

An Assessment of Black Axe Confraternity Cult in Nigeria: Its Impact on the University Educational System

AMINU ZUBAIRU SURAJO[†] & A. H. M. ZEHADUL KARIM[‡]

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science,
International Islamic University Malaysia,
Gombak 53100, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
E-mail: aminuzubairus@gmail.com*

KEYWORDS: Black Axe Confraternity cult. Oath of secrecy. Initiations. University campus. Benin. Nigeria.

ABSTRACT: The thesis focuses attention on the activities of Black Axe Confraternity cult in major Nigerian university campuses. The cult group brings about lack of peace and stability in the campus as a result of incessant violence with the rival cult groups. The activities of Black Axe Confraternity cult started at the University of Benin and spread to various universities. The Black Axe cult members also involves in armed robbery, drug trafficking, kidnapping, election rigging and other political malpractice. Every year newly recruited members were initiated into the cult group and they swear with the oath of secrecy. From that day, they give their allegiance to their leaders. The impacts of Black Axe Confraternity cult includes interruption of the academic calendar, lack of peace of minds, insecurity and uncertainty among students, death and injury of many members including the innocent students, destruction of the university properties, involvement of election violence and civil disobedience. The solutions to the problems of Black Axe Confraternity cult group in Nigerian university campuses comprises of public enlightenment campaign on the negative effect of cultism, moral reorientation, discouraging politicians from assisting the cult member financially, admission based on merit and expulsion of students involved in campus cult violence. The parents, society, government and the religious organizations have greater role to play in bringing an end to the problem which affects the university educational system in Nigerian.

INTRODUCTION

The Neo Black Movement of Africa (NBM) or popularly known as the Black Axe Confraternity cult was founded at the University of Benin, Nigeria in 1977, as one of the university campus cult group. It was initiated by a group of nine undergraduate students under the leadership of Nicholas Idemudia (alias IbnGodidi the Saddest), he was worried about the predicament of the Black Man. The Black Axe

Confraternity emerged as a reaction to the observed extremes by the Pyrates confraternity cult. Considering the Black Panthers cult as a direction, the Black Axe Confraternity cult uses Blackism, confrontational and action-oriented as the suitable ideology of the cult group. The Black Axe Confraternity checkmates the activities of Pyrate confraternity (one of its key enemies) on the campus and to participate in the fortification of the black man (Adewale, 2005).

The graduated members of the Black Axe Confraternity cult (popularly known as “the Lord”)

[†] Research Scholar, corresponding author

[‡] Professor

removed the operation of the cult group from the university campuses in 1994 due to the increase in violence between the Black Axe cult group and other rival groups on the campuses of southern Nigerian universities. The name of the Black Axe Confraternity cult was later changed by the Lords (ex-cult members) in the name of Neo Black Movement of Africa, which emerged and become active in many Nigerian universities in the late 1980s (Ajayi, 2010).

The objectives of the Black Axe Confraternity comprise of engaging in research on traditional African religions, forwarding all attentions towards Black Realism and Determinism in addition to

stopping bad images of Black populaces, directing people discipline of the mind and body as well as public action of a regular magazine of the cult group named *Uhuru* (Ajayi, 2010).

The Black Axe Confraternity existed in the University of Benin campuses almost two decades ago. They were accused of masterminding violent crises which erupted at the University of Benin and other universities in southern Nigeria in addition to kidnapping, drug trafficking, hired killing, involved in election rigging and other political aggressiveness in Edo state and other south-south and south-eastern states of Nigeria (Adewale, 2005).



Figure 1: Black Axe Confraternity cult members

(Source: <https://najuju.wordpress.com/2013/10/27/a-neo-black-movement-dictionary/comment-page-8/>)

Objectives of the Study: (i) To assess the activities of Black Axe Confraternity cult on the campuses of Nigerian university; (ii) to examine the initiation and the oath of secrecy of the Black Axe Confraternity cult group; (iii) to analyse the impacts of Black Axe cult activities in Nigerian university campuses; and (iv) to offer solutions to the problem of Black Axe cult activities in Nigeria Universities.

METHODOLOGY

The secondary sources were used to collect the data, such as journal articles, newspapers, bulletins,

books and other university library archives. Other sources were collected from the University of Benin library collections, the National University Commission (NUC) documentations as well as police reports on violent activities of the Black Axe Confraternity cults in various universities in the country.

TREND OF BLACK AXE CONFRATERNITY CULT

Many Nigerian newspapers' reports indicated series of shooting and killing happening in and outside

the university campuses are attributed to the Black Axe Cult group. The murder of students at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in 1999 encouraged former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo to give the university authority an ultimatum of six months to bring a lasting solution to the problem of cult groups. The Black Axe has been associated with terrible inter-confraternity conflict for number of years in many universities (Fasanmi, 2006). According to Offiong (2003) Majority of Black Axe Confraternity cult members came from the two dominant tribes in Southern Nigeria namely Yoruba and Igbo. And apart from the University of Benin,

which is its birthplace, Black Axe Confraternity cult occupied and became active in universities like Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, and University of Nigeria Nsukka etc.

The symbol of the Black Axe cult group (Figure 2a) is an upright axe with a wide blade fixed to a short handle, and its motto is “Aye! Axemen”. The violent confrontation has become the official policy of the cult group. Each individual member in the cult group is called the “Axe-neb” or the “butcher” and the ambition of each cult member is his readiness to incite violence on the campus.

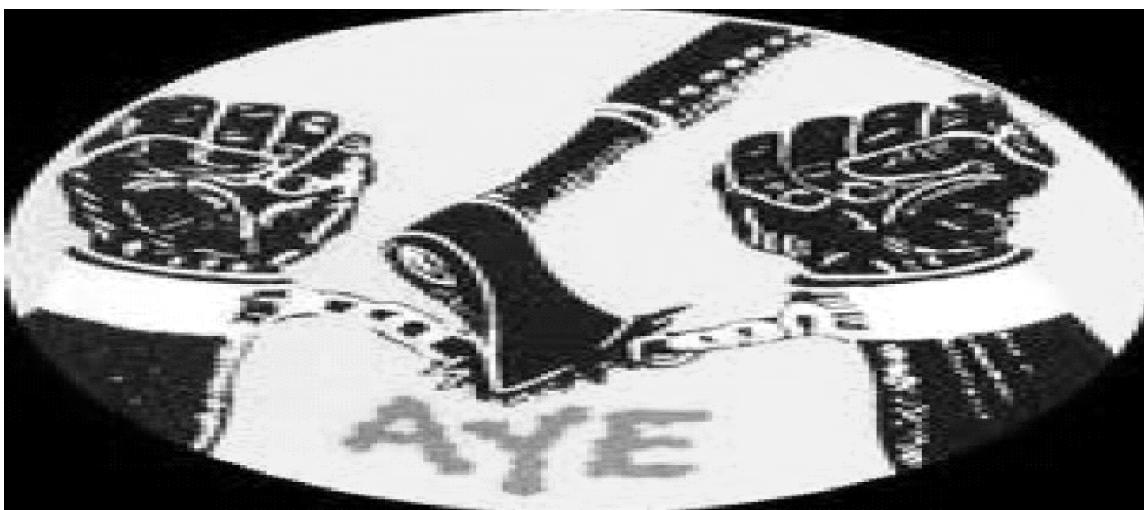


Figure 2a: The symbol of Black Axe cult group

Source: <https://najuju.wordpress.com/2013/10/27/a-neo-black-movement-dictionary/comment-page-8/>

The Black Axe confraternity cult experienced changes of name, from Black Baraccansto Brotherhood of the Baraccans, then to Black Axe confraternity, and afterward changed to Neo Black Movement of Africa (NBM) (Fasanmi, 2006).

The axe becomes the new symbol of Neo Black Movement of Africa. The cult members' attire comprises of white shirts, black trousers, yellow tie and a cap with yellow ribbon. The white connotes harmony and cleanliness of the body and minds; black indicates sympathy with the black race and their self-esteem and the yellow colour signifies members' intelligence (Ibeh, 2005).

INITIATION CEREMONY

The initiation ceremony, popularly called by the cult members as “Blending” took place outside the campus of the universities occupied by the Black Axe Confraternity cult. The gathering of the newly recruits for the initiation ceremony is nicknamed “Jolly or Jollification”. This is in order for the members among undergraduate students to familiar with the activities of the cult group. Offiong (2003) states that the original aim of the Black Axe cult group was to endorse consciousness of the Blackman, fight for their freedom against neo-colonialism and uphold their human dignity. These aims of early Black Axe cult



Figure 2b: The new symbol of the Black Axe cult known as Neo Black Movement of Africa

Source: <https://najuju.wordpress.com/2013/10/27/a-neo-black-movement-dictionary/comment-page-8>

members are degraded into selfish and egocentric behaviour that is disreputably and ferociously violent. He maintains that violence has turned out to be the cult's formal policy. During the initiation ceremonies, newly recruited members undergo different tedious task that consists of bodily exercise and stamina test in the name of the "FM or Football Match" for every cult member. This involves flogging of cult members, cutting part of their body, drinking human blood and other concoctions, paying allegiance to the deities sanctified by the group. During the ceremony, members go around the bonfire prepared in the bush for several times, while reciting some incantations and other invocations only known to the cult members. Most of their initiation ceremony took place at night and in a secret place without the public knowledge (Jekayinkfa, 2008).

Oath of Secrecy

The newly recruited cult members swear with the oath of secrecy binding to all members. They promised to themselves never to reveal their secret to non-members, never to go against the cult groups' rules and regulations as well as giving total obedience to the cult leaders. This is very significant to the cult members and their activities (Ogidefa, 2008).

Violent Activities

The Black Axe Confraternity and other cult groups in the campus are intensely involved in political malpractice and civil disobedience. The Nigerian society underwent direct huge election rigging, hooliganism and viciousness. The emergence of democracy in Nigeria similarly produced the uppermost trend of violence between politicians at local, state and federal level. A small number of these politicians have enclosed themselves with an illegal bunch of criminals together with dishonest law enforcement agents, who are eager to do as they wish because of Money. The Nigerian police and other security agents have received a bad reputation as one of the government organizations that is extremely corrupt and controlled by untruthful officers who use their positions to unlawfully assist the negative activities of some political figures in the country. Furthermore, a small number of Nigerian politicians and student cult's members have been linked together with violent activities in Nigeria. For more than twenty years, these cult members have succeeded because of the assistance from the influential politicians in Nigeria, predominantly state governors and the senators who are using them as a political tool to settle down political scores (Omoegun and Akanle, 2007).

The federal ministry of education in conjunction with the National University Commission (NUC) highlighted that there has been an increase of cult related violence in many Nigerian Universities. Majority of these violence erupted between the Black Axe Confraternity cult and other rival cult groups on the campus (Ogunbameru, '97). The following Nigerian Newspapers' reports have indicated the extent of violence in major southern Nigerian universities:

On the 7th of May 2009, the *DailyTrust* newspaper, informed a violent confrontation between the Black Axe Confraternity members and the members of Vikings cult which lead to death and injuries of many students at the University of Abuja. While on 15th March, 2010, also *This Day* newspaper reported that the bloody clash broke out between the Black Axe cults with the Markvites cult that lead to the death of nine cult members. Similarly, in the same year on 22nd October, the *Vanguard* Newspaper informed that a deadly clash exploded between the Black Axe cult and the Maphites confraternity cult in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, where seven cult members were killed and several others injured including the innocent students.

Similarly, on the 27th of October 2011, The *Leadership* newspaper stated the disturbing rate of the activities of the Black Axe Confraternity cult at Delta State University. Consequently, the Black Axe Confraternity conflict with the other rival cult occurs almost every day at the university. For example, on the 11th of August 2011, the *Vanguard* Newspaper stated that the cult group clash with the Mafia cult group lead to the death of some students at the university (Ogunsanya, 2012).

Moreover, violent confrontations occurred on several occasions between the Black Axe Confraternity cult and its major rival cult group known as the Eiye Confraternity cult group for instance on 12th March 2009, *This Day* newspaper reported that a group of cultist suspected to be members of the Black Axe cult kidnapped the Son of the Ovia local government council in Edo state. The boy was free in exchange for payment of large sums of money, while on 26th May 2011, the *Vanguard* newspaper reported that eighteen people were killed in cult related violence between the Black Axe cult and the Eiye Confraternity cult at the University of Benin. Likewise, on 7th August, 2012 pm, newspaper reported that conflict erupted between the Black Axe cult members with that of the Vikings Confraternity cult at Ambrose Alli

University, Ekpoma, where two cult members were murdered in cold blood (Opaluwah, 2009).

In the same way, on 7th July 2011, the *Daily Trust* newspapers reported that because of rival cult conflict between the Black Axe cult and the Aiye Confraternity at the Ekiti State University, thirteen students were injured, correspondingly, on 19th March 2012, the *Vanguard* newspaper reported a bloody cult war between the Black Axe cult and the Aiye Confraternity at Ijanikin and Ikorodu area of Lagos State (Ogunbameru, 2004). Correspondingly, on 17th June 2013, the *Vanguard* newspaper stated that at least twenty people, including cult members in different parts of Benin City following the incessant cult war between the Black Axe cult and the Aiye Confraternity.

THE IMPACTS OF BLACK AXE UNDERTAKINGS TO THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The activities of Black Axe Confraternity cult seriously affected the university educational system in Nigeria. Many Nigerian universities, especially the southern universities are seriously affected with the cult violence. Some of the impacts are as follows:

Interruption of academic calendar: The academic calendar of the university in the country was interrupted because of the incessant violence between the Black Axe cult and other rival cult groups on the campus and even outside the campus. These violent activities have strongly affected the development of higher education in the country. The academic activities, most of the times were stopped or suspended and consequently, this affected all categories of students. Therefore, the university authority extends the academic calendar for some months or even a year. This brings about frustration to the innocent students.

Life threatening condition: Violent confrontations between Black Axe Confraternity cult and its rival cult groups on the campuses lead to the destruction of lives and university properties worth millions of Naira (Nigerian currency). Many cult members, including innocent students were killed. The clash erupts unnoticed and this can lead to a full-scale combat, which can, consequently, spread outside the campus. The cult members wherever they are, have no peace of minds and live a life of insecurity and uncertainty. They can be attacked any time, any

moment and at any place. This condition did not allow them to fully concentrate on their studies.

Living in bondage: Majority of cult members are living in bondage due to lack of freedom. Since the time, they swear with the oath of secrecy during their initiation ceremonies, they have already surrendered their rights to the cult organization. They are completely loyal to the cult leaders. This indicated that cult members have no control over their lives; they are under the command of their cult authority at all times; to tell them the next line of action. Any attempt to disobey their leaders, the members would pay the consequences. The education of the cult member is undermined, since they are not attending lectures and examinations, which lead to their complete failure and their subsequent withdrawal from the university.

Students' Expulsion: Majority of cult members were dismissed from the university due to poor performance and examination malpractice. Those that were dismissed automatically become dropouts. They may likely join the group of criminals such as armed robbers, kidnapers or group of paid hired killers all with the aim of earning a living. Some of them retaliate by attacking the lecturers who failed them in the exam or the students who exposes them on their malpractice or illegal activities. They use sophisticated weapons to carry out their mission such as guns, pistols, axes, machetes or concentrated acids.

SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF BLACK AXE CULT ACTIVITIES IN THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

To effectively fight the problem of campus cults, overall education on the effects of cultism must be put in place by all agencies of education. Therefore, religious institutions such as mosques, churches, parents, school, administrators, government and society in general must join hands together to fight cultism in Nigerian universities.

Parents should cease to be members of community cults, if they belong to any and they should also dishearten their children from becoming members. Similarly, parents should demonstrate good examples by inculcating fear of God and moral discipline to their children. Nevertheless, parents

should as a matter of urgency involve in providing counseling for their children, and find out whom they are associating with? How did they go about their academic and social lives in the campus?

The admission into the university should be based on merit academically and morally wise. Although an appropriate attention must be inaugurated to tackle welfare and academic needs of the students. In the same way, a complete orientation must be organized by the university authority for all the newly admitted students by emphasizing the negative effects of cultism on the campus. Henceforth, the university authority should ensure that any staff found involved in cultism or assisting cult members in any way should deal with appropriately. The university security should be properly funded, trained and equipped in order to combat cultism in the university campus.

The government has an important role to play in fighting cultism in the university campuses. Political leaders should provide leadership by example so that their followers should imitate. They should learn to limit their desire for material gain and put the interest of Nigeria above their egoistic interest. Similarly, the government should evade metaphorical policies and try to formulate practical policies intended to decrease the rate of unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and corruption in the country. In addition to that, government should strictly enforce decree number 47 of 1989, to curtail the menace of campus cultism.

The religious organisation also has an important role to play, especially in the fight against crime and occultist behaviour. Moral reorientation and preaching on the menace of campus cultism should be vigorously initiated and enforced in all the university campuses. In the same direction, society is a place where children raised up at home, trained in the school and lastly culminate in a complex society. The society plays an important role in crime reduction by largely bestowing self-esteem and reverence to hard labour, trustworthiness and moral conduct instead of loving money. Likewise, political leaders must fear God always, particularly in the acquisition of money and material wealth to the disadvantage of the masses.

CONCLUSION

Cultism is a most important social evil that swallows the Nigerian tertiary institutions of higher

learning. Violent confrontations between the Black Axe cult group and other rival cult members became very difficult to eliminate cultism in the society. Nevertheless, steps can be adopted to considerably decrease the harmful effects of cults in the Nigerian universities and the society in general. The abolition of campus Black Axe Confraternity cult and their rival cult groups in the university campuses requires the participation of the generality of the populace and every element of social structure in Nigerian society. The plan of social control must be emphasized in the home, school, religious organisations, government and the society in order to bring lasting solutions to the problem.

REFERENCES CITED

- Adewale, R. 2005. Violence in the citadel: The menace of secrete cult in the Nigerian universities. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 14 (1):79-98.
- Ajayi, I. A. *et al.* 2010. Menace of cultism in Nigeria tertiary institution: The way out. Isaacabiodun@yahoo.com. Haastrupt2006@yahoo.com (Retrieved 16/02/2015).
- Daily Independent* (Lagos), 1 August 2011. Emmanuel Nzomiwuand Femi Ogbonnikan. "Ten Die, Houses Razed in Enugu Tanker Explosion." (Factiva).
- Daily Independent* (Lagos), 18 March 2010. Wisdom Patrick, Onoja Auduand Segun Adeleye. "Thirteen Killed in Fresh Jos Violence-Cult Clash Claims Sixin Sagamu." (Factiva).
- Daily Independent* (Lagos), 27August 2012. Anolu Vincent and Basseyy Inyang."Gunmen Kill Ex-CBN Director, Nwosu, in Owerri." <<http://dailyindependentnig.com/2012/08/gunmen-kill-ex-cbn-director-nwosu-in-owerr/>> (Accessed 26 Nov. 2012).
- Daily Trust* (Abuja), 20 September 2011. Hir Joseph. "State Security Services Raid Cultists Hideouts, Arrests 28 Suspects". (Factiva).
- Daily Trust* (Abuja), 3 May 2012. Nurudeen Oyewole. "21Cult Groups Infiltrate Secondary Schools.'" (Factiva).
- Daily Trust* (Abuja), 7 July 2011. Doyin Adebusi. "Pandemoniumat Ekiti Varsityas Cultits Exchange Gunfire." (Factiva).
- Daily Trust* (Abuja), 7 May 2009. Abubakar Sadiq Isah. "Uniabuja Expels Five Over Cult Activities." (Factiva).
- Fasanmi, J. I. 2006. Management of cultism in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. In: A. A. Owoseni, W. B. Ajayi, S. Ajiboye, B. O. Omoyajowo (eds.), *A Book of Readings on Cultism and Its Attendant Effects on Nigerian Institutions of Higher Learning*, pp. 115-123. A Publication of the College of Education: Ikere-Ekiti.
- Human Rights Watch*, October 2007. Criminal Politics, Violence, "Godfathers" and Corruption in Nigeria. <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/nigeria1007webwcover_0.pdf> (Accessed 25 Sept. 2012).
- Ibeh, A. E. 2005. The psycho-sociological imperatives of cultism in Nigeria institutions of higher learning. *Being a paper presented at a seminar in Cultism and its Effects on Nigeria Institutions of Higher Learning, November 23 and 24, 2005.*
- Jekayinka, A. 2008. Cult Activities in the Nigerian Institutions of Higher Learning. *File: /E/Co/Cult Activities in the Nigerian Institutions of Higher Learning.* (Accessed 13/2/2015).
- Leadership* (Abuja), 21 February 2011. Kola Niyi-Eke."Cultists Kill Pregnant Women, 6 Others." (Factiva).
- Leadership* (Abuja), 27 July 2012. Patrick Ochoga. "Six Feared Killed in Renewed Cult Warin Edo." (Factiva).
- Leadership* (Abuja), 27 October 2011. Kola Niyi-Eke. "Battling Cultism inDelta."(Factiva).
- Leadership* (Abuja), 7 July 2011. Abiola Alo. "Suspected Cultists Terrorise Ekiti Varsity." (Factiva).
- Offiong, D. A. 2003. *Secret Cults in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions*. Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd.: Enugu, Nigeria.
- Ogidefa, I. 2008. Cultism in educational institutions in Nigeria: Causes, possible solutions and counselling implications. www.devifinder.com (Retrieved on 19/02/2010).
- Ogunbameru, O. A. 2004. Personality dimensions to cultism in Nigeria tertiary institutions: A socio-biological perspective. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 16 (2):91-98.
- Ogunbameru, O. A. 1997. The sociology of campus secret cult. In: Ogunbameru (ed.), *Reading on Campus Secret Cults*. Ile-Ife Publishing House.
- Ogunsanya, 2012. Impact of campus secret cult organizations on university administrator. A case study of university of Ibadan, Nigeria. In: LebeanYann and Ogwanya Mobolaji, *The Dilemma of Post-Colonial Universities* (eds.), pp. 75-92. Ibadan IFRA and African Book Builders.
- Okwu, O. J. 2006. A critique of students' vices and the effect on quality of graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 12 (3):193-198.
- Omoegun, M and F. F. Akanle 2007. Perceived causes and effects of cultism in Nigerian universities: Prevention and solution with counselling implications. *Journal of Sociology and Education in Africa*, 6 (1):79-97.
- Opaluwah, A. B. 2009. Cultism and Nigerian campuses: The way out. <http://www.gamji.com/article4000/> News 4512: htm (Retrieved on February 20, 2009).
- The Guardian* (Lagos), 27 July 2012. Alemma-Ozioruva Aliuand Michael Egbejule. "Six Diein Cult Violence." <http://www.guardiannewsngr.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=93611:six-die-in-edo-cult-violence-&catid=1:national&Itemid=559> (Accessed 23 Nov. 2012).
- The Guardian* (Lagos), 30 December 2009. "Nigerian Police Arrest Thirty Suspects Over Recent Violent Clashes." (Factiva).
- The Nation* (Lagos), 29 July 2011. Titilayo Banjoko. "Three Killed in Cult's Clash." <<http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/news/13982-three-killed-in-cults%E2%80%99-clash.html>> (Accessed 26 Nov. 2012).

