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CONTROL OF CULTISM AND THE SECURITY OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA: AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE OF AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

JIBANIYA SIMON AWUDU Ph.D.
Research Monitoring and Coordination Office, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, Nigeria.

Abstract

When cultism starts operating in Nigerian universities, it was seen as a peaceful club, but as time goes on, the activities of these clubs began to inject immoral behaviour in the institutions. Their activities and pattern of operation were gradually changing from peaceful pattern to conflicting pattern. Their patterns of operation began to raise several questions regarding their impacts on campus. But as Nigerian universities are still battling on how to control cultism on their campuses, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria over the years has not been risen any complain on the existence of cultism on her campus. This paper attempts a critical investigation on how Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria succeeded in controlling cultism on her campus for the purpose of strengthening her security. This paper argues that, quest for academic achievement, influence of peer groups, and quest for power and protection are some of the major reasons for students' involvement into cultism. Based on investigation, this paper found that Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria succeeded in controlling cultism on her campus by expelling of cultists from the institution, not readmitting cultists into the institution, ensuring severe punishment for the cultists, delegating more power to the university security, enhancement of the university security measures, among other measures. Based on the data presentation and analysis, the paper concludes that cultism does not presently exist in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and this is due to the various measures put in place by the university, especially the security measures.

Key Words: Cultism, Control, Security, University Community, Nigeria.

Introduction

The greatest and the most embarrassing problem threatening the security of tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is the renewal of the menace and aggressiveness of cult activities. Obviously, cultism is said to be the mother of crimes in tertiary institutions, and this phenomenon has negatively affected the image of our institutions, the learning quality and integrity of the grandaunts. According to Ogunade (2002), secret cult is an enclosed organised association of group devoted to the same cause. It is an enclosed group having an exclusive sacred ideology and series of rites cantering around their secret symbols. Cultic activities are sometimes laden with blood. It may be the blood of an animal or that of human beings. He claimed that during initiation rites or during rival group clashes within the University setting, blood flows during which many lives are lost in the process.

For some decades now, various efforts have been made to deal with the problem of cultism. Some of the measures include the enactment of Decree 47 of 1989 that pronounced a number of years jail term for any cultist found guilty. The Federal Republic of Nigeria under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000 issued a three month ultimatum to all Vice-Chancellors to eradicate cultism from campuses. Despite the various measures, the eradication becomes an uphill task. In fact, the eradication of secret cults from tertiary institutions has

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become unachievable goal in spite of the government commitment to clutch this societal ill from existence (Oyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2015, p.229).

When cultism starts operating in Nigerian universities, it was seen as a peaceful club, but as time goes on, the activities of these clubs began to inject immoral behaviour in the institutions. Their activities and pattern of operation were gradually changing from peaceful pattern to conflicting pattern. Their patterns of operation began to raise several questions regarding their impacts on campus.

As several cults continue to emerged, the university communities continue to experience different kinds of social vices such as murder, violence, riot, rape, among others which have great implication on the security of our universities. This drew the attention of Nigerian university system and the government on how to eradicate cultism on Nigerian campuses. In fact, eradication of cultism in our tertiary institutions has been of concern to the nation because of the increasing number of students that join cultism in tertiary institutions. Despite the various measures put in place by the universities and government, the eradication becomes an uphill task.

But as Nigerian universities are still battling on how to control cultism on their campuses, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria over the years has not been risen any complain on the existence of cultism on her campus. In other words, the issue of cultism in Ahmadu Bello University seems to become an old fashion, because there are no recent cases of cultism in the institution. The interesting thing here that deserves to be research on is how the university has succeeded in controlling cultism on her campus in order to strengthen the security architecture of the university community. It is therefore on this premise that this paper was written. The paper is divided into six sections, first is the introductory section, the second and third comprises conceptual framework and theoretical framework respectively. The fourth segment is on the methodological perspective, while the fifth section dwells on the Control of Cultism and the Security of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The final section of the paper concludes and recommends.

Conceptual Framework

Echekwube (1999), traces the origin of the term cultism to the Latin word "*cultus*" which means worship and is actually associated with the worship of one God or Supreme Being. The word 'cultism' originated from the Latin word 'Occukre' which denotes something hidden, occulted, concealed, enigmatical, mysterious, mystical, etc. Cultism can be seen as a system of religious or spiritual beliefs, mostly an informal and transient belief system regarded by others as misguided or extremist.

According to Ajayi (2015) cited in Oyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015, p.222), cultism is a ritual practice by a group of persons whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their mode of operations are done in secret and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike. Cultism can also be seen as a religious sect; generally considered to be extremist or false, with its followers often living in an unconventional manner under the guardians of authoritarian and charismatic leader.

According to Adoga (2017), broadly speaking, cultism has been defined in one of two ways: theologically and sociologically. While theological definitions focus on the group's belief system, specifically its deviation from orthodoxy, sociological definitions on the other hand focus on behavioural characteristics of the group. Theologically, cultism can be defined as a religious movement that grows out of and deviates doctrinally form a previously established faith; which means a group claiming to be members of a faith but which neglects or distorts to messages of that faith. Any religious movement, which holds on to a set of doctrinal beliefs that deviate from the generally accepted belief, qualifies as a cult. Sociologically, cultism can be defined as a group that breaks away from the conventional consensus to express very different views; real or imagined; possible or impossible; moral or immoral etc.

According to the Lexicon Webster Dictionary (1980) cited in Gwarjiko (2015), cultism or cult is a system of religious worship especially with reference to its rites or ceremonies; a sect adhering to a common ideology or doctrine especially when such adherence or devotion is based on fanatical beliefs or dogma; an instance of fixed, almost religious, veneration for a body of admirers.

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In order to broaden the concept, Kangiwa (2015), links the concept to social deviance and its relativity, which he sees as any behavior that fails to conform to the expectations of society. He also sees it as a departure from the norms and it occurs when an individual or group does not meet the standards of society.

On the other hand, scholars agree that security is a 'contested concept'. There is a consensus that it implies freedom from threats to core values (for both individuals and group) but there is a major disagreement about whether the main focus of enquiry should be on 'individual', 'national', or 'international' security (Baylis & Smith, 2001, p.300). Some security experts argued that the concept of security has always been associated with the safety and survival of the state and its citizens from harm or destruction or from dangerous threats. This conception generally holds that the state is the only institution with the primary responsibility and power for the safety of its territory and its people (Zabadi, 2005, p.3).

Security is often viewed in terms of the basic survival, welfare, and protection of the state existing in an international system characterized by self-help (Viotti & Kauppi, 2009, p.15). As Mbachu (2009), argues, security is all about national interest and involves "the sum total of actions and measures, including legislative and operational procedures, adopted to ensure peace, stability and the general well-being of a nation and its citizens."

Theoretical Framework

The socialisation theory, using the learning by imitation model of socialisation, is used as the theoretical framework for analysis. According to Eguavoen (2006), socialisation is the process through which cultural values, norms; behaviors and skills characteristics of a society are transmitted to its young and potential members. This is the principal means by which any society preserves its rich cultural heritage and achieves basic social conformity which are important means for ensuring their survival.

The imitation model of socialisation is one is which learners themselves learn roles, duties and other values by copying and approximating the expected standards of behavior of their peers, and most importantly of those they wish to be like-significant others (Eguavoen, 2006). These significant others could be celebrities, actors, actresses, individuals within the neighbourhood or community, political figures, etc. Analytically, learning and cultism can be carried out though the agencies of socialisation like the peer group and the school for example. The school, an agent of socialisation teaches the child or even young adults quite a lot of experiences through learning. Teachers, non-academic staff and other various arrangements within the school setting assist to socialise the individual. The school as an agent of socialisation has both formal and informal aspects.

The peer group as agent socialisation is very important is socialising the individual. It should be noted that it is not in all cases peer socialisation is beneficial. It can be dysfunctional, especially in cases where values that contradict those previously taught are being propagated-cultism. The decisive role peer group influence plays in instilling social values seems to be in consonance with the maxim, "show me your friends and I will tell you who you are". Indeed from observations and experiences, most people (ex-cultists) confessed that it was their peers (friends/roommates) that lured then to join secret cults (Echekwube, 1999).

Drawing on the above, learning in various educational institutions becomes important in the acquisition and utilisation of knowledge for the transformation of the individual and the society. Such learning can take place through the agent of socialisation – the school, whether formally or informally. Again, learning in such institutions can be impeded by cultism, which develops out of the process of socialisation. Cultism does not exist in a vacuum but comes about through the process of socialisation and the agents of socialisation. The origin of cultism in Nigeria is traced to the educational institution (University of Ibadan), which is a social institution and an agent of socialisation through the peer group which is also an agent of socialisation. All these come as a result of learning by imitation.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the social institution *vis-à-vis* socialisation plays a vital role in the society. So learning and cultism as a process of socialisation to a great extent have impact on the individual, the social institution(s) and the society at large.

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Methodological Perspective

Population of the Study

The population for this study comprise of the staff and students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. According to the ABU Zaria population update, the university has a student population of 35,000, 1,400 staff and 5,000 supporting staff (www.abu.edu.ng, 2023). Summing the numbers together, the total population of this study is 41,400.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample is a small group obtained from an accessible population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). In determining the questionnaire sample size, the Taro Yamane's formula of sampling is used. Therefore, a sample of three hundred and ninety-six (396) respondents was drawn. The Yamane's formula calculation that made us arrive at 396 is given below:

Yamane's Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n = the sample size
N = the size of population
e = level of significance.
N = 41,400
e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{41,400}{1+41,400(0.05)^2} \qquad \frac{n = 41,400}{1+103.5} \qquad \frac{n = 41,400}{104.5} \quad n = 396$$

In respect to the sampling technique, the simple random technique was employed in distributing the questionnaire.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The data generated through questionnaire were analysed using certain procedure. Descriptive method of analysis was used to analyse the collated data; through which statistical tools such as frequency distribution table and percentage were used.

Control of Cultism and the Security of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

This section of the paper focuses on the presentation and analysis of the data collated from the field. A total of three hundred and ninety-six (396) questionnaires were administered, out of which three hundred and seventy-two (372) were retrieved, presented and analysed.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

S/No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Male	207	55.6
2	Female	165	44.4
	Total	**372**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table indicates that, 207 of the respondents representing 55.6% are males, while 165 representing 44.4% are females. The result shows that most of the respondents are males. More males are sampled because they are the ones that were more ready to be sampled and also returned most of the collected questionnaires.

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Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

S/No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	18-25	94	25.3
2	26-30	84	22.6
3	31-35	60	16.1
4	36-40	82	22.0
5	41 and above	52	14.0
	Total	**372**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table shows that 94 of the respondents representing 25.3% are between the age of 18-25, 84 representing 22.6% are between the age of 26-30, 60 representing 16.1% are between the age of 31-35, 82 representing 22.0% are between the age of 36-40, and 52 of the respondents representing 14.0% fall between the age of 41 and above. From the foregoing, it is obvious that most of the respondents fall between the ages of 18-25, follow by 26-30. This so because these categories constitute the set of students we have in the school.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Status

S/No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Academic Staff	54	14.5
2	Non-Academic Staff	40	10.8
3	University Security	36	9.7
4	Student	242	65.0
	Total	**372**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table indicates that 54 of the respondents representing 14.5% are academic staff, 40 representing 10.8% are non-academic staff, 36 representing 9.7% are university security, and 242 representing 65.0% students. This reveals that majority of the respondents are students. The students are the majority because they are most populated on the campus, and they are the ones mostly involved in cultism.

Table 4: Whether cultism exists in many Nigerian universities

S/No.	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	235	63.2
2	No	137	36.8
	Total	**372**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table reveals that 235 of the respondents representing 63.2% agreed that there is cultism in many Nigerian universities, while 137 representing 36.8% disagreed. From the responses of the respondents, it is very clear that majority of the respondents agreed that there is cultism in many Nigerian universities. However, from the foregoing, it can be established that there is cultism in many Nigerian universities.

Table 5: Reasons for students' involvement into cultism in Nigerian Universities

S/No.	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Quest for academic achievement	116	31.2
2	Influence of peer groups	63	16.9
3	Lack of parental guidance	32	8.6

4	Quest for power and protection	140	37.6
5	Others	21	5.7
	Total	**372**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table reveals that 116 of the respondents representing 31.2% are of the opinion that the reason why students involve into cultism in Nigerian universities is quest for academic achievement, 63 representing 16.9% said it is influence of peer groups, 32 representing 8.6% said it is lack of parental guidance, 140 representing 37.6 said it is quest for power and protection, and 21 representing 5.7% are of other opinions.
From the responses of the respondents, it is very clear that majority of the respondents agreed that quest for power and protection and quest for academic achievement are the major reasons for students' involvement into cultism in Nigerian universities. This study therefore align with this result.

Table 6: Whether there is a significant relationship between cultism and social vises on campus

S/No.	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	351	94.4
2	No	21	5.6
	Total	**372**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table indicates that 351 of the respondents representing 94.4% agreed that there is a significant relationship between cultism and social vises on campus, while on the contrary, 21 representing 5.6% disagreed.
From the responses generated from the respondents, majority of the respondents agreed that there is a significant relationship between cultism and social vises on campus. However, from the foregoing, it can be established that there is a significant relationship between cultism and social vises on campus.

Table 7: Whether there have been cases of cultism in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

S/No.	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	224	60.2
2	No	148	39.8
	Total	**372**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table reveals that 224 of the respondents representing 60.2% agreed that there have been cases of cultism in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, while on the other hand, 148 representing 39.8% disagreed.
From the responses of the respondents, majority of them agreed that there have been cases of cultism in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. From this, it can now be deduced that there have been cases of cultism in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Table 8: Whether there are ongoing cultist activities in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

S/No.	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	43	11.6
2	No	329	88.4
	Total	**372**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table shows that 43 of the respondents representing 11.6% agreed that there are ongoing cultist activities in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, while 329 representing 88.4% disagreed.

From the responses above, majority of the respondents strongly disagreed that there are ongoing cultist activities in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. From the foregoing, it is obvious that there are no ongoing cultist activities in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Table 9: Strategies used in controlling cultism in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

S/No.	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Expelling of cultists from the institution	105	28.2
2	Not readmitting cultists into the institution	63	16.9
3	Ensuring severe punishment for the cultists	32	8.6
4	Delegating more powers to the university security	95	25.5
5	Enhancement of the university security measures	69	18.6
6	Others	8	2.2
	Total	**372**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The above table indicates that 105 of the respondents representing 28.2% are of the view that expelling of cultists from the institution is the strategies used in controlling cultism in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. 63 representing 16.9% said it is by not readmitting cultists into the institution, 32 representing 8.6% said it is by ensuring severe punishment for the cultists, and 95 representing 25.5% said it is by delegating more powers to the university security. Furthermore, 69 representing 18.6% said it is through the enhancement of the university security measures, and lastly 8 representing 2.2% are of other opinions.
Based on the above result, it is clear that diverse strategies are used in controlling cultism in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, but the major ones are the expelling of cultists from the institution, and delegating of more powers to the university security.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The greatest and the most embarrassing problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is the renewal of the menace and aggressiveness of cult activities. Obviously, cultism is said to be the mother of crimes in tertiary institutions, and this phenomenon has negatively affected the image of our institutions, the learning quality, integrity of the grandaunts, as well as the security of our university communities.
As Nigerian universities were and are still battling with the issue of cultism, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria being one of the oldest universities in the country also recorded some cases of cultism before now. However, this paper found that Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria succeeded in controlling cultism on her campus by expelling of cultists from the institution, not readmitting cultists into the institution, ensuring severe punishment for the cultists, delegating more power to the university security, enhancement of the university security measures, among other measures. Based on the findings derived from the analysis, the paper concludes that cultism does not presently exist in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and this is due to the various measures put in place by the university, especially the security measures.
After a careful investigation of the subject matter, and coming up with the above findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made regarding what could be done to curb cultism in Nigerian university communities:

i. A comprehensive orientation should be organised for all the new students expressing the various recruitment strategies and negative effects of the cultism on campus.
ii. Any academic or non-academic staff found to be cultic should be dismissed from service. This will serve deterrence to other university staff.
iii. The legislators should sponsor bills that will specify the mode of punishment to be meted out to cultist in our institutions. This will empower the security agents to make arrest and prosecute while the judiciary adjudicates without delay.

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iv. Parents should indulge in counselling, follow-up of their academic/social lives, associate and partner with the school for the correct of any negative trait in the children.

v. Finally, other Nigerian tertiary institutions should inculcate the measures adopted by Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in controlling cultism. This will go a long way in eliminating cultism completely from Nigerian campuses, as well as strengthening the security our institutions.

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APPENDIX I
QUESTIONNAIRE
SECTION A: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Gender: (a) Male [ ] (b) Female [ ]
2. Age: (a) 18-25 [ ] (b) 26-30 [ ] (c) 31-35 [ ] (d) 36-40 [ ] (e) 41 and above [ ]
3. Status: (a) Academic Staff [ ] (b) Non-Academic Staff [ ] (c) University Security [ ] (d) Student [ ]

SECTION B: CONTROL OF CULTISM AND THE AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

4. Does cultism exist in many Nigerian universities?
   (a) Yes [ ] (b) No [ ]
5. What are the reasons for students' involvement into cultism?
   (a) Quest for academic achievement [ ] (b) Influence of peer groups [ ]
   (c) Lack of parental guidance [ ] (d) Quest for power and protection [ ]
   (e) Others, specify _____
6. Is there any significant relationship between cultism and social vises on campus?
   (a) Yes [ ] (b) No [ ]
7. Have there been cases of cultism in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?
   (a) Yes [ ] (b) No [ ]
8. Are there ongoing cultist activities in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?
   (a) Yes [ ] (b) No [ ]
9. What are the strategies used in controlling cultism in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?
   (a) Expelling of cultists from the institution [ ]
   (b) Not readmitting cultists into the institution [ ]
   (c) Ensuring severe punishment for the cultists [ ]
   (d) Delegating more powers to the university security [ ]
   (e) Enhancement of the university security measures [ ]
   (f) Others, specify _____
10. What should be done to curb cultism in Nigerian university communities?
    (i)_____
    (ii)_____
    (iii)_____
    (iv)_____

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