trained Nigerians and expatriates have left the services of the universities. Unfortunately, despite efforts to tackle the problem, secret cult activities in Nigerian universities persist. The solutions developed so far are akin to putting out an inferno without any proper attempt to identify the sources of the inferno. This paper attempts to identify those sources or the conditions that stimulate and promote cultism in Nigerian universities as well as students' perception of this social menace in the Niger Delta University (NDU).

Study Objectives

The study has both general and specific objectives. The general objective of the study is to provide empirical insight of the problem of cultism in Niger Delta University (NDU). The specific objective includes:

- i. To examine student perception on why students join secret cults;
- ii. To identify the causes of cultism at Niger Delta University;
- iii. To examine the mode of operation of secret cults;
- iv. To discover existing mechanism for tackling secret cults at Niger Delta University;
- v. To determine the effect of secret cult activities on learning at Niger Delta University.
- vi. To offer new solutions to secret cult problems in Nigerian Universities.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions offer direction to the researcher in carrying out the study:

- i. What are the existing mechanisms for tackling secret cult activities at Niger Delta University?
- ii. How do secret cult activities affect learning at Niger Delta University?
- iii. What are the modes of operation of secret cult members at Niger Delta University?
- iv. What is (are) the cause(s) of secret cultism at Niger Delta University?

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Secret Cultism in Nigerian Universities

The secret cult phenomenon is not new in Africa. As Aguda (1997) has observed, activities of secret cults such as the Human Leopards and Human Crocodiles have long been recorded in central Africa. In Nigeria, secret cults have likewise existed for some time in many parts of the country: the Ogboni cult among the Yoruba's of the South-West, the Ekine cult can be found in the Delta region, and the Ekpe secret cult can be found among the Efiks of the South-

Eastern part of Nigeria (Adelola, 1997). Membership in these cults provides a source of status, and economic, social and political security to adherents (Aguda, 1997).

The origin of the secret cults in the Nigerian universities can be traced back to the Pyrates Confraternity, also known as National Association of Sea Dogs. It was founded at the university college of Ibadan (now called the university of Ibadan), in 1953 when the institution was still a satellite campus of the university of London (Rotimi, 2005). The Sea Dog Confraternity was similar to numerous other fraternities and sororities, which are ubiquitous in many American universities and colleges both in their membership requirements and activities (Thomas, 2002). In the United States, fraternities and sororities are sometimes called Greek clubs because of their Greek names and symbols. These Greek clubs promote, among other things, moral uprightness, patriotism, community service and high academic and intellectual standards.

The Pyrates (or Sea Dog) Confraternity was formed by the first African Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka and his peers, known as the G7. The original aims of the association were both lofty and noble. They sought to produce future Nigerian leaders who would be proud of their African heritage. As Thomas asserts, the Confraternity boasted of the cleanest, brightest, and the most politically conscious students. The main objectives of the Confraternity have been summarized by Orilusin (1990) as:

- i. To fight non-violently but intellectually and effectively against the imposition of foreign conventions to revive the age of chivalry.
- ii. To find a lasting solution to the problems of tribalism and elitism.

Professor Soyinka was the first democratically elected Captain of the society under the title Captain Blood. Professor Muyiwa Awe was Long John Silver. Many other prominent Nigerians were founding fathers of the confraternity including Pius Oleghe, Ralph Opara, and Aig I'moukhuede. Sea Dog outfits resembled those of the traditional pirates, though everything was done in a healthy, fun and harmless spirit. Soyinka (2002) notes that the Pyrates wanted to be different from the stodgy establishment and its pretentious products, the hypocritical and affluent middle class, and the alienated colonial aristocrat.

Soyinka also explains that confraternities are not cults (Dixon 1994). Confraternities were part of the social life of the university in eras past. As Adebayo (2001) likewise notes some students have since twisted the aims of this noble tradition. Soyinka further points out that the original confraternity did not swear any oath of secrecy, had no binding of blood, and the identities of members were known to both students and staff.

Long after the founding fathers had left the University of Ibadan, the Sea Dogs Confraternity continued to thrive. Unfortunately, towards the end of the 1960's the social, political and educational changes occurring across Nigeria began to affect the operations of the confraternities. Thus, according to Adelola (1997), the first notable departure came in 1968 with the formation of the Eiye Confraternity at the University of Ibadan. The Eiye Confraternity grew out of the Buccaneers which had developed from the Sea Dogs.

The major force behind the formation of Sea Dog splinter groups was the doctrinal adherence by original members to the organization's tenets. Thomas (2002) notes that members of the newer groups were not able to meet the high academic standard originally set by the Sea Dogs. The splinter groups regarded the Sea Dogs as elitist whose campaigns had outlived their usefulness. These splinter or protest groups included the Black Axe, Mafia, Buccaneers, Vikings, and Dragons. Subsequent female cults have included the Daughters of Jezebel, Temple of Eden, Barracudas, and Frigates (Rotimi, 2005). Today in Nigeria, there is hardly any tertiary institution which has not felt the adverse effects of the activities of secret and violent cults.

Erosion of Family: Influence and Secret Cultism

In modern Nigeria, the influence of the family has greatly receded. Increasingly and as a result, the average family fails in its function to provide a solid moral foundation for children. Children are thus weakly prepared to resist negative peer group influences which they encounter on a daily basis. Commenting on the activities of "area" boys and girls - a sub-cultural deviant group of young boys and girls in urban centres in Nigeria - Rafiu (1993) highlights the inability of the modern family to equip children with effective socialization needed to conform to acceptable cultural norms. He goes on to note, with respect to mothers, that they are content sending their children to lesson teachers when the school hours are over, thus robbing them of the opportunities to be genuine children with time to play, mix with nature and be creative. He further indicts mothers for the children's loss of touch with nature: "no time to run after lizard, no time to swim to their hearts content, no time to play hide and seek game with their dogs in the nearby bush - indeed, there is no bush, there is no river. There are no plants to provide habitation for lizards". The focus is solely on school and special coaching and lessons to prepare children to face the powerful JAMB (Joint Admissions Matriculation Board) examinations for universities.

Rafiu (1993) concludes that, with the lack of contact with nature in a jungle of concrete, that is proof of affluence in our society, children become soulless. They lack moral instruction both at school and at home. Because

they are soulless, they become blood thirsty monsters who prowl the streets and campuses at night, terrorizing innocent people.

Owoeye (1997) has established strong links between a weak and defective family background/influence and tendencies for students to join secret cults. In such cases, parents themselves may be members of secret cults and/or they may be the perpetrators child abuse and neglect. Likewise, Rotimi (2005) argued that children from broken or single parent homes often miss the much needed socialization process and as such fail to absorb the real social values of society, making them anti-social and aggressive.

Meeting the Challenges of Secret Cults in Nigeria

Over the last two decades, various attempts have been made to deal with secret cultism. These have included passing appropriate decrees, enacting legislations, the establishing of regulations by university authorities, and improving university infrastructure. One of the earliest official attempts aimed at curtailing cult activities was the enactment of Decree 47 of 27th December 1989. It is entitled the Students Union Activities (control and regulations) Decree of 1989 and was introduced by the General Babangida military administration. The Decree empowered the governing council of each university to pro-scribe any society operating within the campus and pursuing activities which are not in the interest of national security, public safety, order, morality or health. Unfortunately, this early attempt did little to curtail cultism, and instead drove cult activities underground.

Recently, the House of Representatives passed a more comprehensive bill aimed at dealing more effectively with secret cultism on the campuses of tertiary institutions across the country. The bill stipulates a penalty of five years in jail or a fine of N250, 000.00 (Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Naira) or both for students convicted of participating in secret cult activities (Oladeji and Ojewuyi 2001). The bill does seem to have borrowed from the abovementioned Decree 47 of 1989. For example, clause five (5) of the bill states that, "No cult or society by whatever name called or known shall pursue activities which are:

- a. Not in the interest of national security, public safety, public order, morality and public health,
- b. Illegal, inimical, restructured or unlawful.

Apart from enacting legislations, some state governments have also formed intelligence units, which, during the military interregnum, worked very closely with different tertiary institutions to fish out suspected cult members. Such activities have occasionally yielded results, for example, in the 20th March 1994 Guardian Newspaper, it was reported that suspected cult members were indeed apprehended in the then Ondo State.

Some universities, such as Niger Delta University, have also gone beyond government legislation and introduced clauses in the matriculation oaths in which students pledge not to be members of secret cults. In many universities, those caught engaging in cult activities are either rusticated or expelled (Awe 2001). In Lagos, the Commissioner of Police has suggested those students caught engaging in cult activities should be also banned from becoming members of professional bodies. Umanah (2002) highlights that President Obasanjo allocated funds to various universities for the improvement of sporting activities and repair of infrastructure. Some universities have undertaken the improvement of recreational activities with the hope that these will deter students from becoming involved with cults.

Recently, appeals have also been made for divine intervention in fighting secret cultism. Efunuga (2003) reports that, having exhausted all legal and other earthly means to curb the menace of secret cultists, the authorities of Moshood Abiola Polytechnic in Ogun State organized a retreat where both Muslim and Christians prayed fervently for the eradication of secret cultism on campuses. They specifically prayed to God to deliver both the institution and the general community from the violence and mayhem of these groups (Efunuga 2003).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding structural relations in society is the realm of sociology. However, within sociology there are various theories that seek to explain this relationship including functionalism, Marxist political economy, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and phenomenology. The latter two are micro and non-structural in their explanations of social phenomenon and are not particularly useful in this study. Functionalism is pre-occupied with consensus among structures and has failed to account for conflict and violence in society. This renders it inappropriate in this context as well.

Based on the above, we are left with the Marxist political economy theory as the most appropriate framework of analysis for this study and so it is adopted here. Marxian political economy accords primacy to the material existence and production of society, especially the role of the economy in the study of society. In other words, it assumes that the mode of production of goods and services constitutes the basis for all social processes and institutions. Marxist theory takes the social relations in the production process as the key take off point for its analysis

of all other social phenomenon in society. It attempts to show how the social class who own the means of production uses their position to exploit the masses who own nothing but their labour power. The theory draws our attention to the social evils of capitalism and the unequal relationships in it that foster the oppression and poverty of a large majority in society. It enables us to see how the gross exploitation of the masses generates the much needed ground for unending social economic crises.

Marxist political economy allows us to see how the whole idea of cultism is as a result of the hardship generated by a conscienceless ruling class and the impoverishment of the people. Youth from poorer backgrounds can find joining cults to be a means of expressing social power in place of the economic power they are marginalized from.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Setting

Niger Delta University is located at Wilberforce Island in Bayelsa State, about 32km from the State Capital of Yenagoa. It is made up of three campuses, the Glory Land Campus (the main campus), the College of Health Sciences Campus and the temporary campus of the Faculty of Law. The university was established in 2000 by a bill on the 15th of May 2000 put forward by the first Executive Governor of Bayelsa State, Chief D.S.P. Alamieyeseigha. The university, which started academic activities in the 2001/2002 session, saw its pioneer set of graduates in the 2004/2005 academic year. Although, the student population was only 1,039 at inception, this increased to 4,639 in 2003/2004 and to 10,294 in 2006/2007.

Research Design

A descriptive research design was employed to analyze the perception of students on cultism at Niger Delta University. The study made use of an instrument known as the cult perception questionnaire developed by the researcher and validated by the research supervisor.

Research Population

The population of the study was made up of the students of the Niger Delta University. During the time of this study, the students' union week was occurring and the population of students in school was 300. This served as the research population. The population used for this study was those students on campus and the sample population for this study is 120 students.

Sampling Technique

The sampling technique used for this study is the simple random sampling method. Thus to select our sample population, the ballot system was employed. Each item in the sample frame was given a number on a piece of paper and thrown into a basket, The researcher randomly selected participants by taking one item at a time from the basket with eyes closed until the required number was reached.

Data Collection Method

Primary and secondary methods of data collection were used in this study. Primary data was collected through a general survey that administered structured and unstructured cult perception questions. A total of one hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were printed and one hundred and ten (110) were completed and returned. Secondary data was collected from textbooks, journals, newspapers and internet materials.

Method of Data Analysis

The data gathered from the field work will be analyzed qualitatively using simple percentages. Percentage values were calculated according to the numbers of responses from respondents to each question and these are presented in tables below. One hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were distributed and one hundred and ten (110) were retrieved. Our analysis was based on the number of questionnaires retrieved.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section will present the data gathered through field work. The data is presented in simple percentage tables based

on the response rate recorded in the questionnaires for each item. The percentage calculation will be carried out as follows:

$$\frac{\text{No. of Response}}{\text{No. of Respondents}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

The first section is comprised of the presentation of data on the personal characteristics of the participants. The second section presents data on the perception of cultism at Niger Delta University. The final section offers an evaluation of the study's research questions.

Personal Data of Respondents

Table 1: Age of Respondents

<i>Age Interval</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Below 19	15	13.6
20-29	35	31.8
30-39	31	28.2
40-49	19	17.3
50 and Above	10	9.1
Total	110	100

Table 1 shows that 15 (13.6%) of all respondents were below the age of 19 years, 35 (31.8%) were between 20 and 29 years, 31 (28.2%) were between 30 and 39 years of age and 19 (17.3%) belonged to the 40-49 years age bracket. Finally, 10 (9.1%) were 50 years or older.

Table 2: Gender of Respondent

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Female	40	36.5
Male	70	63.6
Total	110	100

The above table presents the sex status of students who took part in this study. The table reveals that 40 (36.4%) of participants were female, while 70 (63.6%) were male.

Table 3: Marital Status

<i>Status</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Single	65	59.1
Married	25	22.7
Widow/Widower	7	6.4
Separated	13	11.8
Total	110	100

As shown in Table 3, 65 (59.1%) of respondents were single at the time of the study, 25 (22.7%) were married, 7 (6.4%) were widows or widowers, while 13 (11.8%) were separated.

Table 4: Religion

<i>Religion</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Christian	60	54.5
Muslim	20	18.2
Traditionalist	20	18.2

Others	10	9.1
Total	110	100

Table 4 above shows that 60 (54.5%) of respondents were Christians, 20 (18.2%) were Muslims, 20 (18.2%) were Traditionalist, while 10(9.1%) indicated other.

Cultism in Nigerian Universities

Table 5: Perception of the Contextual Existence of Cultism at Niger Delta University

<i>Answer Alternatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
High	36	32.7
Moderate	61	55.5
Low	13	11.8
Total	110	100

Table 5 reveals the perception of cultism among students at Niger Delta University. It shows that 36 (32.7%) thought its presence was high, 61 (55.5%) thought it was moderate and 13 (11.8%) thought it was low.

Table 6: Causes of Cultism at Niger Delta University

<i>Answer Alternatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Collapse of the economy	38	34.5
Collapse of Moral Values	32	29.1
Collapse of societal/institutional codes of conduct	20	10.9
Victimization	8	7.3
Others	12	18.2
Total	110	100

The above table displays information on the perceived causes of cultism at Niger Delta University. The data show that 38 (34.5%) believe the collapse of the economy has led people to indulge in cultism, 32 (29.1%) believed it was the collapse of moral values, 20 (10.9%) believed it was the collapse of societal/institutional codes of conduct and 8 (7.3%) saw victimization as the cause. Twelve respondents (18.2%) said it is caused by other factors.

Table 7: Reasons Students Join Secret Cults at Niger Delta University

<i>Answer Alternatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Perpetrate violence	12	10.9
Drug peddling on campus	8	7.3
Protection from bullies and wicked lecturers	52	47.3
To terrorize lecturers to get good grades	38	34.5
Total	110	100

This table presents data on why students engage in cultism. The data reveal that 52 (47.3%) thought students join cult groups to protect themselves against bullies wicked lecturers, 38 (34.5%) thought it was to terrorize lecturers to get good grades, 12 (10.9%) thought it was to perpetrate violence, and 8 (7.3%) thought it was as

an avenue for drug peddling.

Table 8: Mode of Operation of Cult Groups at Niger Delta University

<i>Answer Alternatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Violently	78	70.9
Non-violently	9	8.2
Don't know	23	20.9
Total	110	100

Table 8 displays student perceptions on the mode of operation of cult members at Niger Delta University. Seventy-eight (80.9%) thought cult members operated violently, 9 (8.2%) deemed them to operate non-violently, and 23 (20.9%) said they don't know.

Table 9: Does Cultism Affect Learning in Niger Delta University

<i>Answer Alternatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Yes	31	28.2
No	26	23.6
Don't know	53	48.2
Total	110	100

This table presents data on whether respondents believed cultism affected learning at Niger Delta University. It shows that 31 (28.2%) believed it affected learning, 26 (23.6%) thought it did not affect learning and 53 (48.2%) didn't know.

Table 10: Existing Mechanisms for Addressing Cultism in Niger Delta University

<i>Answer Alternatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
School security	54	49.1
Nigerian Police Force	16	14.5
State Security Service (SSS)	40	36.4
Total	110	100

Table 10 shows information on existing mechanisms for addressing cultism at Niger Delta University. The data reveals that 54 (49.1%) saw school security as a good mechanism for tackling cultism, 16 (14.5%) preferred the Nigerian Police Force, and 40 (36.4%) saw the State Security Service (SSS) as the best approach.

Table 11: Are Existing Mechanism for Addressing Cultism Effective?

<i>Answer Alternatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Yes	23	20.9
No	76	69.1
Don't know	11	10
Total	110	100

The table above shows the data on whether existing mechanisms for tackling cultism are seen as effective at Niger Delta University. The data shows that 23 (20.9%) thought the mechanisms were effective, 76 (69.1%) thought they were not effective and 11 (10%) didn't know.

Table 12: Do Parents Have a Role to Play in Reducing Secret Cults on Campuses?

<i>Answer Alternatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
Yes	99	90
No	4	3.6
Don't know	7	6.4
Total	110	100

Table 12 presents data on whether parents have a role to play in reducing cultism. Ninety-nine respondents (90%) thought parents had a role to play, 4 (3.6%) thought they did not have a role to play and 7 (6.4%) didn't know.

Evaluation of Research Questions

The information above was based on the use of the simple percentage method. The descriptive tool of analysis is used to support the percentage values already presented in the tables.

Research Question 1: Why do students join secret cults? This research question was measured with answer alternatives including perpetrating violence, drug peddling in campus, for security against bullies and wicked lecturers, and to terrorize lecturers to get good grades. The findings were presented in Table 7. The largest group of respondents, 47%, thought that students joined for protection against bullies and wicked lecturers. This finding could have implications for cult cessation and prevention programs as perhaps broader security in general is needed on campuses.

Research Question 2: What are the causes of secret cults? The data addressing this question was presented in Table 6. The finding showed that 43% thought the cause was the collapse of the economy while 10% thought the cause was the failure of societal/institutional codes of conduct.

Research Question 3: What are the existing mechanisms for addressing secret cults at Niger Delta University? The major reason for raising this question was to discover the sources for controlling cultism at Niger Delta University. The data on this question was presented in Table 10 and showed that 49% of respondents saw school security as the mechanism used to tackle cultism at Niger Delta University. A smaller percentage noted that the State Security Service (SSS) is also usually invited to monitor cult activities.

Research Question 4: What are the modes of operation of cults at Niger Delta University? The above question was presented in Table 8 and had violently, non-violently and do not know as answer alternatives. Seventy percent of respondents felt that cults had violent modes of operation and 20% were not certain. Thus, there is an overwhelming association of violence with campus cults.

Research Question 5: Does cultism affect learning at Niger Delta University? The data for this question was presented in Table 9. More than 53% of the respondents said they did not know, while 23% said No and 28% said Yes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study has been to examine the menace of secret cults in Nigerian Universities using Niger Delta University as a case study. The aim was to determine the causes of cultism and the implications of cultism in order to outline useful recommendations to help reduce the problem.

A sample of 120 students was assembled using the simple random sampling technique. One hundred and twenty questionnaires (based around the variables of the study) were distributed to the respondents and 110 were completed and returned. In analyzing the returned questionnaires, the researcher employed simple percentages and descriptive tools of analysis. The findings of the study were used to evaluate the research questions which guided the study.

The first major finding of this study is that the collapse of the economy is perceived as the major cause of cultism in Nigerian universities. This finding supports other literature on the subject which contends that it is very often poor youth and students who join cults to gain a sense of power which they otherwise do not have due to their economic circumstances. The study also determined that students engage in cult groups so as to protect themselves from bullies and wicked lecturers.

As mentioned earlier, cultism is a symptom of a society where institutionalized and personal violence have become a way of life and where brute force has supplanted vigorous intellectual debate and where there is a conspicuous absence of dialogue as a veritable element of conflict resolution. Nigeria is a society where more money is allocated annually to defence than to social welfare and education. To successfully combat the problem of secret cults, changes must thus occur both in the general society and within educational institutions.

General citizen education focused on the corrosive effects of secret cultism must occur. Mosques, churches, school administrators and society at large must fuse efforts to combat this evasive and chronic problem. It is both necessary and urgent that the Committee of Vice Chancellors of the Nigerian universities adopt a common and uniform approach to eradicating cultism. This must involve thoroughly investigating and finding root causes of the problem. It must also involve strengthening university administrative powers to eliminate the scourge from the campus.


The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) must be encouraged to channel their energies into virile student activism; the type of activism that encourages healthy intellectual debate on issues that affect students and society at large. It is also important that the government improve the funding of the education sector so that universities can return to their former glory as centres for critical debate and learning excellence. For all this to occur, the Nigerian government needs to structure an inquiry into the state of Nigerian tertiary education including a thorough and objective examination of funding, admissions policies and the general welfare of students and staff.

Finally, although this work has focused on cultism on university campuses, it must be noted that cult activities are also occasionally observed in polytechnics and colleges of education. It has even been reported that this scourge has extended to secondary schools. The significance of this study can be assessed in three ways: the Methodological, Educational and Theoretical significance. This study does not lay claim to any new methodology. Nevertheless, it seeks to extend our knowledge of the use of survey methods in research of this nature. It therefore re-affirms the continuous relevance of the questionnaire tool in eliciting useful data on cult related issues. This study will contribute to the existing body of literature on cultism in our universities. In this regard, the study will be of great importance to students of sociology, conflict studies and intelligence studies. This study will be very significant theoretically as it hopes to extend our knowledge and understanding of the political economy theory to encompass the causes and consequences of secret cultism in Nigerian Universities. The scope of this study is twofold: geographical coverage and contents. In terms of geography, the study addresses only the Niger Delta University in Bayelsa State and does not extend to any other tertiary institutions. In terms of content, the study covered only secret cult activities in tertiary institutions and not other cult activities like those in the streets or secondary schools. Likewise, the literature will be focused on issues related to university cults.

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