

Full Length Research Paper

Praetorians and school climate in Lagos-based higher schools

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This investigation views insecurity in tertiary institutions as a product of the socialization process. Following Truman's exposition, it therefore uses the group theory as the basis for analyzing issues of safety in some higher schools in Lagos State. It identifies the armed group, revealing the fact that there are many variants. It argues that like all other organizations in the larger society, the group sets out to attain four functions necessary for organizational effectiveness and survival. These are goal achievement, integration, adaptation and latency. The methods adopted for the study are basically the use of questionnaire, observation and interview of students, former students and some members of staff of some selected tertiary institutions in Lagos State, as well as some people outside the school system. Some of the inhibitions such as inadequate funding, fear of being attacked and issue of godfathers, among many others, are chronicled and palpable panacea proffered before reaching the conclusion that, a bit of military involvement is the veritable desideratum to ensure safety of lives in Nigerian tertiary schools.

Key words: Military, effectiveness, integration, adaptation and latency.

INTRODUCTION

Combating crime has been an onerous task for the Nigerian police whose preoccupations are not only the prevention, detection and prosecution of crimes and criminals, but also, as explained by Tamuno (1970) and Odekunle (1980), the maintenance of law and order. As the police battle with crimes in the polity, the security operatives in tertiary schools contend with the assignment of reducing violence and theft, but while the police are trained in the use of batons and guns to subdue criminals, the batons remain the only weapon for the security officers. Indeed, this violence is universal (McMahon, 2000).

However, the purposes of this study are to examine the concepts of praetorians and climate, discuss how school praetorians have been effective in relation to four organizational functions, statistically test the relationship between praetorian behaviour and school environment, unfold the predisposing factors for cultism, unravel their effects on school climate, highlight the problems encountered to eradicate cultism and proffer possible antidotes before reaching some conclusion.

Concept of praetorians

Praetorians were a bunch of bodyguards in Ancient Rome. They were first established by Emperor Augustus with the goal of protecting himself against assassins. The name etymologically has its roots in the title: praetor-a commander or a general; and the tent of the general was known as the praetorium. The private cohort of guards maintained by the praetor to protect him and his tent were called the Cohors Praetoria.

Thus, the concept of 'praetorian' evolved from the Latin words, Cohors Praetoria, which means the household troops of the Roman Emperors. Historically, the Roman imperial guards, since the era of Augustus, underwent stages of transformation. As documented by Encyclopedia Britannica (2003), the Cohors Praetoria existed by the 2nd century BC as the bodyguards for Roman generals. Emperor Augustus established a permanent corps comprising nine cohorts in 27BC, strategically positioning them all over Rome. Two equestrian prefects were, however, appointed to command

them. But in 23AD, Tiberius powerful prefect, Sejanus, emerged the sole commander. He then stationed them in fortified barracks at the outskirts of Rome. This enhanced their political influence. Thus, they subsequently partook in the appointment of emperors. Prominent roles were played by the praetorians in the ascension of Claudius in 41AD, the crises of 68/69AD, the lynching of Domitian's killers in 97AD and in the murders of Pertinax, as well as played a major role in the ousting or assassination of Didius Julianus, in 193AD, Elagabalus in 222AD and Balbinus and Maximus in 238AD. Septimius Severus reorganized the guards, recruiting their members from the legions. They were, however, scrapped by Constantine I in 312 AD. Besides, the Roman imperial guard stood as a classic example of the rule of soldiers.

Therefore, praetorians are precursors of the military. However, the former is preferred here because of its notoriety. The praetorians, here, are the violent cult gangs in tertiary schools. Much as the military in praetorian societies dominate politics, the cult gangs influence and shape the school climate.

Therefore, there are many groups within the Nigerian tertiary institutions in Lagos, such as the violent-prone group of students and the non-violent type. The intention here is to label the former praetorians and the latter non-praetorians. There is also intra-group conflict. The concern here is about the praetorian group, which has many variants such as EIYE CONFRATERNITY, BUCCANEERS, VIKINGS, PYRATE CONFRATERNITY, THE NEO-BLACK MOVEMENT OF AFRICA also known as BLACK AXE, THE DAUGHTERS OF JEZEBEL, THE TROJAN HORSE, THE KKK and THE MAFIA, among many others.

It is also the contention here that, this variety of praetorians is a product of the contact students have with foreign cultures during the socialization process (Parson, 1960; Doye, 1996). This is because long before the creation of the first cult gang in this country; there had been cult associations in the United States. For instance, there have been since the 19th century, campus cults such as Phi Beta Kappa, which blazed the trail in 1776, Kappa Alpha Society and Ku Klux Klan (KKK). These, as argued by Odili (2004) and Babawale (2006), are some of the oldest in the United States. To Babawale (2006) campus secret cults evolved from fraternities. In his apt words: These fraternities first made their appearance in Europe during the middle ages. They grew out of the guild system, which was established by craftsmen and merchants. This idea later gained prominence in Medieval universities in Europe. Ever since this period, we have had a proliferation of fraternities in European and American universities....

Another influencing factor is the traditional secret cult in the larger society. The socialization process has exposed the students to the cult activities as practiced for instance, by the Ogboni Confraternity, whether traditional or reformed. They may not be familiar with the nitty-gritty of it, but the fact that it is shrouded in mysticism is

enough reason for them to emulate it. The students' admission into higher institutions is only an avenue to develop the experiences they have observed or heard or read about in books and journals. However, as Odili (2004) observed, while the secret societies in the larger society do not openly display acts of violence, their campus counterpart makes violence their watchword. This violence involving the use of such weapons as guns and machete, among others, informed the appellation praetorians, rather than the cult gang.

Besides, it is pertinent here to unfold the similarities between the military and cult gangs in schools. Although the cult gangs are by no means professional, yet they, like the military, are organized with centralized command, having the capon or as the 'Eiye' variant would say, the 'Ibaka' as the head of the command unit. Also, like the military, they have hierarchy of authority. That is, nationally, they have their number one who functions just as the commander in chief of the armed forces. They, like the military, enforce some discipline such that any erring member is thoroughly punished; more often than not, with infliction of wounds or injury or sometimes with permanent damage such as plucking off one of the eyes.

As regards communication, they, too, have powerful communication networks. They, like the military, believe in esprit de corps. This spirit of oneness or togetherness is enhanced via the rigorous and painful initiation rites, which culminate in oath taking. Members, during initiation, also taste or suck their blood in the spirit of togetherness and with the resolve that no member divulges their secret to a non-member. This is the more reason why withdrawal or desertion becomes difficult and dangerous. Therefore, whoever disengages from the gang by force is pursued and killed by the loyal members. This is similar to the military that frown at desertion during war.

Also, the characteristic which makes the military different from other groups is the monopoly over the use of lethal weapons. The school praetorians also use deadly weapons. But while the armed forces intervene in politics in countries with low political culture or where a large number of the populace are a –political or politically apathetic, their cult counterparts dictate the pace and tone of activities in the school climate.

The school climate

The school, like a human being, has its personality. This personality is a number of visible or perceived attributes, which differentiate one school from another. Thus, it is the uniqueness of a school. This uniqueness, which makes a school different from others, is known as the school climate. It is also the 'feel' teachers and students have for the school (Dressel, 1976; Sergiovani and Starratt, 1979).

However, Hoy and Miskel (1987) (cited in Nenty, 1990) delineated two types of school climate, open and closed.

Schools with open climate have humanistic orientations, which are based on democratic principles with an open channel for two-way communication. Conversely, a concealing confining and restricting atmosphere that is always identified with autocratic principles characterizes the closed climate. Much as the open climate encourages healthy student-student and student-staff interaction, the closed climate prevents students' participation both at the classroom and school levels.

Thus, school climate is defined here as the totality of physical, social and psychological factors that interact to give a school its unique identity. This identity may be a product of academic excellence, it may be a function of violent or cult gang behaviour. This unique identity informs the decision by some tertiary institutions to refuse some National Diploma and degree holders admission into Higher National Diploma and postgraduate courses on the grounds that their alma mater are notorious for cult activities.

Besides, it is imperative here to consider whether Nigerian tertiary institutions based in Lagos have open or closed climate. The fact that the student population in these schools is largely adults and the form of government in the polity is democratic; the higher school system is expected to be an open climate where the rule of law and not the whim and caprices of the political gladiators, prevails (Oyediran, 2007).

To Oyediran (2007), democracy etymologically evolved from two Greek words – 'demos' which literally connotes people and 'kratos' which signifies rule. To him, democracy is the rule by the people. Therefore, the people may rule directly as it was the vogue in ancient Greek city states where all the citizens participated directly in decision making or the people may rule indirectly through their representatives. The latter is the norm in all modern democracies given the astronomical growth in population.

Sargent (cited in Oyediran, 2007) chronicled as elements or principles of democracy the following:

1. The participation of citizens in political decision making.
2. A good measure of equality among citizens.
3. Some measure of freedom or liberty granted to (or retained by) citizens.
4. A system of representation.
5. Rule of law.
6. Electoral systems which support majority rule; and
7. Education which enhances intelligent political participation by the citizenry.

However, since there are situations in the larger society, especially during crises, when a state of emergency is declared and the political leaders have the constitutional rights to curtail the rights and freedom of citizens, to that extent the Nigerian higher schools have both open and closed climate. For the school climate to be completely

open is to encourage chaos and crises and for it to be completely closed, is to discourage unfettered academic and learning freedom which institutions of higher learning enjoy.

Although cultism thrives more in open school climate than in closed ones, yet cult gang behaviour may be a product of perception of their environment as being impoverished (Lamax, 1977). The thinking here is that, cultists or praetorians have not seen any enriching material in the environment hence the unorthodox reaction to issues within the school climate.

Theoretical framework

This study is veritably situated within the context of socio-organizational theory for effectiveness and survival. Therefore, like other groups within and outside the school system, the school praetorians set out to attain four functions needed for organizational effectiveness and survival. Effectiveness, in the view of Soyode (1980), is perceived as the "capacity to provide or accomplish the correct end" and "the efforts to secure the relevant outcome". Soyode's succinct analogy drove home the distinction between effectiveness and efficiency. According to him, the latter allows the giving of high scores to a student who has written a wrong but beautiful answer to a question while the former penalizes such a student because he has failed to pursue the appropriate goals specified by the question. Thus, effectiveness embraces not only the quantity and quality of output, but also its relevance to felt needs.

Be that as it may, school praetorians aim at attaining four functions for organizational effectiveness and survival. According to Parson (1960) (cited in Pounder, et al., 1995), Ogawa (1992), as well as Ogawa and Bossert (1995), these are goal achievement, integration, adaptation and latency. Goal achievement relates to an organizational ability to define its objectives and to direct its resources towards their realization. Participants of the population interviewed revealed that, the goal of school praetorians is for protection. One way of achieving this is to instill fear in other people within the school climate and to ensure that they have input or say, in the political and social activities. Hence, the incessant harassment of other persons – the girls for friendship, the boys, men and women for money extortion, the school authority for attention and possibly for financial gain, the invigilators and examination officers for assistance to prospect in examination malpractices, among others. In fact, they play a major role in the key elective positions within and outside the campuses. Consequently, when violence erupts or manipulation of election results occur or there is outright rigging of elections in or outside the schools, they are the major actors and actresses.

Integration is yet another mechanism. This involves the level of social solidarity, which exists among members in

Table 1. Results of data analysis.

Zone	n	Mean	SD	EX	EX Square	(EX) Square/n
Yaba	40	50.03	4.94	2001	101051	100100
Badagry	40	54.05	6.79	2162	118656	116856
Ikorodu	40	54.93	6.3	2197	122217	120670
Total	120	53	-	6360	341924	337626

an organization. This solid bond exists between or among praetorians. This bond is enhanced, as stated earlier, by the oath taken during initiation and the blood they exchanged and tasted. Thus, there is cooperation, particularly among those belonging to the same group. Their attack is group-oriented and not a one person show. Thus, there is cooperation, particularly among those belonging to the same group.

Adaptation is a function which is concerned with the ability of an organization to control its relations with the environment. The school praetorians operate within the school climate. To operate outside the environment indicates an attack on a person and on that person alone. It was even observed that some of them became emergency touts at the precincts of some Lagos-domiciled schools, collecting tolls from "Okada" riders and visitors to nearby shops or warehouses. Latency consists of the cultural patterns, motivation and commitment of organizational members. School praetorians are committed to their cause even at the risk of losing their lives. The oath issue ensures this commitment.

METHODOLOGY

Population

This comprised all private and public higher schools located in Lagos state.

Sampling procedure

A stratified sampling based on school location and school type was used. Three types of tertiary schools were identified in Lagos State and public higher schools were included. Three types of tertiary schools were identified in Lagos State and the sampling was restricted to public higher schools. The members of the sampling population are geographically arranged thus:

Yaba zone: University of Lagos, Federal College of Education (Technical) (FCE (T) and Yaba College of Technology.

Ikorodu-Epe zone: Lagos State Polytechnic (LASPOTECH) and Michael Otedola College of Primary Education.

Epe and Badagry zone: Lagos State University (LASU), Ojo and Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education (AOOED), Ijanikin.

'Lucky dip' was adopted to pick a school from Yaba zone while a coin was tossed to choose from both Ikorodu-Epe and Badagry zones. Therefore, members of the sample for this study were drawn from three schools namely FCE (T), LASPOTECH and LASU. 40 members of each school were randomly selected to give a total sample of 120.

Research instrument

The main instrument used for the collection of data was the questionnaire with interview and personal observation adopted to augment. A ten-item closed ended (Yes/No) questionnaire was developed demanding responses on questions such as:

- (A) Have you been beaten or seen another person beaten by cult members in or within the precincts of the school?
- (B) Have you been (or seen another person) instructed forcefully by cult members in the school or within its purview, to hand over your cell phone, wrist watches, neck-laces, and so on?
- (C) Have you been compelled by cult members to assist in class test or assignment or in outright writing of semester examination?
- (D) Have you seen cult members with guns and other deadly weapons on or within the precincts of this campus?
- (E) Have you witnessed or heard about intra or inter cult clashes where deadly weapons were freely used within or at the precincts of this school?
- (F) Have you witnessed or heard gunshots from cult members within or at the precincts of the school?
- (G) Do you think or believe that cult members are largely violent in their behaviour on or around the campus?
- (H) Are you scared or afraid of possible violent cult behaviour while in school?
- (I) Are you afraid due to cult activities, to read your books in deserted areas of the school?
- (J) Do you think or believe that cult activities in the school or within its purview adversely affect academic achievement?

The responses to these questions were statistically tested at 0.05 level of significance using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

RESULTS

Therefore, from Table 1, $F_{cal} = 7.43$ and $F_{critical}$ from the table = 3.07 at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, we conclude that violent cult behaviour (praetorian activities) affects school climate. Therefore, from Table 1, $F_{cal}=7.43$ and $F_2, 117$ from the statistical table is 3.07 at 0.05 level of significance. Since $F_{calculated}$ is greater than the $F_{tabulated}$ the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus we conclude that violent cult behaviour (praetorian activities) significantly affects school climate.

Predisposing factors

It becomes pertinent, at this juncture, to consider the motivation for becoming a school praetorian in Lagos higher schools. One predisposing factor is the academic

background. Students, who are aided to pass their Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and are admitted into tertiary institutions based on these results, find it difficult to cope with their studies. Therefore, they need some "protection" to attain success. They thus resolve to harass and intimidate fellow students, lecturers and other members in the school climate. Peer group influence is one potent factor. Some students with good home and school background become school praetorians, based on the type of company they keep in higher schools. Therefore, out of sheer naivety, the feeling of belonging via association with people makes many a student in Lagos higher schools find himself or herself in cult gang.

Poor parental background is yet another prominent factor. Many praetorians are products of broken homes, or homes where discipline is never enforced or homes where parents have little or no time for the moral upbringing of their children.

Lack of political or national integration is yet another motivation. The centrifugal thinking rather than centripetal aspiration, which characterizes the polity, has affected the psyche of most students in Lagos tertiary schools. That is, the perception of oneself first as either a Yoruba or Hausa or Ibo or Ijaw or Efik, among many others; rather than as a Nigerian is also a factor that makes some students join cult gang and relate more within this praetorian group rather than see themselves as members of the larger student population.

Fear of failure is another predisposing factor. Most members of cult gangs socialize more within their group. There is real or perceived fear that they may not attain the academic goal. That is, they see failure staring them in the face and this propels them to take to praetorian behaviour.

Another factor is economic. The country's economic downturn has affected most homes in Lagos state. In spite of the great strides the Nigerian economy has attained at the macro level, there is little or no improvement at the micro realm. Indeed, as stated by Muhtar (2009), the global economic melt-down has made it difficult for the government to realize the United Nations' Millennium Development goals. Hence, the diversification embarked upon by some students in Lagos higher schools to generate enough income for sustainability. Some students join praetorian group in order to survive.

Consequences

The effect of the praetorians on the Lagos school climate has been largely negative. Their activities in some higher schools have led to incessant disruption of the academic programmes and this has led to a fall in the standard of education. Emanating from this is the fact that, students learn and teachers teach in an ominous school climate. The fear that the praetorians may start another bout of

violence does not encourage thorough teaching of courses by lecturers and does not encourage students to pay serious attention to their studies. There is also the decimation of student population. The fact that there is intra-(and-inter)- cult violence makes this factor important. Members of cult gangs attack, maim and often kill one another. Lives lost in situations like this reduce the student population.

Problems

The need to eradicate cultism in schools is fraught with problems. One such impediment is inadequacy of funds. The economic straits have made this problem inevitable. Consequently, the schools lack the financial wherewithal to confront cultism in all its ramifications.

Another bane is the issue of Godfathers. This has become an enigma of sort in tackling the problem of cultism. There are some powerful people within and outside the Lagos school system who serve as financiers for the members. Some of these Godfathers use these cult members to attain their inordinate political ambitions. There is the problem of identifying all members of the cult gang in Lagos higher schools. Where the school authorities are resolute to deal decisively with cultism, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to identify all members. The fear of being attacked by cultists is another inhibition. Where students, lecturers and other members of the Lagos school community know the cultists, the fear of being attacked may prevent these people from mentioning the names of cultists. Even at meetings, people are afraid to discuss issues bordering on cult activities.

There is also the problem of relating with them. The thinking here is that associating with them, not as students but as cultists, swells their ego and exposes those associating with them to all forms of harassment and extortion.

Another inhibition is the fact that, the security personnel within the Lagos schools are not armed. For somebody with a baton or bare hand to take on a cult member, who is armed, is nothing but a conscious bid to commit suicide. The more reason why security operatives in some Lagos schools take to their heels and leave the gates wide open any time cult violence erupts. Absence of technological gadgets to detect arms concealed on cultists is another problem. Non-detection of these arms at the Lagos higher school gates encourages their unbridled use in the campuses. There is also the need for good means of communication such as walkie talkies and cell phones to enhance communication.

The federal nature is yet another impediment. Exclusively, the federal government controls both the military and the police. It is thus not easy, except they are motivated monetarily, to get the required number of policemen and women to assist the Lagos tertiary schools

in checking the menace of cult members. Even as security operatives in Lagos state, as revealed by Akpoyibo (2009), the police are assisted in terms of logistics, equipment, monetary incentive and other materials by the state government. Lack of powerful but punitive enabling law is yet another hindrance. To Odili (2004) and Oloyede (2008), Rivers state government, as well as Kwara, among others, have passed an act banning cultism in its schools, yet the law against cultism in Lagos does not have the needed bite to deter cultism.

There is the factor of instability in the polity which has infected the higher schools. Thus, the event in Lagos higher schools is a reflection of the activities in the larger society. Therefore, violent cult activities in higher schools are product of instability in the political terrain. There is the urgent need to check violence and arson in the larger society.

Panacea

It becomes imperative to proffer palpable antidotes for all the above problems. One key solution is adequate funding. There is the need for government and proprietors of schools to allocate enough money for matters of security of lives on Lagos campuses. Where this is done, the higher schools may become anything but the harbinger of cultism. There is the need to procure some modern tools and gadgets for detecting weapons. This becomes necessary in order to discover cultists who have concealed some lethal weapons on their body. These technological gadgets need to be installed at the Lagos higher school entrances and at other strategic places on campuses.

Besides, the bushes within the Lagos school premises should be cleared on a continual basis in order to ensure that deadly weapons are not hidden in the school. The moment these guns are not kept on campuses, there may be a drastic reduction in their violent activities. The fact that their major activities and initiation rites take place in the evening and late in the night is enough reason to ask all students and other members of the Lagos school community to leave the premises soon after the day's academic activities are over at least in nonresidential campuses. Patrol vehicles, going round day and night, to ensure there is no illegal assembly in residential campuses. These compel praetorians to shift their base from the campus to some other places outside the schools.

Lecturers and school authorities need to refrain from giving any gang member recognition or attention as a member of a cult. This diminishes their ego and makes them mend their ways. There is also the need to sensitize the student population against cultism and the evils perpetrated by members. Organizing, on a regular basis, public lectures for students can do this. Lecturers can also find time to educate their students against cultism.

However, identified cultists should be dismissed. This

needs to be a continuous exercise. This discourages pro-cult activities in Lagos schools.

Furthermore, the fact that security operatives used at the moment in Lagos higher schools are ill-trained to combat cultism effectively; it becomes imperative here to propose the involvement of the military in the deterrence of cultism. This ensures the total eradication of cultism in schools. Retired soldiers who have access to guns can be employed as security personnel. The military barracks can be contacted to post or deploy soldiers to schools. But these soldiers while moving about within the premises must be in mufti. This no doubt makes the school climate conducive for learning and teaching.

There is need for the state government to evolve a punitive enabling law. The fact that the law is stringent may likely scare some cultists and make them shun violent behaviour.

Achieving stability in the polity may ensure peace in Lagos higher schools. Therefore, there is the need to introduce effective electoral reforms such as the Uwaiz Committee's Report on electoral reform and punitive laws that will deter rigging and other electoral frauds. This may remove the art of rigging from the psyche of politicians (and consequently from the thinking of the students in Lagos higher schools) who, at the moment, according to Ogunlewe (2009) and Duke (2010), see rigging as the only way to win elections in this country.

Conclusion

A relationship has been established between school praetorians, the cult gang and the climate in higher schools. It has been argued that there are similarities among the praetorians, military and other organizations in the larger society. It has been disclosed that, like all other organizations, the school praetorians have set forth to achieve four functions for organizational effectiveness and survival. Much as this paper has unfolded the inhibitions for the proper check of cultism, it has proposed some tangible antidotes for it to be annihilated. It has thus found it safe to conclude that, what guarantees safety of lives in Nigerian higher schools is the involvement of military personnel in the security operations.

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