

A Typology of Institutional Hostility in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a two-part typology as explanatory models in the growing institutional hostility in Nigerian public universities. The first encompasses ethnic antagonisms and exclusions which have turned the universities into boiling pots rather than the envisaged cultural melting pots; while the other is the anti-intellectualism of the ruling class and a palpable disinclination toward the academic enterprise. Inadvertently, the academy has been polarised into exclusionary communities of privileged ingroups and persecuted outgroups. Contests and encounters in the universities are of the ethnic genre, no longer the intellectual kind and, due to increasing self-consciousness, in-group members have transited from a group *in itself* to a group *for itself*, while the outgroup has stagnated as an unorganised but agonising group *in itself*. Using a historical perspective, the paper illustrates the typology with milestones which include threats, physical attacks, murders and normative persecution of members of outgroups. On the other hand, the anti-intellectualism of the political elite has resulted in the destabilisation of the university leading to dysfunctionality of the academic calendar, brain-drain as well as disillusioned and apathetic students. Unsurprisingly, Nigerian universities rank outside the top-rated institutions in Africa and the world at large, further deprecating the self-worth of intellectuals. Recent reforms, including an autonomy law, have been sabotaged by ethnic and political exigencies and, after an eight-month strike in 2022, Nigerian universities are at a critical crossroad with an uncertain future.

Key terms: academy/university, ingroup/outgroup (in groupers/out groupers), ethnic group/tribe.

INTRODUCTION

Universities are traditionally conceived as utilitarian ivory towers which inspire pride in government, citizenry and alumni who usually rank their former schools among the best, irrespective of their global rankings (Castro, 2015). Begun as elitist centres of learning and culture in the Humboldtian sense, the African university doubled as a tool for social change, modernisation and development. In the colony, newly founded universities were outposts of their Euro-American counterparts whose degrees they awarded and, in view of international faculties, they righteously claimed parity and co-superiority. With ample funding, academic freedom and autonomy, the university held out a great promise for a new Africa, and locally sourced staff immediately ascended into the national bourgeoisie. Alas, in the post colony, governments lost interest in research and universities descended into centres for human resources development, soon regressing into ruined institutions bereft of their historical *raison d'être* (Truscott & Donker, 2017; Andou, 2017; Bulfin, 2009).

The growth trajectory of Nigerian universities is readily discernible. Probably due to low priority accorded education, the colonial government established only one university in the country (at Ibadan in 1948). On independence year (1960), another was founded at Nsukka, to be quickly followed by the opening of three new universities (at Lagos, Ile-Ife and Zaria) in 1962. Eight years later, a sixth university was opened in Benin City, followed by seven others in 1975 (in Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Kano, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Sokoto). Significantly all 13 institutions (popularly referred to as the first and second generation universities) are publicly owned. Ditto for the 15 others founded between 1988 and 2013 (in Abuja, Awka,

Birnin-Kebbi, Dutse, Dutsinma, Gasua, Gusau, Lafia, Lokoja, Ndufu-Alike, Otu-Oke, Oye-Ekiti, Kashare, Uyo and Wukari).

Although some of these universities in the post colony were started by subnational governments (e.g., University of Nigeria, Nsukka [UNN], Obafemi Awolowo University [OAU], Ile-Ife, Ahmadu Bello University [ABU], Zaria, Nnamdi Azikiwe University [NAU], Awka), all 28 universities listed above are owned by the federal government. With the liberalisation of university ownership entrenched in the 1979 constitution, all state governments established one or more universities, just as the federal government has not relented in founding more universities in all states of the federation. Since 1993 when the ban on private universities was lifted and more specifically, in the 4th Republic, scores of private universities have been licensed and today, there are more private than public universities although the bulk of students are to be found the latter (Abdulrahman, 2017; Okoli et al., 2016; Ejiogu & Sule, 2012; Oluwatosin, nd).

Because of its inability to meet set standards of academic staffing, buildings, equipment and residential facilities, the only university in colonial Nigeria did not attain full-fledged autonomy until after independence; yet newer universities without the advantage of its mentoring were established as full-fledged institutions, *ab initio*. Nevertheless, up till 1970 when Nigeria's sixth university was opened, commissions were set up to estimate the manpower needs of the country before universities could be established. Thereafter, it became a heuristic reaction to fortuitous events, political discretion, ethnic balancing (or federal character), personal whims of the president or governors as well as the economic power and influence of private proprietors (Jacob et al., 2023; Osha, 2015; Oyediji, 2012; Babalola, 2008). Justified by the apparently insatiable demand by applicants for admission, there has been a palpably malevolent proliferation of universities in all parts of the country, urban and rural, north and south. Many were founded by mere proclamations and licensing and shorn of feasibility studies or plans, some without a single building while others occupied primary or secondary school sites (Nyewusira, 2014). One private university simply occupied an abandoned and decrepit local government secretariat.

In the melee of establishing new universities, quantity and political expedience took the place of considerations for quality resulting in decline, decay and endemic crises. One Vice-Chancellor (VC) lamented that Nigeria has now attained the dubious distinction of having established the largest number of universities in the shortest time as the federal government, states and private individuals and institutions are locked in a race to establish more universities (Nyewusira, 2014:176). According to a former VC and Executive Secretary of Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), Nigeria's ascendancy in the number of universities has shown other African countries that "man pass man". Such is the haste that no less than 48 clandestine degree-awarding "factories" founded by desperate swindler-proprietors aiming to reap surplus value were forcibly shutdown in 2012 by government and it is feared that such illegal institutions are still operational.

Expectedly, dire consequences have followed the wake of unplanned geometric increases in the number of universities and enrolment without matching increases in resources and facilities. Most universities have exceeded their carrying capacities leading to a dip in quality and standards. According to the NUC, Nigeria's 201 universities (public and private) have 100,000 lecturers teaching and supervising 2.1 million students while a recent survey showed that 99% of public universities lacks internet access (or has only epileptic access); none has an automated library; 76% use well water; 45% of students use pit latrines and 67% resort to open defecation in nearby bushes while 77% of these institutions could be described as glorified high schools. Even more significant is the fact that Nigerian universities are not integrated with the economy as curricula are oblivious of societal needs, resulting in the rapid production of unemployed and unemployable graduates. Whereas these universities were modelled after Euro-American institutions, they failed to adopt modern management systems conducive to efficiency and professional academic work output. African universities at large are thus confronted with the challenge of relevance as they have failed to address simple existential-societal needs of food, health, shelter and sanitation. In addition to being

alienated from the society and the business community, they are not accountable to the wider tax-paying community from which fee-paying students are drawn. And, as emphasis shifts to privatisation, welfare issues are relegated leading to a terse relationship between university administration and students as well as between academic staff and government. With the unrestrained licensing of private universities, government has been accused of privatising education, a public good from which the poor is being systemically excluded because of unaffordable fees (Tribune, 2022; Ogundele et al., 2021; Anyebe, 2014; Akinwumi, 2010; Assie-Lumumba, 1996).

In the rest of this paper, I shall highlight how the aforementioned hostile university environments have been compounded by ethnic animosities and the anti-intellectualism of the ruling elite. These issues are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. For example, I shall argue that ethnic antagonisms are cultural red-herrings camouflaging socio-economic power struggles in and outside the academy. The proliferation of universities is also driven by ethnicity, a cankerworm that has eaten deep into politics and public administration in the country as tribal square pegs are stuck in round holes. Similarly, anti-intellectualism is a function of the power struggles and national cake-sharing in a neoliberal order which relegates the academy.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In applying George Ritzer's Macdonaldisation thesis to Nigerian universities, Dumbili (2014) suggested that the precepts of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control have resulted in the privatisation, commercialisation, marketisation and massification of Nigerian universities since 1980s. Regrettably, because "rational systems are often unreasonable" these Macdonaldian principles have had incongruous and malevolent effects on Nigerian universities as the state cannot "disengage" itself and expect universities to improve and provide solutions. The vindictive dysfunctions and animosities in Nigerian public universities may be ascribed to the Macdonaldisation of these institutions.

Further, the crises in Nigerian universities seem to be caught up in the maze of the dichotomy between human capital and social capital theories. Apparently fired by the human capital theory (HCT), government's purpose in proliferating universities is to improve human resources since education increases skills which in turn conduces productivity. HCT places emphasis on investment in human beings in the hope that economic growth manifests from education. Accordingly, the level of education is assumed to be positively correlated with income and, in the capitalist setting, supply and demand take place in perfectly competitive markets. However, Mclean and Kuo (2014) have observed that there is no perfect correlation between education/training and wages or productivity because numerous social factors influence labour markets, e.g., ethnicity, religion, gender, ideology or political affiliation, unemployment, insecurity, nepotism, state of origin, labour union power and professional control, etc.

Perhaps even more potent is the theory of class struggle as an explanation for ethnic animosities within and outside the academy as well as the anti-intellectualism of the ruling elite. According to Mahmudat (2010), ethnicity is a social construction to serve parochial interests, an invention of the Nigerian ruling elite in its quest to keep the people divided for easy manipulation and domination. Therefore, ethnicity in Nigerian universities is an extension of a nationwide malaise of mobilisation of intense narrow loyalties to subnational groups for positions of political and economic advantage. These subnational groups are older than the nation-state itself and allegiance to them ranks above that to political associations or class systems. To achieve this overarching allegiance, the elite emphasises ethnic symbols, interethnic differences and boundaries as well as the unity and common ancestry and destiny of in group members. Such false consciousness negates the objective of nationhood, intensifies the crisis of political legitimacy and the basis of good governance. Rather than being the vessels for national progress, Nigerian universities have become the purveyors of elite parochialism and atavistic power mongering.

ETHNIC ANTAGONISMS

From experiences of intergroup dynamics in Nigerian universities, an ethnic group or tribe may be theorised as an administrative weapon for economic empowerment of its members through creating a system of employment and placement in positions of authority for continuous economic, position and power domination (Igbofe, 2021). Conflict often ensues whenever this weapon is deployed against out groups, that is, non-indigenes or elements not belonging to the locally dominant ethnic group (and state). As noted by Otite (2001), interethnic conflicts are socially, physically and mentally destructive, leading to losses in human capital and material properties, visible scars and symbols of violent conflicts and a legacy of mutual distrust, fear and suspicion. Nigerian universities have been caught up in the uneasy and fitful coexistence of numerous ethnic groups. The early warning shot was fired in 1965 when the incumbent VC of the University of Lagos (Unilag) was stabbed in a public forum ostensibly because government pandered to ethnic sentiments by appointing him in place of the immediate past VC, a scion of another ethnic group. Years later, the Chief Medical Director of ABU Teaching Hospital was slain by a local mob allegedly because he was non-indigene.

To attenuate interethnic rivalries, government created the Federal Character Commission with the mandate of enforcing fairness and equity in the distribution of public posts among the federating units of the country. To take advantage of this plausibly altruistic mission, ethnic hegemonists have deliberately reinterpreted federal character to mean that it is their turn to dominate local public universities which are now conceptualised as belonging to dominant ethnic groups in their locations. The sense of entitlement and territoriality accruing from federal character dictate that all public universities are veritable exclusive ethnic enclaves in which appointments are given to “sons of the soil” (Uriah & Obi, 2019).

Consequently, VCs who are now appointed largely on the basis of their ethnic affiliations, have become the arrowheads of in groups in the interethnic rivalries which have turned these institutions into hostile environments for outgroup members. Having been appointed fundamentally on ascriptive criteria, these arrowheads move to decimate the rank of non-indigenes and curb their influx by deploying administrative compromise and political interference in the recruitment, promotion and posting of staff. Recruitment becomes almost invariably based on the whims of VCs and their political overlords in government, not on the needs of the university. Inadvertently, the cognitive melodrama of recruitment by influence is implanted in the academy (Goodness, 2011).

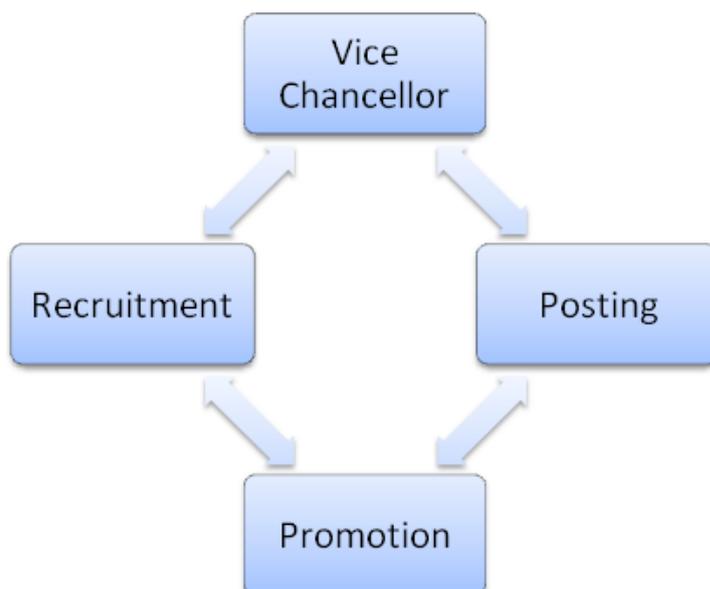


Fig. 1 Strategy for ethnic dominance.

Through recruitment, postings to substantive positions and promotions to enhance seniority, VCs actively facilitate in group dominance and power to the chagrin of out groupers. From the putative diagram (Fig. 1), it is easy to surmise that through enhanced promotion, an unduly recruited staff may be posted to a strategic position from which (s)he could rise even to the position of VC. Therefore, the different loci in the strategy for ethnic dominance are interpenetrating and interwoven with the VC at the driving seat. In an empirical phenomenological study of three universities in Nigeria by Igbafe (2021), indigenes expressed a sense of entitlement to (control) the institutions. In due course, we shall examine the involvement of higher levels of authority in strengthening the hands of the VC in the interethnic conflict in universities.

At the receiving end, outgroup members may react in various ways to cope with their hostile environments. The arrows in Fig. 2 are pointing outwards, indicating the fate of out groupers. This simple diagrammatic illustration captures the experience of all non-indigenes in public universities in Nigeria where some VCs bypass professors (and other seniors) to appoint lower-order tribesmen as heads of departments and other key administrative positions, contrary to conventions and statutes. These relegated seniors are then subjected to arbitrary rule including compromise of academic standards and procedures by the favoured and protected juniors. As we are to expect, lower-order appointees dominate the University Senate where they readily acquiesce to all manners of decisions and actions taken by the VC. In dominating the Senate and the numerous institutional committees, ingroup members overtly demonstrate their ownership and control of the university. To a large extent, this relationship of dominance may also describe the fate of non-indigenes and other outgroups outside the academy.

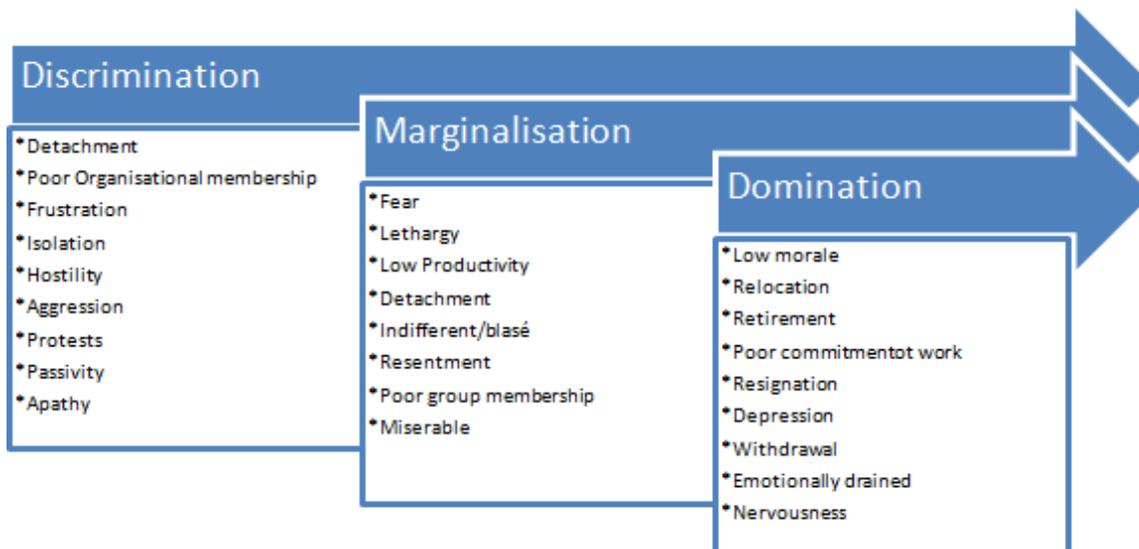


Fig. 2. Reactions to ethnic domination

University staff subjected to discrimination, marginalisation and domination on account of being ethnic outsiders or non-indigene may react in different ways as depicted in Fig.2. In other words, assuming that we can heuristically differentiate between discrimination, marginalisation and domination, there is no rule that someone who suffers discrimination may not react in the same manner as someone who suffers marginalisation and domination. In extreme circumstances, vocal ethnic outsiders may be punished through suspension from duty or promotions, or outright termination of appointment and dismissal. Others may become reticent, informants to gain reprieve and recognition or simply toe the line. More adventurous out groupers may resign and move to other universities to forestall further discrimination and marginalisation.

The proliferation of universities in Nigeria has presented opportunities for long-suffering out groupers to relocate to their home states where they quickly regroup to form new ingroups of advantage, thereby

recreating the scenario from which they escaped in their former universities. This culminates in a vicious cycle of musical chairs whereby former out groupers are transformed into in-groups with the same outcomes. In many instances, marginalised members of outgroups in federal universities have moved to their home universities as VCs or senior academics and have adopted the selfsame strategy of ethnic hegemony.

In a sense, each public university has taken on the identity of the dominant ethnic group in its immediate geographical location such that “In the south-west, it is now a herculean task for a non-Yoruba to emerge as VC in a public university, a non-Igbo has no chance of emerging as a VC of one in the south-east, just as only a northerner can aspire to be a VC in any public higher institution in the north” (Punch, 2021) Arising from this is a subliminal ethnic struggle defined by distance from the university as the VC is not only expected to be selected from the dominant/local ethnic group, but from indigenes of the community of its location.

Agitations pursuant to the appointment of indigene-VCs may be diabolical, violent and dangerous. For example, over a four-day period in 2022, indigenes of a university town in south-western Nigeria protested the appointment of an out grouper as a VC. Dressed in all-white spiritual attires, chanting incantations while performing rituals accompanied by masquerades, the protesters blocked the entrance to the university, beat up workers, and vandalised buildings (Punch, 2022). Yet the alleged out grouper hailed from the same ethnic group in a neighbouring LGA. What is worse, in the modern Nigerian public university, it is not enough to have “correct” geo-ethnic credentials. Candidates for the position of VC must also be inbred, that is, someone whose academic career is substantially owed to the institution. Of course, this excludes pioneer VCs. Blinkeredness is so ingrained that, in spite of regulations which mandate the consideration of “outsiders” in the contest, even local academic staff unions oppose such aspirants thereby inadvertently taking stands with ethnic warlords in their campaign against outgroups.

Variants of indigene outrage and sense of entitlement have become hallmarks of all public universities in Nigeria such the end of tenure of a VC is a tense period of ethnic mobilisation, solidarity building and sharpening of boundaries and identifiers of ingroups and outgroups. Likening the situation to the cut-throat contests for power in the larger polity, The Nation (2021) averred that succession crisis in the Nigerian university system marks it out not only as sick but also a source of wider infection and social contagion.

Ethnic insularity and particularism have debauched the nuanced universality of the academy. Ever looking inwards, Nigerian public universities are guilty of academic incest (Alemika, 2015), having become increasingly homogeneous, drawing staff and students from the dominant ethnic group and the host state. Occasional lip service is paid to the federal character principle through token representation of ethnic outgroups.

The increasing homogeneity of Nigerian universities has been aggravated by two other factors: intangible remunerations and unstable academic calendars. Because Nigerian academics are among the least paid in the world (Deji-Folutile, 2022; Tribune Online, 2020; Sabo et al., 2019; Bello & Isah, 2016; Aideluonoghene, 2014), they are not attractive to foreigners, a situation worsened by unstable and irregular academic calendars which isolate the country from the international cycle (Ogunbode, Oyoko & Ezema, 2022; Punch, 2020). On the other hand, whereas tuition fees and other charges in public universities are low by comparative international rates, they are not attractive because students admitted to these institutions may not know when classes will commence and those already in them do not know when they will graduate due to the perennially unsteady academic calendar. Foreign students are further excluded by cumbersome processes by which applicants for admission into all Nigerian universities are required to write two entrance examinations, the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and the Post-Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (Post-UTME), with the physical presence of candidates mandatory in the latter (Ogunode, Olatunde-Aiyegun & Mcbrown, 2022).

Therefore, ethnicity distorts rank equilibrium and worryingly influences the intellectual labour market in Nigeria. In the 21st century, exclusionary and ethnic irredentism manifesting through ingroup-outgroup hostilities has isolated public universities in Nigeria, rendering them hostile, unattractive and uncompetitive. With local ethnic groups successfully claiming ownership and subsequently dominating public universities, these institutions have shed their cloak of universality and reneged from the precepts of the ivory tower. Ethnic leadership has negated merit, thereby making it difficult to attract or retain the best (outgroup) scholars. Because leadership is ascribed to those with a sense of entitlement, intellectual reproduction is unlikely to thrive especially under the circumstances of poor funding and derelict facilities.

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM OF THE RULING ELITE

Through various actions and policies, the Nigerian ruling elite has demonstrated extreme hostility towards universities and contempt for intellectuals. In the following paragraphs I shall contextualise this anti-intellectualism by examining the rise of militant academic staff unionism as a counterforce. In the process, I shall show that ethnicity is a veritable potent force to keep the academy in tow.

From the formative years in the colony up to the Second National Development period (1970-74), Nigerian public universities, to a large extent, approximated to the ideal of the ivory tower. Government provided ample funding, while the institutions enjoyed relative autonomy and merit circumscribed appointments, recruitment and promotions. Integration into the international academic cycle was facilitated by a stable calendar and a robust exchange and linkage system.

In the aspect remuneration, the pay of the Principal of the University College, Ibadan was second only to that of the Prime Minister at independence in 1960. By 1966 a professor earned more than a federal Permanent Secretary while Assistant Lecturers earned more than their counterparts in the civil service. In comparison with the armed forces at this time, an Assistant Lecturer earned more than a Lieutenant while an Associate Professor earned more than a Brigadier-General, but a Major-General earned slightly higher than a professor (Abechi, 2016).

Even so, during this early period, there were skirmishes indicating that all was not really well with the university system. For example, at Ibadan African scholars successfully agitated for pay parity with their European counterparts in 1951 while in 1970, members of the National Association of University Teachers (NAUT) at Unilag successfully persuaded the University Council to adopt a new pay package which was shunned by government. Reference may also be made to the ethnic undertones in the appointment of the second VC of Unilag.

However, the template for the hostility toward academia was laid in 1973 when, in response to a strike action by the NAUT to back up demands for improved conditions of service, government took the unprecedented step of ordering lecturers to vacate their official residences or, in the alternative, withdraw their threat and apologise for their action (Hudu, 2015). Unprepared for this high-handed reaction, the lecturers hastily beat a retreat and went back to work, humiliated and uncertain of their future. Some left for greener pastures, thus signposting the onset of brain drain from Nigerian universities (Abechi, 2016).

The utter routing of NAUT during the 1973 strike emboldened government in its onslaught on the academy. In the following year, the Udoji Commission on the Review of Public Service introduced the unified public service system which abolished any dichotomy between universities and the civil service with the latter having the upper hand in the matter of wages. By 1975, a Captain in the army earned more than a Reader while a Brigadier-General earned more than a Professor and a Lieutenant-General earned more than VC.

Lecturers responded by transforming NAUT into the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), a more

militant organisation, in 1978 and, after strikes in 1980 and 1981, government effected marginal improvements through the Cookey Commission (1981) which introduced the University Salaries Scale (USS). Unfortunately, this minor victory for the union was reversed by the Elongated University Salaries Scale (EUSS) of 1985-93 which made public wages significantly inferior to private sector wages. Intent on regaining grounds lost to government in its battle to reclaim the academy and challenge ruling class hegemonisms, ASUU embarked on several strikes in 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986 (during which the union was proscribed), 1987, 1988, 1992, 1993 (when the union was banned again), 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 (when dozens of lecturers were dismissed at the University of Ilorin), 2002, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and almost annually thereafter until the 8-month strike of 2022 during which lecturers lost their pay. According to Olajuwon et al. (2023:4-5), “the union went on strike for about 630 days between 2015 and 2022, the longest under any administration in the country.” In 2009, government entered into a thoroughgoing agreement with ASUU on virtually all the contentious issues raised by the union. Unfortunately, government reneged on the agreement and this has constituted the apple of discord in the interminable strikes since then.

Rather than address the recurrent issues raised by ASUU, government identified the union as an enemy of the state and deployed heavy-arm tactics to suppress its agitations. For example, two presidents of the union were killed in shady circumstances. In 1988, the president of the union was found dead by his car by a federal highway (Bangura et al., 2007). The second was killed in 2013 when the union’s minibus in which he was travelling was smashed by a car in a state governor’s motorcade. Under the leadership of the latter, the union was proscribed and he was arrested, detained, banished from his official residence and dismissed from employment (Lukman, 2013).

Generally, ASUU’s incessant strikes have not yielded the desired results as government continually spurned agreements and stuck to its 1973 response template by sacking lecturers, withholding salaries, proscribing the union, arresting and detaining union leaders, issuing quit notices to lecturers in university houses or physically ejecting them and calling on union leaders to call off strikes “in the interest of students” (Chukwudi & Idowu, 2021; Akinwotu, 2019; Odiagbe, 2012). Government anti-intellectualism and control of the academy reached the lowest point in the 1990s with the appointment of Sole Administrators for universities in defiance of the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1993 which specifically pronounced against it. The most audacious example was the appointment of an army general as the Sole Administrator of Nigeria’s largest university (ABU, Zaria) from 1995 to 1998. A professor was similarly appointed at UNN from 1994 to 1998, another at the University of Maiduguri 1993-4 and at several other public universities. While we await detailed analyses of their tenures, it is on record that over 100 staff in ABU and 180 at UNN were summarily dismissed by Sole Administrators (Ikwuemesi, 2018; Arikewuyo, 2013) while another estimate holds that 1000 lecturers left Nigerian universities in the two-year period between 1998 and 2000 (Osha, 2015).

Rather than browbeat the academy, Sole Administrators exposed government flak and, as the country tethered towards the 4th Republic and democratic rule, it became an unpopular gambit and was duly condemned (Nwafor & Joseph, 2021; Anyanwu & Ewhe, 2020; Lebeau & Ogunsanya, 2015; Saint et al., 2003). Accordingly, the 2009 agreement between government and ASUU specified that there shall be no sole administration in Nigerian universities. To all intents and purposes, sole administration has been jettisoned; however, government has consolidated its stranglehold with erosion of university autonomy and the politicisation of the office of VC.

One of the few concessions won by ASUU is university autonomy. Granted by the Universities Autonomy Act No. 1, 2007, the law gives universities the autonomy to govern themselves, determine conditions of service, control admission and academic curricula, control their finances and generally regulate themselves without interference from government and its agencies (Oshio, nd-a). In spite of consistent opposition and

protests by ASUU, government has violated virtually all the provisions of the autonomy law (Azenabor, 2022; Paul & Amadin, 2017; Aguba, 2016; Olayinka, 2015; Arikewuyo, 2013; Nyewusira & Nyewusira, 2013; Ekundayo & Adedokun, 2009). For example, it exclusively determines the conditions of service in the university and issues relating to housing, salaries and allowances, pensions, employment, etc. are all circumscribed by government civil service circulars and directives. Whereas public universities have very large bursary departments, salaries are paid directly from the Ministry of Finance and ASUU objection has not deterred government from including universities in the civil service Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIIS). Research grants and attendance of conferences are now centrally administered by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Tetfund), a public bureaucracy also burdened with the physical development of universities and has now established its own academic institutes called *Pioneer Centres of Excellence* in 12 universities ostensibly “to address some specific national development challenges through the preparation of professionals, applied research and associated outreach activities” (Tribune Online, 2022).

Even more significantly, academic curricula are now centrally determined. By a law enacted in 1985, NUC was empowered to exclusively determine university curricula in Nigeria, the latest being the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) which universities are mandated to adopt in 2023. Individual university input to CCMAS is restricted to only 30% of curricula, consisting of largely non-core courses. Under CCMAS, NUC introduced six new courses and requires certain departments to change the names approved by University Senate. For example, without reference to the logic for creating a Department of Sociology and Anthropology, universities with such nomenclature are now required to drop Anthropology. The NUC, whose head, the Executive Secretary, is now addressed as His Academic Eminence, is so powerful that, without reference to extant laws, it issued a circular directing VCs to close universities from 22 February to 14 March 2023 (Suleiman, 2023). And, although, in 1997, only 24% of applicants obtained admission into Nigerian universities, NUC directed universities to cut their admission quota by 60% in 1998, just as the Education Minister was ordering the closure of satellite campuses and discontinuation of remedial courses (Osha, 2015). Admission of students is now centrally controlled by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), which also allocates admission quotas to universities to match their institutional capacities.

Government emasculation and capture of the academy has wittingly been facilitated by VCs, creating a scenario of who pays the piper dictating the tune. Under the circumstances of poor funding, violence, contradictory and inconsistent government directives, lack of freedom and autonomy as well as perennial strikes by ASUU, other staff unions and hangry students, university governance became synonymous with crisis management (Fajonyomi et al., 2017). To be successful in their quest to prevent crisis or enforce peace in the campus, VCs had to resort to underarm tactics and have increasingly become inflexible, insensitive, repressive and undemocratic (Olaiya, 2016). Accordingly, they have become less popular, depending progressively more on government muscle and ethnic backups to survive. VCs have increasingly become Chief Executive Officers, relying on personal instincts, whims and caprices, contrary to the conventional and statutory committee system which thrives on collective wisdom (Ahaotu, Ogunode & Ayisa, 2021; Ogbogu, 2013).

In view of these circumstances, the appointment of VCs has become a particularly potent medium of establishing and enforcing government control. Extant laws give Governing Councils the power to hire and fire them, a provision circumscribed by the fact that the Chairman and most members of such councils are constituted by government, making the latter the effective hirer and firer. Studies confirm that partisan politics, ethnic bias, sectional factors, religious bias, favouritism, quota system and catchment area policy overshadow academic considerations in the appointment of VCs, members of Governing Councils and other principal officers of Nigerian universities (Jacob et al., 2023; Ehijekwute et al., 2021; Omodan et al., 2020; Ogundele, 2018; Okhiku et al., 2017; Akpakwu & Okwo, 2014). Government may even bypass Governing Councils altogether. For example, in 2011, it appointed five former VCs to new terms as heads of newly

established universities, contrary to extant law which restricts tenure to one term only (Oshio, nd-b).

These days, aspirants to the position of VC are unlikely to be successful without connection to, and support from people in the corridors of power and the dominant ethnic group. Further, government unsuited dalliance with local ethnic leaders has greatly consolidated the powers of VCs in their quest to maintain order and retain power in the troubled academy. Unsurprisingly, the two prime qualities of VCs are now loyalty to political authority and membership of dominant ethnic group. These are *a priori* loyalties which members of the locally dominant ethnic group exploit with maximum effects. In some circumstances, the locally dominant ethnic group may select one of their members among the aspirants, resulting in intragroup strains. Even so, in groupers quickly rally round such lucky aspirant, offering moral and sundry supports. Moreover, such preferred aspirant is usually in a pole position to attract political support as resolute efforts are pooled to secure the appointment.

Needless to say, VCs invariably use their powers to gratiate their political and ethnic supporters within the academy as well as cronies and overlords outside of it. In separate studies, Ogunode & Ahmad (2022) and Nwodim (2021) observed that VCs now routinely employ and promote in groupers and nominees of their overlords without reference to due processes which require competitiveness and rigour. Therefore, suboptimal personnel get recruited. Sequel to recent reforms which resulted in the outsourcing of certain administrative services, some VCs deployed many redundant, overage and otherwise inappropriate personnel into academic staff in deference to ethnic and political pressures. Similar concessions are made in matters of admission when VCs use their discretionary powers to facilitate the entry of many less qualified or unqualified candidates of their benefactors and cronies (Ogunode & Musa, 2022; Ponga et al., 2018). In essence, through ethnic identity crisis, universities have replicated the vices associated with partisan politics in Nigeria and foreclosed the gains expected from the hard-won university autonomy. To those who fought for the autonomy law, VCs represent the antithesis of university culture.

The other source of hostility in the academy is the violence perpetrated by notorious student fraternities now popularly referred to as secret campus cults as well as terrorist gangs outside the campus. Allegedly offshoots of a group formed at Ibadan in the early 1950s, secret cults have occupied national limelight since the 1980s as a result of wanton violence and murders attributed to them. Although newer groups emerged from 1965, violence is traced to 1972 (Ifowodo, 2013). Among other reasons, these groups which have now mushroomed into over 50, emerged due to a combination of factors including demographic changes resulting in more youthful and impressionable population, poor parenting, peer pressure, erosion of virile student unionism and academic freedom, reduced funding of education and decaying infrastructure amidst rising poverty and harsh economic conditions, crime and growing systemic corruption as well as increasing militarisation of society even as the judicial and policing systems have become less effectual (Smah, 2021; Bakare, 2021; Ajitoni & Olaniyan, 2018; Adoga, 2017; Mediyanse, 2016; Onyeabor, 2005).

Cults have turned the campus into their forts, constituting themselves into a vicious secret police, wreaking violence and murders and preventing lecturers and students from going to offices, libraries, laboratories and reading rooms afterhours. They are known to have penetrated all other facets of society (Nnam, 2018; Ogunsanya, 2015), resulting in an emerging *folklore of cultism* in which every violent malfeasance in society is associated with campus cults (e.g., see Onyenenkwwa, 2008).

More violence has been visited by terrorist gangs and bandits who have literarily laid siege on the academy in all parts of the country. Scores of lecturers have been kidnapped for ransom while, in the University of Maiduguri, trenches have been dug around perimeter fences to defend the campus against gunfire and suicide bombings by terrorists (Deniset et al., 2021; Abiodun et al., 2020; Onwumere, 2016). Indeed, universities are unable to attract qualified staff from outside their immediate geo-ethnic environment and outside the country due to fear of crime and violence (Alemika, 2015).

FURTHER DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The academy has witnessed a sustained slide since the era of rapid proliferation of universities begun after 1975, a period during which it has become extremely hostile to academia. I have substantiated this by analysing the ignobility of ethnic hegemony and the intense anti-intellectualism of the Nigerian ruling class. Whereas the rapid growth was a response to the equally prodigious number of eligible candidates for admission, Nigeria paid a big price as the growth proceeded without concomitant growth in funding and infrastructure. To mimic Malthusian aphorism, the geometric growth in the number of universities proceeded with arithmetic growth in funding and infrastructure. Subsequent dysfunctionality may be described as the Macdonaldian price, by which rationality and quality are lost to commercialisation, marketization and massification (Dumbili, 2014).

Having identified universities as a palpable source of surplus value, the ruling class acted fast to effect its capture, a process oiled by its control of VCs and Governing Councils. The capture was a venture by a dual class dalliance with the VC at the core (Fig. 3). On one hand, we have the VC, members of the Governing Councils and a few top academics in alliance with the Visitor, heads of the education ministry and top bureaucrats, NUC and Tet Fund; on the other hand, we have the VC, members Governing Councils and a few top academics in alliance with the local traditional elite.

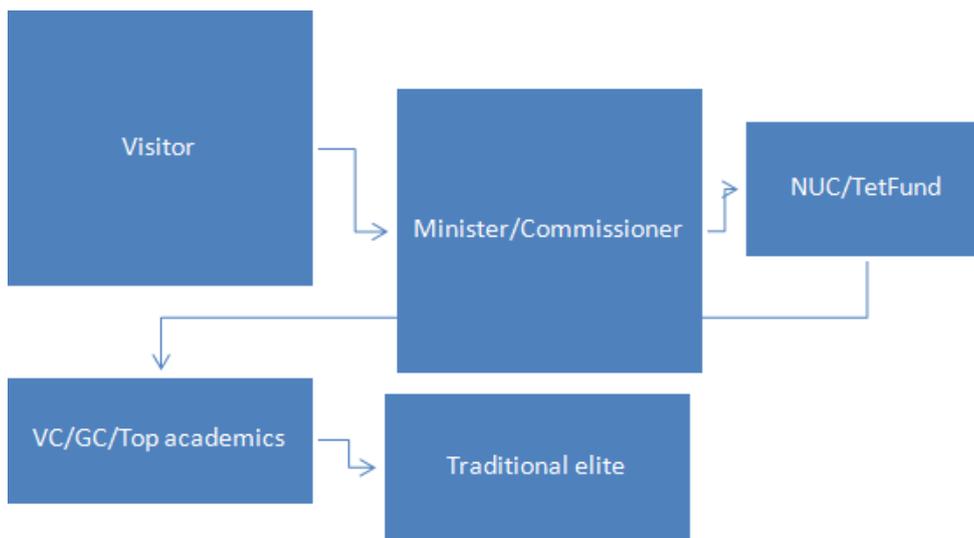


Fig. 3. Dalliances of Capture

Usually, the Visitor is almost invisible in the dalliances as his powers are practically delegated to the minister (or commissioner) of education. Yet, in spite of his dignified silence and conscious efforts to insulate him from the fray, his unseen hand is in every pie as the minister, heads of NUC, Tet Fund and VCs, in descending order of importance, are answerable to him. Notably, Visitors and VCs of state universities have only indirect influence on Tet Fund and NUC, federal agencies on which they always claim a stake. VCs are more prominent in the other dalliance involving them and the traditional elite. The latter are usually very visible in contests to appoint or reappoint VCs during which they go all lengths to insure victory for their kin.

Although the dalliances put the VCs in good steads, they are always caught in the middle during the interminable contests between ASUU and government. Because they are always wont to take sides with outside stakeholders in the dalliances, VCs make the campus uncomfortable for ethnic outsiders and any unsupportive element in the campus. To consolidate their internal support base, VCs appoint ethnic in-groupers to key positions or entice out-groupers with same. Thus, ethnicity has become an effective weapon

of divide and rule as ethnic undertones are now read into every activity, thereby worsening the polarity in the academy. Further, VCs regularly repudiate responsibility and attribute the crisis in the academy to government failure to live up to expectations. While some occasionally express muted support for ASUU, they all invariably implement harsh directives from government against academics including dismissals, suspensions and sundry privations.

With the capture of the academy, VCs have become a pawn in the game of chess in which ruling class commercial interests have subverted the purposes of higher training (Kuo, 2014) and university autonomy has been reduced to a mere slogan. Unable to determine wages of university staff, curricula, conditions of service or university calendar, VCs approximate to titular heads, perennially waiting for directives from government house, ministries of education and finance, NUC, Tet Fund, accountant-general, etc. Internally, they are accosted by an independent ASUU with who they are perpetually at loggerheads while students have been reduced to an alienated mass of certificate seekers, uninterested in the mission, vision and future of the academy.

In conclusion, we attribute institutional hostility to the interplay of social forces which transcend the academy. Initial enthusiasm on the bright prospects of the academy as a cultural melting pot and purveyor of modernity and development has been negated by the recourse to ethnicity in pursuit of narrow class (economic and political) interests by the ruling class. The capture of the academy has transformed it into an unwholesome habitat for academics. This hostility is epitomised by numerous morbidities including the tumorous growth of universities and concomitant dearth and decay of facilities and infrastructure, poor funding and measly remuneration of staff, intergroup animosities, ceaseless strikes and instability of academic calendar, academic incest, isolation and ethnic particularism, emasculation and loss of academic staff, loss of autonomy, insecurity amidst generalised violence as well as the challenge of secret cults, student unrest and apathy.

Unrelenting in its approach, government invoked the 1973 template in revoking academic staff salaries after a precedential eight-month strike in 2022. While the strike was raging, 19 new universities were established including one named after “King” David Umahi, a state governor. With the universities firmly in control of the ruling class and ASUU having (temporarily) lost its voice after the worsening of 2022, the future is uncertain.

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