

Immigration and  
Refugee Board of CanadaCommission de l'immigration  
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Canada

[Home](#) > [Research](#) > [Responses to Information Requests](#)

## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIRs](#) | [Help](#)

15 February 2005

### NGA43277.E

Nigeria: The Black Axe Confraternity, also known as the Neo-Black Movement of Africa; their treatment of anti-cultists; their forced recruitment of individuals opposed to cults; their initiation rituals and oaths of secrecy; their use of symbols or particular signs  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Recent Nigerian newspapers, reporting on a series of killings and shootings allegedly carried out by the Black Axe, explain the notoriety of the confraternity (*Daily Champion* 3 Sept. 2004; *ibid.* 27 Jan. 2005; *This Day* 12 July 2004; *Vanguard* 27 Jan. 2005; *ibid.* 23 Sept. 2004; *ibid.* 17 Aug. 2005; *PM News* 13 Sept. 2004; *ibid.* 6 Sept. 2004). Beginning with the killing of a student at Obafemi Awolow University in Ile-Ife that prompted former president Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 to give the vice-chancellor six months to wipe out cult groups (*This Day* 12 July 2004; *Daily Champion* 3 Sept. 2004), the Black Axe has been linked with bloody inter-confraternity fighting for several years (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 27 Jan. 2005; *This Day* 12 July 2004; *Vanguard* 27 Jan. 2005; *ibid.* 23 Sept. 2004; *ibid.* 17 Aug. 2005; *PM News* 13 Sept. 2004; *ibid.* 6 Sept. 2004). Media reports include a confrontation believed to have taken place between the Eiyé and the Black Axe confraternities at the Polytechnic, Ibadan, Oyo State in September 2004, during which four students died (*PM News* 13 Sept. 2004; *ibid.* 6 Sept. 2004); clashes between the Black Axe, the Vikings, and Black Beret at Enugu State University of Science and Technology, also in August 2004, resulting in the deaths of at least 18 people (*Vanguard* 17 Aug. 2004); and fighting between the Vikings and the Black Axe leading to the deaths of two or three people at Ambrose Alli University in Ekpoma, Edo State, in January 2005 (*Vanguard* 27 Jan. 2005; *Daily Champion* 27 Jan. 2005).

*Daily Champion* reporter Chuma Ifedi observes that not much is known about campus cults since they operate in secret (*Daily Champion* 3 Sept. 2004). But Daniel Offiong, a professor of sociology at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia, recently shed some light on the subject of cults, their origins, and operations in *Secret Cults in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions*. Published in 2003, the study was originally commissioned by the University of Calabar, in Nigeria, in 1992 following the rise of campus fraternities that had threatened and terrorized fellow students, faculty,

and staff in the 1980s and early 1990s (Offiong 2003, vii). Offiong supplemented his early research with enough additional data gathered through informal interviews and newspaper articles in the summers of 1999, 2000, and 2001 to produce his book, which offers a description of the Black Axe and its *modus operandi* (ibid., viii).

## Identifying Features

According to Offiong, the Black Axe, which is also known as the Neo Black Movement, originated at the University of Benin in the late 1970s and can be found at the University of Calabar and other campuses (ibid., 69). Its insignia is an upright axe with a wide blade fixed to a short handle, and its motto is "Ayei! Axemen" (ibid.). Offiong says that the members' motto, "Aye Axemen" appears on their letterhead (ibid., 49-50), while a circular attributed to the Black Axe and addressed to the University of Ilorin administration was signed the "Landlords" (*This Day* 16 Nov. 2004).

Offiong claims that the group's initial goal of promoting black consciousness and fighting for the dignity of Africans and their freedom from neo-colonialism has deteriorated into self-serving behaviour that is "notoriously and brutally violent" (Offiong 2003, 69-70). He maintains that violence has in fact become the cults official policy (ibid., 70). The Axemen's fraternity name for each other is "'Axeneb' or the butcher," and members pride themselves on their willingness to instigate violence on campus (ibid.).

As members of a confraternity or cult, they are recognizable by their clothing: They wear black pants, a long-sleeved white shirt, black coat with the axe insignia on the front and back, and a black beret with a yellow ribbon tied around it (ibid.). Members are also known to use charms and what Offiong calls "fetish rituals" to gain supernatural power and protection from rival members and police (ibid.), a practice that, Offiong alleges, has led to their ostracism by other fraternities (ibid., 72).

## Size of Membership

Offiong attributes the small size of the Black Axe membership, which is estimated to be about 200, to its identification as an ethnic fraternity (ibid.). New chapters tend to draw members from whichever main ethnic group surrounds the university in which the chapter is located (ibid., 70-71). As an example, Offiong says that the Igbo and Yoruba make up the bulk of membership at chapters in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Lagos University (ibid., 71). More recently, however, a suspected cult member arrested in February 2004 for his involvement in a fatal shooting told police that the Black Axe chapter at the Kwara Polytechnic in Ilorin had 500 members (*This Day* 16 Feb. 2004).

## Initiation

Offiong's portrayal of Black Axe initiation ceremonies echoes a research report published in 2001. Sam O. Smah of the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Jos in Nigeria describes the ceremonies as "gruesome, bloody, and barbaric" and says that, true to their secret nature, the ceremonies take place in forests or in cemeteries, usually around a bonfire, and involve dancing, singing, drug taking, the drinking of human blood, and the rape of women (Smah May 2001, 14). Offiong adds that all fraternities initiate new members on Saturdays at midnight (Offiong 2003, 82). For some cults, initiates undergo what Offiong calls the "test of manhood," which involves being flogged, kicked, and hit with belts and sticks while stripped to the pants, before being taken to the "'island'," or initiation site (ibid.). The initiates take an oath of secrecy around a bon fire and put on their fraternity clothes; they are then given a new name and made to sign a membership scroll and provide their thumbprint in blood (ibid.). Drinking, dancing, drug taking, and drumming begin when the new members are presented to the larger group (ibid., 82-83) and end in the early hours of the morning with a procession (called the "'jolly'" by the Black Axe) to the new members' lodgings (ibid., 83).

## Recruitment

Offiong says that recruitment into campus cults such as the Black Axe may be voluntary, but can be forced (2003, 77). The confession of the suspected Black Axe member arrested in February 2004, whereby he claims to have been "forcefully initiated" into the group by his friend, seems to support Offiong's contention (*This Day* 16 Feb. 2004). Describing their tactics as a mixture of propaganda, misinformation, and psychological warfare, Offiong says the cults mainly target first-year students by portraying the university environment as hostile and students as in need of protection (Offiong 2003, 77-78). However, according to newspaper reports, cults have recently begun recruiting in secondary schools too (*Daily Champion* 3 Sept. 2004; *Vanguard* 17 Aug. 2004). Kingsley Ekwenye, the chairman of the Violent Crimes, Crises and Cultism Eradication and Management Committee of the National Association of Nigerian Students, says that secondary schools have become "'a breeding ground for young and fresh cultists'" and that the young students are used to gather information and run errands (ibid.).

The cults apparently advertise with bulletins and assign individual cult members the task of befriending potential recruits to convince them to join (Offiong 2003, 78). They also have application forms potential members can fill out (ibid., 78). When security officers at the Enugu Campus of the University of Nigeria confiscated a car used by the culprits in a campus shooting, they found an application form for the Black Axe (*Vanguard* 23 Sept. 2004). If, after taking an application form, a would-be member does not complete and return it, the cult members threaten the

person, declaring him their enemy, until out of fear he relents and joins the group (Offiong 2003, 79). As Offiong says, citing N. Osuagwu as an expert writing on cults in the early 1990s, the cults cajole, hound, and threaten people to become members (ibid.). A 1998 *Tell Magazine* story by A. Adebajo, which Smah quotes, suggests that opposition to the cults is dangerous; cult members have permanently maimed those who oppose their plans and given concrete reason to fear them (Smah May 2001, 14).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

### References

*Daily Champion*. [Lagos]. 27 January 2005. Vincent Adekoye. "Three Die in Ekpoma Varsity Cult Clash."  
<<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200501270160.html>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 3 September 2004. Chuma Ifedi. "Capital Punishment for Cultism."  
<<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200409030514.html>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

Offiong, Daniel A. 2003. *Secret Cults in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions*. Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd.

*P.M. News*. [Lagos]. 13 September 2004. Idowu Akinrosaye. "Cultists Strike at Ibadanpoly, 4 Dead."  
<<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200409131247.html>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 6 September 2004. Idowu Akinrosaye. "4 Feared Killed in Ibadan Poly Cults Clash."  
<<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200409071171.html>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

Smah, Sam O. May 2001. *Perception and Control of Secret Cult and Gang-Induced Difficulties for Quality Living and Learning in Nigerian Universities: The Case Study of Universities in the Middle Belt Zone*. (Copy provided by the author).

*This Day*. [Lagos]. 16 November 2004. "UNILORIN: Cultists Deny Involvement in Killings."  
<<http://thisdayonline.com/archive/2003/05/22/20030522news29.html>> [Accessed 7 Jan. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 12 July 2004. Onwudo Francis. "Students Decry Govt's Inability to Unmask Colleagues' Killers." <<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200407120739.html>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 16 February 2004. Tunde Sanni. "Police Arrest Corps Member, 3 for Cultism." <<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200402160812.html>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

*Vanguard*. [Lagos]. 27 January 2005. "Two Killed in Ambrose Alli Varsity Cult Clash." <<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200501270357.html>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 23 September 2004. Tony Edike. "Cultism: Dusk to Dawn Curfew at UNN." <<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200409230652.html>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 17 August 2004. Tony Edike. "18 Die as Cultists Clash in Enugu." <<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200408170099.html>> [Accessed 8 Feb. 2004]

### **Additional Sources Consulted**

Norway. October 2004. Directorate of Immigration and Immigration Appeals Board. *Report from a Fact-Finding Trip to Nigeria* (Abuja, Kaduna and Lagos) 23-28 February 2004.

**Internet Sources** : Allafrica.com, BBC News, Ingenta Connect

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.