The Nature and Management of Students’ Conflicts in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Ifeanyi Onyeonoru
Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines the nature of students’ conflicts in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and observes that the prevalence of such conflicts has been due to their mismanagement which is traceable to a conventional, but faulty and often monolithic diagnostic of the problem. The paper, therefore, takes a sociological approach to the analysis of the crisis. The major argument is that overt students’ conflicts are rather social manifestations of more deep rooted conflicts underscored by structural discontinuities and social distortions arising from five related factors associated with the wider Nigerian crisis: authoritarian governance arising from the erosion of institutional autonomy, infrastructural collapse and social distortions due to poor funding, poor motivation of staff who a major obligation for the moral character and well-being of the students, the impact of the wider moral crisis on the university staff and students and the precarious socio-psychological mental states of the students as youths in social change and their consequent disposition to simmediacy. Against this backdrop, students are perpetually at the receiving end, which disposes them to aggression. Individual students are more or less left to various forms of adaptation, including deviant behaviour involving conflicts. Hence, administrative strategies that aim at finding lasting solutions to the crisis must be holistic and historical. They must structurally deal with the underlying sources of conflicts rather than concern themselves merely to the symptoms that manifest themselves as students’ conflicts.

Introduction

Social conflicts in Nigerian tertiary institutions have almost become the norm in the academic communities. Aspects of such conflicts that have now reached a crisis dimension include industrial action by labour unions in the educational system, popular protests - sometimes in the form of violent demonstrations by higher institution students - often organized by the students’ unions, and the secret cult conflicts, the latest but most daring of the conflict. A frustrating aspect of these conflicts lies in their re-occurrence, irrespective of tough measures adopted by the authorities and the government. In fact, the conflicts have become more
sophisticated in recent times with the activities of the clandestine organizations, campus secret cults whose members kill and maim. Measures adopted in the management of the conflicts have proved ineffective, and, hence, inappropriate. The faulty measures are themselves the product of faulty diagnosis of the problem.

Some scholars have located the crisis variously in such factors as family disorganization, broken homes and the consequent poor parental care, economic crisis, erosion of University autonomy, adolescent behaviour, youth aggression and pampered self-image of the students, poor funding of the institutions and the consequent acute lack of social amenities and academic facilities; brain drain and poor attention to students, authoritarianism, pop movies and horror films, lack of consultations with, and low participation of students in university governance. Much of the discourse are, however, characterized by circular explanations - the analyses are either ahistorical or non-holistic (or both), and tend to deal largely with the apparent causes of the conflicts relative to the root causes, which we explore in this study.

This paper deals with aspects of the conflicts that directly involve students and the management of the conflicts by the authorities of the tertiary institutions. Hence, reference to industrial conflicts only enables us understand and explain the student located conflicts. The objectives of the paper are, therefore, three-folds. The first is to conceptualise the types of students’ conflicts in Nigerian tertiary institutions; the second is to examine their management, while the third is to identify the root causes of the crisis in order to enhance our evaluation of the conflict management strategies employed by the institutions.

The underlying position in the paper is that observed overt students’ conflicts are rather surface manifestations of more deep-rooted conflicts underscored by structural discontinuities and social dislocations associated with five related variables (also associated with the wider Nigerian crises) namely: authoritarian governance arising from the erosion of institutional autonomy infrastructural collapse and social distortions due to poor funding; poor motivation of staff who have a major obligation for the moral character and well-being of the students; the impact of the wider moral crisis on the university staff and student; and; the precarious socio-psychological mental states of students as youths in a harsh and anomic social environment - as distinct from their disposition to aggression. Hence, administrative strategies that aim at finding lasting solutions to (the crisis must be historical, holistic, and systemic, structurally dealing with the underlying sources of the conflicts, much more than, but not to the exclusion of the ‘symptoms’ that manifest as acute students’ conflicts. Much of our discours will concern the university system, not because it is more important than other tertiary institutions, but because of availability of data from studies relating to the university system. We will draw much of our theoretical inspiration from the won
of Durkheim on anomie because of the similarity of our subject with the crisis of his
time which he dealt with in the thesis.

**Anomie, Alienation and Conflict**

Emile Durkheim attributed the social disorder that characterized the 19th century French
(European) society to the emergence of a different, somewhat new, social milieu that
he termed ‘organic solidarity’. This was as a result of the breakdown of ‘mechanical
solidarity’, that is, the traditional social system characterized by close social relationships
embodied in traditional institutions such as the family (and the extended family) system.
These had functioned to ensure the social integration of society by providing
socialization, social support and mental stability for members of the society. With the
breakdown of such supportive social system in the face of high aspirations in the
emergent modern social organization, and the implicit deregulation of traditional norms
and behavioural patterns, the society became characterized by a level of disintegration
declared by normlessness, which Durkheim referred to as ‘anomie’. The lack of moral
constraint and the decline of the common morality are major characteristics of anomie
(Ritzer, 1996). With the quest for increased prosperity, especially in the face of abject
poverty of the majority such as was witnessed in Nigeria during the Babangida period,
aspirations run wild at the very moment when traditional rules have lost their authority.
“The state of deregulation or anomie is thus further heightened by passions being less
disciplined, precisely when then they need discipline” (Durkheim, 1951:419). Then the
disorganization associated with the crisis throws the door wide open to every sort of
adventure. The ‘equilibrium’ is upset, but a new balance cannot be immediately struck.
Time is required for the public conscience to reclassify men and things. Anomie was,
therefore, the product of ‘organic solidarity’, a modern system of organization
characterized by formal relationships which tends to socially isolate (individual) members
of the society. The non-supportive system of social relationships and implied social
dislocations led to alienation, i.e. distortions of human that arise from the domination
of the individual by the ‘alien will’ of the more powerful (Cooper, 1991; Meisenhelder,
1991). The implicit state of estrangement and despair often leads to various forms of
frustration and violence due to the lack of achievement of aspirations (Brown, 1954;
Myers, 1993). These consequently resulted in high rate of deviant acts like anomie
suicide (Durkheim, 1951; Giddens, 1971; Coser and Rosenberg, 1976). The almost
two decades of economic, political and moral crises witnessed in Nigeria from the
1980s produced a social environment typified by anomie, and this had significant impact
on social order and normative behaviour in Nigerian tertiary institutions, as indicated in
the following section.
Nature and Management of Students’ Conflicts

In this section, we construct typologies of conflicts that are common in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Identify the apparent causes of the conflicts and discuss their management.

Conflicts between Students and Administration:
The above type of conflict results from disagreements between the authorities in higher institutions and the students. Issues in conflict are mainly those that directly affect the socio-economic and academic welfare of the students. These include the provision of basic social amenities and social services, as well as matters relating to fees and subventions: catering, water, electricity, accommodation, transport, school fees and levies, academic curriculum and school calendar. These issues constitute a major basis for students’ conflicts in Nigerian higher institutions.

The conflicts that are mainly intra-institutional often take the form of demonstrations or such protests as boycott of lectures. The demonstrations might be peaceful or violent. A common feature of such protests, however, is that they often begin as peaceful demonstrations but end up in violence, especially whenever they involve a clash with law enforcement agencies. Aspects of the violence may include destruction of properties within the institution, assault of target staff or officials involved in the disputes, disruption of traffic flow and harassment of associated members of the academic community. The nature of this type of conflict, however, seems to have changed somewhat since the late 1980s — from the vandalization of infrastructural facilities within the campus to the more peaceful demonstrations within the campus involving the march with chants, the rally or the picket line. At every point, however, the presence of armed policemen on campuses tends to provoke violent reactions from students.

The management of such conflicts at the institutional levels commonly includes the immediate closure of the institution, with ultimatum given to students to vacate the campus. Failure to conform to the deadlines usually results in police brutality. Another strategy employed by campus administrators is the suspension or dissolution of the Students Union and/or its executives. It should be noted, however, that the management of students’ conflicts at this level has sometimes been in compliance with ‘instructions from above’, i.e. from the government.

Students versus Government Conflicts:
Factors that lead to conflicts in this category often relate to macro socio-political, economic or educational policy issues that affect the welfare of the students directly or indirectly. Such conflicts often commence with the Students Union issuing a statement objecting to the policies. This is typically
underlined by an ultimatum ordering the government to rescind the decision, or expect a popular resistance. The militant approach of students to conflict with the authorities is partly a product of military rule in Nigeria.

In concrete terms, the strategies, employed by the students in conflicts in this category are largely similar to those in the first category above. In addition, however, such demonstrations sometimes go beyond the campus gates, into the town. The rationale is to sensitize members of the public to the issues involved in the conflict, especially when they relate to the overall interest of the public. At such times, the students extend their campaigns to the vulnerable groups in the society, such as market women and men who are thereby mobilized to join the protests. A good example of this is the May 1989 structural adjustment programme (SAP) riots in which the students went into the towns to mobilize members of the public by explaining to them, even in vernacular language, the issues involved in the adjustment policies, and their implications for the lifestyle of the Babangida military junta vis-a-vis the vulnerable groups in the society. The nature of the organization of such protests is noteworthy. They are often coordinated nationally and articulated through the national, zonal and local offices of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). The response of the government to such conflicts varies; but it often involves the strategies highlighted in the first category above. Specifically though, and particularly when the protest has a national impact, the government often reacts by proscribing the students’ organization at the national level. Hence, the movement has had a history of banning and unbanning, such that in the recent past, the student union simply neglects such bans and continues with its struggles. The point must be made that conflicts in this category have expectedly recorded the highest frequency of student-police clashes, destruction of lives and properties, arson, looting, vandalism, sexual assault, police brutality among others.

**Students versus Staff Conflicts:**
This type of conflicts often occurs when other organized interest groups on campus attempt to pursue their own interest at the expense of that of the students. A common example is the situation where unions in the institutions, whose jobs relate to the social well-being of the students, often choose such strategic times as-the examination period to pursue their dispute with the administration through strike, for instance. Such conflicts may involve an element of violence when it is students versus non-academic staff because both groups are more disposed to aggressive methods in dispute processing unlike the academic staff. Striking members of the Non Academic Staff Union (NASU), for instance, often disrupt public water and power supply on campuses in a bid to make their strike more effective, thereby adversely affecting the well being of the students and the campus community at large. This was rampant in Nigerian universities during the NASU strikes for parity in conditions of service with the academic staff in 1992.
Students are known to attack the strikers for disrupting their social life as they question the right of the latter to tamper with public utilities, an action considered in excess of strike action associated with the withdrawal of service.

Students versus staff conflicts are not often overt when it concerns students and the academic staff, especially when it has to do with industrial action. This may be partly because they often carry along with their demands, the needs of the students. Furthermore, the reality of a more direct influence of the academic staff over the students put the later in a relatively disadvantaged power position to effectively oppose the former. Hence, the students prefer to tread softly, rather using appeals instead of employing overt conflicts. Sometimes though, the students may embark on peaceful demonstration to protest their grievances, like it happened in a few universities in Northern Nigeria in 1996 (CDHR, 1996) during the seven months strike embarked upon by the union of Nigerian academics, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

Students versus Students Conflicts:

Conflicts among students in the above category are well ‘documented. They include those among students with varying religious persuasions, in particular between Christians and Muslims, clashes between rival political camps on campus, especially during student union politics. The most common manifestations of students-versus-students conflict in recent times are associated with campus secret cults. The curious aspect of the matter is that the fraternities transformed from a somewhat constructive (radical students’ social movement) origin in 1952 to the current terrorist stage. By the late 1990s, there were about 40 different campus secret cults in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Sometimes, the conflicts involve rival secret cults or cult members and other student organizations or other social groups on campus (Ogunbameru, 1997; Ogunsanya, 2000; Osha, 2000). Between December 1992 and June 1998, 207 criminal activities were carried out by suspected secret cult members in the University of Ibadan -declared among others by the police (Ogunsanya, 2000). Teachers in higher institutions are also known to be involved in campus cult conflicts. We will examine this category of conflict more closely due to its current significance for social order in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Cult-conflict assumed a crisis dimension from the late 1980s during the Babangida administration, and resulted in the closure of several institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. It also led to the expulsion and rustication of several students. The situation was the same all over the country in universities and polytechnics as it was in other higher institutions like colleges of education. In fact, the cult scare has assumed a more dangerous dimension, with its activities now extended to secondary schools, including the female ones (Tribune, August 8, 1997). For many years, public concern about the crisis featured constantly in
Nigerian news media. The crisis situation is somewhat captured by the following editorial:

The spate of killings and maiming by the cultists in our higher institutions has reached a level whereby no parent can anymore be sure of the safety of his child in any of those institutions as long as the cult activists are left to operate. (Vanguard Editorial, Monday, February 17, 1997).

The above editorial was in response to the clash of cultists in Lagos State University (LASU) that left 2 students killed and many others injured before the intervention of the Lagos State anti-crime patrol, Operation Sweep. In September 1997 (in the same institution), a similar incident left at least three students dead, and more than 90 others identified with the event either rusticated or expelled from the University. Such is the situation in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The alarming dimension of the cult conflicts on campuses is that several of them involve the use of dangerous weapons including firearms. Hence, by 1997, no fewer than twenty students had been killed in secret cult related violence in Nigerian universities (Osha, 2000).

The cult crisis led to widespread insecurity to the effect that, in the aftermath of a clash of two rival cult groups and the death of some students in the University of Lagos in 1997, the Vice Chancellor, in a statement to the press, threatened to quit the campus for fear of campus cults. He, moreover, regretted that, with secret cults’ current level of sophistication, the authorities lacked the capacity to fight back the cultists. He attributed the crisis to the breakdown in the family system evident in broken homes (The Champion, September 12, 1997). The Vice Chancellor’s statement is a typical example of the monolithic view resulting in a defective management of the crisis and leading to the fact that it is the symptom rather than the root of the crisis that is being treated.

A typical management of the cult conflicts by the authorities often involves the imposition of curfew on the campus, setting up of panels of investigation to identify the culprits, suspension, rustication or outright expulsion of students identified as cult members, and theillumination of the campus environment to avert dark spots. Serious cases of cult conflicts may result in the outright closure of the institutions involved, and the invitation of the state security agents to ensure safety and peace on campus.

In addition to the strategies of managing students conflicts highlighted so far, whenever the conflicts involve destruction of properties, the authorities often impose levies on the students to offset the cost of vandalized property. At other times, penalties may involve the submission of sworn affidavit in a high court to the effect that the student is not a member of a campus secret cult, or the signing of undertaking to be of good behaviour. These are often conditions for re-
admission or re-absorption of students in the aftermath of conflicts (Ajayi and Tamuno, 1973; Tamuno, 1991).

The Babangida era that marked the crisis stage in students’ conflicts also experienced the most authoritarian management of the crisis. As our analysis later will show, it is not just a coincidence that students’ crisis became quite prominent at this time. The Babangida administration can be clearly marked out as one that provided a social environment conducive for the blooming of such crisis. In this connection, Decree No. 47, of 1989, promulgated in December 1989, following the SAP riots deserves a special mention. The Decree stipulated severe penalties for (student) offenders, including N50, 000.00 fine or a five year term of imprisonment, or both, for persons convicted by the Special Tribunal set up under the Decree. Moreover, the administrators of tertiary institutions were vested with powers to proscribe any Students Union or organization that engaged in activities considered not being in the public interest. Convicted members of such organizations are made liable to indefinite suspension, or dismissal by the Minister of Education or any other delegated authority. That was an indication that the internal machinery for conflict management in the higher institutions in Nigeria was no longer capable of dealing with the level of conflicts that manifest themselves in the educational system. The government, therefore, resorted to the externalization of its (conflict) management through the tribunal, with implications for institutional autonomy and the internal system of justice.

The authoritarian handling of the conflicts is partly the product of an erroneous perception of the students as troublemakers, in addition to a mutual distrust among participants in campus conflicts (government, students and staff) during the Babangida era (1985-1993). One view has it that:

From the government’s perspective, university students were an undisciplined lot, prodded to rebellion by “extremist” teachers and some outsiders, under permissive and laissez faire Vice Chancellors (Ogunyemi, 1992:10).

As implied already, the attitudes of most university administrators were not any different. University administrators also tended to adopt a unitarist perspective to students’ unrest by viewing the problem as acts of irresponsibility, rather than a phenomenon to be handled with adequate understanding. In a case of students-versus-students conflict that resulted in the death of an undergraduate at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in 1991, for instance, the University Governing Council expelled sixty students in a single day. It was, however, alleged by the academic staff union of the University that some of the expelled students were not given fair hearing by the Council’s panel (The African Guardian, September 2, 1991). Similar events that span the spectrum of tertiary institutions in Nigeria were reported in the Annual Reports of the Civil Liberty
The Babangida military junta also introduced voluntary unionism in the higher institutions, which made it discretionary for students to belong to the Students Union, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). In the light of financial difficulties experienced by the students due to the economic crisis and adjustment at this period, this act was aimed at stifling the students’ unions by starving them of funds, thereby frustrating their activities. The policy was in contrast with the hitherto system of compulsory student unionism and automatic deduction by the University of fees for membership of the Student Union by students. Babangida was obviously scared of the popular support which the Students Union had gained, especially in view of his hegemonic agenda. He, therefore, combined the above repressive stance with a generous bursary award of N500.00 per student, aimed perhaps at distancing the generality of the students farther from their unions and registering confidence in the regime. These measures, however, did not substantially change the situation.

Sources of the Conflicts

Institutional Autonomy:
The interference in university autonomy that began in 1972 with the military Government of General Yakubu Gowon reached its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s when instructions on the governance of tertiary institutions were issued from the State House (Lagos and later Abuja, or their State Government equivalents). Authoritarian principles became apparent in the governance of tertiary institutions with the loss of power of the University Councils to appoint Vice Chancellors and discipline staff. This has had remarkable effects on morality, as university administrators preferred to give their primary allegiance to the ruling military juntas that appointed them than to the university community. In 1968, for instance, (before authoritarianism set in), a student-versus-administration conflict was arbitrated by a member of the Pirate Confraternity chosen by the Vice Chancellor at the University of Ibadan (The African Guardian, April 15, 1-9-91; Adelola, 1997). That is, the university authorities tended to chose the path of dialogue in cases of conflict with students.

In contemporary times, however, the average administrator in a typical Nigerian higher institution is basically concerned with carrying out instructions from ‘above’ in order to retain or enhance his or her position, rather than insist on doing justice and ensuring confidence in the system. One implication of this development is that erring members of the community, whether administrative, academic staff, non academic staff or students, could get away with deviant acts, especially when such offenders have connections from ‘above’, while others who are not so privileged are denied justice. This is also applicable to the cult groups.
that are dominated by children from influential families (Tamuno, 1991: Ogunsanya, 2000).

The Special Tribunal (Miscellaneous), set up by Decree 47 of 1989, was the height of the externalization of discipline of staff and students within the universities and other tertiary institutions. Usually, these tribunals suffer credibility crisis due to government’s interference with, and strong influence on, the judicial process of such bodies, especially under military rule.

The effects of these on the system of justice within the campuses are noteworthy. Students (and staff too) no more believe in the capacity of the system to provide justice and security. With the loss of confidence in the internal system of justice, they resort to their own means of addressing insecurity and redressing their discontent. A ready outlet is the campus cult. While the children of the wealthy and influential parents/guardians try to lord it over the rest through the cult (Tamuno, 1991), some of the latter also seek self-defense through rival cults, and the vicious circle continues. Meanwhile, no one is particularly afraid of the law because the system of justice has been rendered impotent.

By the late 1970s, the Federal Government introduced the practice of closure order as an instrument of long-distance crisis management of Universities. The practice usurped the powers of Council, Senate and the Vice Chancellor. These factors impact on the institutions and produce bad and ineffective leadership (NUC, 1994).

**Poor Funding:**
Gross reduction in the funding of tertiary institutions in Nigeria combines with other factors to produce conflicts. We shall examine this with data relating to the university system. Once this is done, we can assume that the situation in other tertiary institutions are worse since the government places higher priority on funding universities relative to other tertiary institutions.

The grants requested by Nigerian universities in the 1977/78 session stood at about N280 million; the amount recommended by the National Universities Commission (NUC) was about N184 million, while the Government’s grants to the universities was N154 million. In the 1978/79 session, requests by the Nigerian universities increased to about N394 million, NUC’s recommendations stood at N232 million, while Government’s grants decreased to a mere N140 million. As a result, allocation per student in constant naira value as an estimate of public expenditure on university education also declined steadily from N3,424.00 in 1975/76 session to a mere N409.00 in 1989/90 session (ASUU Negotiating Document, 1992). The gap between the request of the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Federal Government budgetary allocation to the universities, which continued its downward slide into the 1990s, reached 87.2 % in , 1991 (FOS, 1995). The overall effect of poor funding on the educational system
was a collapse in teaching activities and research facilities, which constitutes a significant source of frustration for teachers and students.

Decline in funding and facilities notwithstanding, student admission into the universities was on the increase. Placements by Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for first-degree courses, for instance, increased from 32,839 in 1987 to 61,212 in 1991. Total enrolment of students in Nigerian universities by major disciplines also showed consistent increases: from 174,133 in 1989 to 227,999 in 1993 (FOS, 1995). Meanwhile, brain drain in the university system, mainly due to poor remuneration, led to depletion in academic staff strength in the face of the rapid increases in student population. Estimates of gross shortfalls in academic staff strength in Nigerian universities are instructive (Asobie, 1996). These, among others, led to the setting up of the Presidential Commission on Brain Drain in 1987, and the Longe Committee, which made its recommendations in 1991.

One significant effect of the foregoing scenario, which applies to all tertiary institutions in Nigeria, is that the teacher can no longer relate with the students close enough to influence his or her moral life and character. Moreover, the socially harsh environment to which the students are subjected in terms of accommodation, learning and social life is mentally devastating. These include dehumanizing residential conditions, dilapidated learning environment, collapsed or collapsing infrastructures, grossly inadequate equipment and classrooms, harsh, aggressive and unaccommodating academic and non academic staff, and the effects of the economic crisis that have made living conditions very difficult for students.

With the student population having far outstripped the number of available bed spaces in Nigerian tertiary institutions, most students are either not accommodated or not adequately accommodated in the halls of residents, and are, therefore, denied the opportunity for character building.

At the University of Ibadan, for example, each hall was built to accommodate about 150 students together with a few members of staff. Hall Masters were to be appointed in the fully residential system to take active interest in the well being of the students. However, the condition gradually deteriorated due to high student intake and lack of expansion of facilities such that, in the 1990s, rooms, which were meant to accommodate two persons now house about five, while those officially meant for about six students are now occupied by as many as between 8 and 14 students. With the lack of space, the students take turns to sleep in shifts of 3-4 hours. Meanwhile, the large number of helpless squatters is usually at the mercy of student ‘landlords’ who extort from them large sums of money as ‘rents (Ojo, 1995; Asobie, 1996). In the University of Ibadan, as late as 1997, students converted automobile garages into accommodation, as the crisis deepens. Moreover, inadequate classroom spaces cause students to stand at corridors or in the open air to listen to lectures being delivered in distant lecture
halls (Asobie, 1996). This encourages depersonalization and anomic behaviour, as students find themselves submerged in the crowd. The prevalent social and physical environments and the implicit social conditioning with pathological mental and psychological states predispose the students to aggressive behaviour. Brown (1954) and Mulder (1989) confirm this trend.

**Conditions of Service for Staff:**
Poor conditions of service, heavy workload and poor facilities and working environment, all contribute to the frustration of the academic and non-academic staff, and this is transferred as aggression on the students. Poor renumeration for academic staff was well identified by the Report of the Study Group on Brain Drain in Nigerian Universities (1982-1993) carried out by the World Bank Project Implementation Unit of the National Universities Commission. The problem is clearly epitomized, as follows, in the popular slogan of Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) in the 1990s:’My Take Home Pay Cannot Take Me Home.’

Before the 1992 ASUU Agreement with the Federal Government, the average Nigerian professor’s pay as a percentage of that of his counterpart in Botswana stood at an embarrassing level of 0.005%. As a result of the Agreement, the corresponding relative percentage came to 32%. But by 1996, inflation and related unfavourable socio-economic environment eroded the Nigerian professor’s relative position to about 4% of his counterpart’s pay in Botswana. The claim by Nigerian academics that their condition of service was the worst in Africa was driven home through a comparison with that of their counterparts in relatively poorer countries like Ghana. While a Ghanaian professor earned about N228,534.00 per annum, his Nigerian counterpart earned N49,922.00 (Asobie, 1996). As a result, lecturers tend to engage in private practices, some of which are completely outside their training, such as scurrying for supply contracts to subsidize their income, without regard to their students. While the depletion of lecturers due to brain drain continues, even those “academics who are in the system are not really there” (NUC, 1994:43).

The negative effects of the foregoing on the system were highlighted in a memorandum submitted to the Etsu Nupe-led Sub-Committee of the Joint National Committee of Traditional Rulers and Leaders of Thought on ‘Crises in Nigerian Universities,’ by the erstwhile leader of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), as follows:

The adverse consequences of poor salaries and other conditions of service of University teachers for the university system are great. One of the most pernicious consequences is that the standard of university education declines. A lecturer’s job, if it is to been done properly, is almost a twenty-four hour engagement. A lecturer who has to take time off to do other
things to supplement his income cannot give his best to the system (Asobie, 1996:9).

The major import of poor pay of Nigerian academics for our discourse relates to its impact on the social well-being and mental health the Nigerian student and its implications on students conflict.

**The Impact of the Wider Nigerian Society:**
Aspects of the impact of the wider Nigerian society on the subject of students conflict are already implicit in our analysis in the previous sections. But particular mention must be made of the cash nexus and money worship that makes the wealthy in Nigeria (and their children) outlaws, while the poorer is placed in a position of perpetual slavery until he, perhaps through such deviant means used by the rich, becomes wealthy.

Informal interview of ex-cult converts from the University of Ibadan also reveals that several innocent students were coerced into the cult by their more powerful colleagues. Since the former cannot depend on the system of justice for protection, they readily give in to the latter, even if reluctantly. Sometimes, such response arises from existing patron-clientele relationships involving the provision of welfare facilities for the poorer students by the wealthier: in which case, the weaker partners simply subject to their ‘lords’ on invitation to join the cults. It is, moreover, against this backdrop that the splinter cult groups and terrorism by rival cult groups on campuses can be understood. The asexual reproduction of these groups roughly corresponds to the period of Nigerian economic and moral crisis.

Another important factor is the external support of the cults through assistance received from influential members of the public, sometimes from ex-members of the campus cults and sometimes from current members of parent secret cults outside the campus. The covert support given to the cultists by these fellows makes it more difficult for campus administrators to deal with the situation.

The influence of the wider authoritarian state and military control strategies is also evident in the relationships between campus administrators and the cults in certain cases. Military governments and administrators in tertiary institutions often supported splinter (sometimes cult) groups against militant Students Unions or as ‘watchdogs’ in intra-campus conflicts. The above combined with the moral bankruptcy of the Babangida period (Gboyega, 1996; Onyeonoru, 2001) to worsen the crisis.

The current ethical crisis in the Nigerian society also impacts on the family institution in the country and plays the major role of primary socialization and character formation for youths in the society. The economic crisis of the 1980s and the social crisis arising from the implementation of the neo-liberal oriented Structural Adjustment Programme, especially since the Babangida era,
coupled with the corruption of that period, sent most families on a ‘rat race’ for survival or in class ascending activities in view of the ‘rainy day’, with little time and attention left for the children. These may be partly a response to the lack of adequate social security system and economic stability in the country.

The significance of the foregoing for our discourse is underscored by the fact that of all offences suspected to be perpetrated by cult members apprehended in the University of Ibadan in the period 1992-1998, more than 44% had to do with stealing (Ogunsanya, 2000). This is corroborated by a similar study in the University of Jos, Nigeria in which economic offenses constituted 30.26% of all deviant cases by students in 1998, and poverty was identified as contributing about 50% to the misconduct (Smah, 2000).

The Youth and Society Dynamics:

The youth period, from a socio-psychological point of view, is a peculiar stage, a socio-psychological stage in human development with manifestations of behavioural attitudes that are often in conflict with those of the more mature adults. This supposes that the management of youth affairs requires a level of understanding and specialized skill. Youth is a time of emotional instability, with frequent occurrence of anxiety and depression. Impressionistic and imitative mental attitudes, associated with young people at this period of life, have also been identified by Tamuno (1991) as having significance for students conflicts. Another is their ‘copy-cat’ mentality which, by its curious nature, tends to make them vulnerable to others’ bad influence.

Besides the above is the factor of immediacy, the emphasis of youths on ‘here and now,’ an expression of aggression. This mental attitude is exacerbated by the ‘militarized psych’ of the average Nigerian, due to decades of military rule and the consequent aggressive cues, and tends to complicate the militancy of the students and the authoritarian approaches often adopted by the authorities. In contrast with the adults, the young people tend to think directly and act directly, with little considerations for the consequences. Coupled with this is a blaming syndrome, a projection of failure outward which makes the youths reluctant to accept responsibility for failure. Besides, the youths are faced with the crisis of identity and recognition, a craving to participate in aspects of governance of their institutions, especially in decisions that affect them. Tamuno (1989) observes that student activists generally expect some indicators of acceptance within their area of influence. These include consultation, negotiation, formal reception, and inclusion. This is part of the demand for their social development. Klineberge (1971) usefully suggests that in modernizing states, students confront identity crisis unknown in traditional societies. In the Nigerian situation, the students are perpetually excluded from participation. This factor tends to worsen the atmosphere of distrust between the students and the authorities.
The above characteristics of youths, when viewed against the backdrop of our earlier stated four pathological social conditions of Nigerian tertiary institutions, leave no one with much surprise that Nigerian tertiary institutions are crisis ridden.

The moral image of the wider Nigerian society, in interaction with the youthful and imitative mentality of the students, reflects on youths’ character with negative social consequences. All these contribute to what an analyst described as ‘the damaged psyche of youths’ in Nigeria, which disposes the students to various forms of conflicts (Tamuno, 1991:145). Myers (1993) makes a similar explanation.

The Panacea
The Nigerian students crisis is a product of time and structure. The nature of the current crisis in the Nigerian tertiary institutions must be viewed against the backdrop of the systems conception of the institutions, and intervening measures must take a similar holistic perspective that will account for the root causes identified in this study. This is necessary to ensure the restoration of the university system as an organized combination of co-operating individuals that is typical of a social system (Znaniecki, 1994).

In contrast with the repressive management styles that are dominant in conflict management in Nigeria (Onyeonoro, 2000), Durkheim suggests that moral discipline and social justice executed by a morally just authority are part of the prerequisites for managing such situations. Such an authority, national and institutional, must also be obeyed through respect not fear’, and must be ‘considered just by the people subject to it’. When authority is maintained only by custom and force, “peace and harmony are illusory; the spirit of unrest and discontent are latent and appetites superficially restrained are ready to revolt” (Durkheim, 1951:419). Solutions to students’ conflict must, therefore, be sought within a democratic framework which will not only allow for the participation of students, but also ensure that equity is broadly embraced and social justice emphasized in the wider society. This involves the re-enforcement of the strength of the collective morality as epitomized by ‘the cult of the individual,’ which, in the Durkhemian sense, entails affirming the rights of the individual in relation to the well being of all citizens instead of the pursuit of individual self-interest. Individuals become more integrated into the collective while becoming more autonomous (Chriss, 1993; Tole, 1993). The ‘healing’ process has to start from the wider Nigerian society and should embrace primary and secondary schools that form the bedrock of admissions into Nigerian tertiary institutions. According to a former Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, the University is not a reformatory where you turn criminals to decent people (The Guardian on Saturday, June 28, 1997). Any myopic view or emphasis on the educational system is bound to fail. This is because efforts at suppressing conflict without
dealing with the root causes merely lead to diversions of the disorder into subterranean but more dangerous channels. The anti-corruption campaign of the Obasanjo administration holds promise in this regard provided transparency is maintained.

References

Asobie., A Memorandum To The Sub-Committee of The Joint National Com-mittee of Traditional Rulers and Leaders of Thought on Crises in Nigerian Universities.
Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), 1993
Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), 1994


