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Cultism: A Destructive Concept in the Educational Development of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

Security threat has for long constituted a major impediment to the smooth academic pursuit in Nigeria. It is an understatement to say that the environment devoid of peace cannot enhance a meaningful learning. The threat to human lives and properties has escalated beyond mere imagination with the spate of violence of all forms including assassination, robbery, theft, burglary and murder. The tertiary institutions in Nigeria have not been left out of this serious threat to the breakdown of law and order. Cultism

has become a major social problem in the Nigerian tertiary institutions as its activities and mode of operation are usually shrouded in secrecy and are inimical to the interests of the institutions in particular and the society in general. This unfortunately has to do with the menace of secret cults. Relevant literatures were gathered for this study through secondary source of data. The findings of the study are the lack of the fear of God, lack of parental guidance, god fatherism influence etc. are some hindrance to the eradication of secret cults. It was therefore recommended that the eradication of secret cult demands the total commitment of all the elements of social structure; school, religious institutes, government and the society.

Introduction

The greatest and the most embarrassing problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is the renewal of the menace and aggressiveness of cult activities. Obviously, cultism is said to be the mother of crimes in tertiary institutions, and this phenomenon has negatively affected the image of our institutions, the learning quality and integrity of the grandaunts.

According to Ogunade (2002) secret cult is an enclosed organized association of group devoted to the same cause. It is an enclosed group having an exclusive sacred ideology and series of rites cantering around their secret symbols. Cultic activities are sometimes laden with blood. It may be the blood of an animal or that of human beings. He claimed that during initiation rites or during rival group clashes within the University setting, blood flows during which many lives are lost in the process.

Cultism can be defined as a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their mode of operations are done in secret and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike (Ajayi, 2015). Thomas (2002) asserted that confraternities operated at no degree of violence when they emerged in the 1950's. Unfortunately, they were later high jacked by military governments who were anxious to consolidate their holds on University students who might challenge their authorities. For example virile student Unionism was perceived by military authorities as a threat to their power consolidation. Consequently, secret cults were used to neutralize student unions and their "anti-government activities", especially those which questioned or challenged the authorities of military dictatorship. Consequently, what started as club or some socially conscious students, who chose to be "different" has become club of blood thirsty and blood sucking monsters who parade themselves students.

The eradication of secret cults from tertiary institutions has become unachievable goal in spite of the government commitment to clutch this societal ill from existence. Against this background, the paper tends to critically x-ray the hindrance to its extinction, effects and strategies to stop cultism in tertiary institutions.

Definition of Terms

- Cultism:** Thesaurus Dictionary defined cultism as a religious or religions sec generally considered to be extremist or false, with its followers often living in an unconventional manner under the guardians of authoritarian and charismatic leader.
- Menace:** Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defined menace as a person or thing that causes or may cause serious damage, harm or danger.
- Eradication:** To remove or destroy utterly.
- Institution:** An organization, establishment, foundation, society, or the like, devoted to the promotion of a particular cause or program, especially one of a public, educational or charitable character.
- Student:** A person formally engaged in learning, especially one enrolled in a school, college or University.

Historical Development of Campus Cultism in Nigeria

In the 1953/54 session at the University College Ibadan, now University of Ibadan, seven idealist young students namely Wole Soyinka (now Professor), Pius Oleghe, Raph Opara, Tunji Tubi, Daign Imokhue, Olu Agunlay and Muyiwa Awe (now Emeritus Professor of Physics) formed the Seadogs Confraternity (a.k.a Pyrates). According to Orintusin (1990). The ideas behind the formation of the confraternity were both patriotic and altruistic as it was not imagined as a secret cult. The main objectives of the Seadogs were to be non-violent but intellectually and effectively be against the imposition of foreign conventions; to revive the age of chivalry; and to find a lasting solution to the problems of tribalism and elitism.

In 1972, a schism occurred within the confraternity; some of the members were expelled and they promptly started a rival organization, buccaneers confraternity. About the same time, an informal association friends who got together in Nnamdi Hall of UI in 1965, was transformed into the Eiye Confraternity. It is to be noted, the three confraternity started from University of Ibadan (UI). In 1962/63 session, four Universities came on stream, namely: the University of Nigeria Nsukka, the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), University of Lagos and Ahmadu Bello University. More of Universities were subsequently established in different parts of the country. During the 1970s, the three confraternities started to spread to other tertiary level educational institutions throughout the country. (Muyiwa, 2004). In the early 1990s, female students started their own cults.

Their original idea has suffered so much corruption that no one now likes to be openly identified with campus cults. They have degenerated to secret societies and

have become a terror not only to communities within the tertiary level institutions where they are based, but also to outside communities as well.

According to Adewale (2005) is a by-product of many decades of military rule in Nigeria and its attendant culture of institutionalized violence. Indeed the onset of military rule in Nigeria seemed to have coincided with the metamorphosis of the original Pyrates confraternity to secret cults.

According to Muyiwa (2004) whatever they profess to stand for, their deeds which are known and publicized are now essentially evil. They include:

- i. Cult activities mostly in the night
- ii. Nocturnal invitation ceremonies in which initiates are animalized and some die in the process
- iii. Making blood covenants and performing other occultic rituals.
- iv. Organized opposition against any kind of oppression real or imagined.
- v. Liberal consumption of alcohol
- vi. Use of drugs
- vii. Intimidation and use of violence
- viii. Extortion
- ix. Stealing
- x. Armed Robbery
- xi. Arson
- xii. Sexual abuse and rape
- xiii. Examination malpractices
- xiv. Maiming
- xv. Manslaughter and murder

A roll call of cultists in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions as at August 2003:

1. Black Axe
2. Black beret fraternity
3. Black Bra
4. Buccaneers
5. Black Cats
6. Cappa Vendetto
7. Daughters of Jazebel
8. Eiye confraternity
9. Green Beret Fraternity
10. Klu Klux kan (kk) confraternity
11. Knight Cadet
12. Maphites
13. Mgba Mgbo Brothers

14. Musketeers fraternity
15. Neo-Black Movement
16. Ostrich fraternity
17. Panama
18. Pyrates confraternity
19. Red Sea Horses
20. Royal Queens
21. Sea Dogs
22. Temple of Eden Fraternity
23. Sun men
24. The Amazons
25. The Barracudas
26. The Canary
27. The Frigates
28. The Dragons
29. Himalayas
30. The Mafioso fraternity
31. The Scorpion Fraternity
32. The Soires fraternity
33. The Vikings
34. The Wairus
35. Third Eye Confraternity
36. Trojan Horse
37. Oasis of the silhouette
38. Vipera
39. White Angels
40. Lucifer knights
41. Mafians

Cited in Obamwonyi (2004).

Menace of Cultism

According to Oyegoke (2003). It will amount to stating the obvious if cultism is said to be the mother of crimes in tertiary institutions today. The problem of cultism has been so overwhelming that nearly every arms of the education industry in Nigeria has been infested. What originally was designed to be a positive force or pressure group later turned out to be an instrument of intimidation, extortion, undue influence and political brigandage. It is regrettable to note what began in one institution has now spread like a wildfire to another institutions. The adverse effects of cultism in educational institutions have continued to be a source of worry to governments. The most disturbing aspect of cult activities in tertiary institution is the fact that the practice

places high premium on violence and total disregard for the sanctity of lives. This ferocity often betrays the false appearance of innocence of most cultists,

The menace and aggressiveness of cult members and cult related activities is the most embarrassing problem facing tertiary institutions as this has resulted to escalated crime wave in the various institutions of learning today. According to Okwu (2006) as at September 2003, 5,000 students and lecturers have died on Nigerian Campus as a result of cult related violent clashes. On 8th June 2006, some cult members invaded University of Ado-Ekiti at 12 noon where they burnt the cadet's office, killed three students and wounded many students and staff of the University (Omoegun and Akanle, 2007). Ogidefa (2008) reported that Tony Ileogbuna, Acting Head of Geology Department at the Enugu State University of Science and Technology was murdered. Yomi Edeki of University of Benin was killed on February 4th; Tuesday, March 9, 2004 Vincent Uloho of University of Benin City was also murdered in cold blood.

The Secretary General of the Student Union of University of Benin (W. Obong) was killed by cult members during a parliamentary setting in 1997. Jekayinfa (2008) enumerated some of the menace of the secret cults in the Nigeria institutions of higher learning thus:

- The Principal Assistant Registrar of Delta State University – Peter Obodo was murdered in cold blood by cultists over issue burdering on school administration.
- Mr. Ileoje, the Head of Department at the Institute of Technology (IMT). Enugu was shot in his Office by a female cult member early in 1997.
- Early in 1997, a final year Banking and Finance student at the Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti (OSUA) was killed for deflection. He was murdered in his hostel after renouncing cultism.
- On July 10, 1999, seven undergraduates of the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ife, were murdered in cold blood in their sleep by secret cult members from within out and outside the Campus.
- At the University of Ibadan, the Chief Security Officer was brutally beaten by cult members in the presence of his wife and children.

Reasons Why Students Join Secret Cults

Most of the people who join secret cults are of the adolescent age (15 – 22 years) and as a result of personal volition or out of intimidation. Some of the strategies cultist use to lure and recruit new members are cajoling, set up, Talent hunting and intimidation.

There are so many reasons which compel student to join a cult. Basically, the following are some of the reasons.

Protection

The most common antic employed in luring ignorant student is the protection fable. They make an ignorant student believe that they can give their victim absolute protection being the most powerful and strongest cult that nobody or cult group can cross their path without paying dearly for it. In order to seek power for protection from attack from rival cults, and intimidation from fellow students, some students join the secret cults. Some students are made to believe that as members of secret cults, they are certainly free to command respect from fellow students. They see it as a way of getting rid of their timidity.

Inferiority Complex

Students who join cult groups for this reason make mistakes due to their perception that the cult organization is a place where they can find people who will readily accept them without regard to their social status. And not knowing that segregation exists in cult organization. Some students join cultist as a result of inferiority Complex. This is very common among students from disorderly homes and poor families. They believe that becoming a cultist would forestall those who they assume to be superior to them from looking down on them.

Economic Gain

According to Oyegoke (2003) cult members are given the wrong impression that they stand a better chance of becoming economically more buoyant than non-members. Students from poor homes are easily won over with this gimmick. They are told that for them to live well and have access to so many avenue of making money on campus, the only way is to join a cult organization. They make their victims believe that they can be independent of their poor parents' assistance. So many students from poor home fall victim of this. There is no normal and legitimate means of making money in the cult world. The only means cultists employ in getting money is by forceful extortion of money from their fellow students, some are involved in stealing and armed robbery.

Frustration

A lot of students join cult groups out of financial, academic, social and psychological frustration. These students usually resort to drug taken a way out after which become a cultist trooping for a miraculous solution.

The Love for Female Students

There are students who join cult groups because they think female students will like to go out with them. And can use their status as cultist to force any girl on campus to go out with them.

Peer Group Influence

Most students joined various cult groups due to peer group influence and pressure. Students who became cultist due to this factor have done so, based on the assumption that they don't want to be seen as weaklings and mere men by their friends who are cultists. This group of students fails to realize that a popular decision taken by a bandwagon is not always right. So many youths have placed their destinies at the mercy of their peer groups due to their negative decision (Ufuoma, 2007). Actually, no doubt that peer group's influence is a strong force that compels young students to join secret cults. The period of adolescence is marked by intense social relationship in any environment he or she finds himself. At adolescent, there is a shift of emphasis on social relationship from parents to peer group (Ibeh, 2005).

Revenge Bid

Many students join cult groups to carry out vengeance, because of their unforgiving spirit, have taken the destructive decision of joining cults. This is as a result of either somebody who is higher in authority or status that has offended them or member of their family. They think being a cultist would make their goal attainable.

Some Antics and Tricks Used by Cultist in Luring Students into Cultism

Cultists are very cunning and smart in the art of canvassing for members. They tell students all sorts of lies and they do everything humanly possible to get them initiated. A seasoned cultist may resort to telling lies to convince his victim that the school authority is responsible for the funding and running of their activities, and that they provide security for some top management staff. Some cultist are children of prominent members of the University community are normally use in this kind of approach. The-would-be cultists therefore is easily deceived into thinking that some cultists are sacred cows on campus. Besides telling ignorant students that they work hard in hand with school authorities they also tell them that most lecturers are their members. The purpose of these lies is to make an ignorant student believe that their lecturer members can influence their scores after examination. These are all fatal lies.

In the act of canvassing and brain washing, the status and background of their victim is taken into consideration so as to know how to go about it. Most times, cultist like to go for students with sound financial background because of the support they can get from them in running their illegal activities and for the procurement of arms and ammunition for the cult organization. They make students to believe that their cult is

the most powerful on campus and that nobody would dare intimidate or harass him. The truth is that only a non-cultist can live as freely as he wishes on campus.

Sometimes cultist set-up non-yielding student against same group member by levelling allegation of going out with their girlfriend. The allegation against victim is usually accompanied with intimidation, harassment and consequently he is beaten up. And to forestall such embarrassment will opt for the option of joining a cult so as to defend himself.

There are cult groups who go an extra mile in ensuring that an un-yielding student is initiated by all means possible. For example there are cultists who forcefully hold their victims captive at a gun point and lead him into the bush or a waiting car as the case may be and thereafter, take their victim to the initiation ground for initiation rites. There are also cult groups who are good at organizing parties. The use such forms to get un-compromising students. Most students who are party freaks usually fall for this bait. These cult organizations that use party as gimmick to entice their victims, usually invite their victims out of the party when the party got into full swing. As soon as their victim comes out, they are held at gunpoint and taken to where the initiation rites are taking place and thereafter initiated against their will. All those who might fall victim of this circumstance to report immediately to the school security department or the nearest police station irrespective of the threat from the cult group responsible for it, instead of accepting a fate which will surely lead them to destruction.

The Difficulties in Secret Cults Eradication

For some decades now, various efforts have been made to deal with the problem of cultism. Some of the measures include the enactment of Decree 47 of 1989 that pronounced a number of years jail term for any cultist found guilty. The Federal Republic of Nigeria under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000 issued a three month ultimatum to all Vice-Chancellors to eradicate cultism from the Campus. Despite the various measures, the eradication becomes an uphill task. Some of the difficulties in exterminating the secret cults and their dastard acts are:

1. **Social and Moral Decadence:** The degeneration in social and moral values permeates to every segment of society. The love for money has gone beyond human description to the extent that people don't care about the sources of riches being paraded by some Nigerians that are celebrated. Ogunbamem (1997) is saddened that the Nigerian society has willingly or unwillingly provided an enabling environment for all form of crime among which is the problem of Campus secret cult. And that Nigerian has replaced honour with dishonour as a standard attitude.

2. **Lack of The Fear of Good:** The lack of the fear of God makes people engages in all forms of evil acts. The consciousness of the almighty God has departed from their heart as wickedness has taken charge.
3. **Godfatherism Influence:** Most of the student cultists imitate what the adults in the Society do. Highly respected personalities in the society who are cult members give cover to student cultists. Cultists who occupy prominent positions in society thus encourage the young ones to press forward in the evil act.
4. **Lack of Parental Guidance:** Broken houses have drastic negative impact on the upbringing of children. Such unguided and unguarded children grow up becoming a ready ingredient for cultism. According to Mgbekem (2004) some parents cover their children to the extent of pampering them. When they do a wrong thing instead of scolding them, they allow the children go free from the offence. They grow up with such negative habit and consequently imbibe criminally oriented behaviour which leads them to joining cult groups.
5. **Unreliable Judicial Process:** Some time ago, the integrity of the judiciary was also completely eroded as criminals walk out of suffice with impunity. Cultists standing trial usually get away easily, even when there is overwhelming evidence to convict them and most cases the accused is discharged on technical ground. This act as impetus for those disserving to be cultists.
6. **Authorities Patronage:** Cultist groups enjoyed subtle supports and patronage from both government and school authorities. Cult members were sometimes used by politicians for revenge and for settling personal scores. According to Ogidefa (2008), that there are allegations that some Vice-Chancellors were sponsoring cult activities in their Universities to silence the voice of dissent. This appears not to augur well for a citadel of learning.

The Effects of Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Many students became cultist without knowing the inherent dangers associated with cultism. Some of the negative effects of being a cult member are:

1. **Life of Insecurity:** The threat to cultist life. A lot of lives and properties have been destroyed in the course of clashes without occurring to them that they could be victims of the cult war. In the cult world the strongest, the bravest, the weaklings and the most careful one have been killed. The most unfortunate thing is that those who are mostly killed are those who were not party to what led to these clashes. Many ignorantly walked into the hand of their assailants without the knowledge of a brawl or clash between their cult and a rival cult.

A cultist lives a life of insecurity. He is not sure of the next momentous clashes can erupt any moment, time and place.

2. **Threat to Family:** Cult clashes have actually gone beyond the perimeter fence of the Campuses to rival cult members home. A lot of the cult family members have been killed at their home for the escape of the son by their own cult group in course of leadership tussle and rival cut group in the case of clash.
3. **Mortgage of Liberty:** The oath taken during the initiation implies that you have sold your liberty, freedom and everything about yourself to the cult organization. The allegiance to the cult authority is total. This means a cultist doesn't have control over his or her life and to a reasonable extend the cult authority dictate or determine activities of their member. Any one fall short of their rules and regulations pay dearly for it.
4. **Disrupted Academic Programme:** The academic calendar of the tertiary institution in Nigeria is always disrupted as a result of the affected Campus peace whenever there is cult invasion. The violent activities of the cultist on campus have affected the educational development in the country. In most times the academic activities in the institutions are brought to a standstill as a result of the activities of these nocturnal groups.
5. **Threat to Cultist Academic:** According to Ufuoma (2002), every cultist stands the risk of being rusticated or expelled from school, so many cultists in the past have either been rusticated or expelled from various higher institutions across the country due to their involvement in cult activities. For so many, such expulsion and rustication occurred towards the end of the successful completion of their academics. In most times the cultist suffer for the offence committed for other cultists from another school who have nothing at stake in the institution. Cultists are also prone to longer years on Campus. They always occupied themselves with nocturnal activities at the detriment of the academic which result in the basket of carry-overs usually prolong their stay on campus. Also cults abandon their examinations for the fear of being attacked by members of rival cults or picked up by law enforcement agents. Thereby end up with automatic spill-over (final year) and beg of carry-overs. Almost all the cult clashes recorded occur during examination periods.
6. **The Threat of Law Enforcement Agents:** Cultists are living in perpetual fear of being arrested during and after cult clashes. A lot of cultist have abandon the education for their fear of being arrested after been named against cult operation. Those caught by the police languishes in cells in the police stations.

Government Efforts So Far to Combat Cultism

Over the past decades, internal and external measure have been adopted to combat the menace of the ugly phenomena called cultism in the various citadels of learning in Nigeria amongst are decrees and enacting legislation to clutch or possibly eradicate it, regulative measure by the school authorities etc.

The first attempt made by the Federal Government of Nigeria to curtail the cultism was the enactment of Decree 47 of 27th December 1989 (Student Union Activities Control and Regulation). The decree was introduced by the General Babangida Military Administration empowering the various Governing Council to each University to control cultism. Also under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in the year 2000 issued a three months automation to all Vice-Chancellors to eradicate cultism from the Campuses.

Some institutions and non-government agencies have engaged in campaigns against cultism exposing menace both in sign bills and seminars in schools. University of Benin has made it very mandatory for all admitted students to tender an affidavit of non-cultist before engaging in their clearance.

Conclusion

Realizing the havoc which cultism has wrecked on both members of the academic community and considering the effort of government to curb the menace which appears fruitless, all hands must be on deck to combat the menace. To successfully combat the problem of secret cults, general education on the adverse effects of cultism must be embarked on by all agencies of education. Consequently, churches, mosques, school, administrators, parents, government and society at large must fuse efforts to combat cultism.

Recommendations

Cultism is a major social vice bedevilling our institutions of higher learning and our society today. It is an uphill task to completely eradicate cultism in the society. However, steps can be taken to drastically reduce the negative effects of secret cults in our tertiary institutions and the society in general. The eradication of secret cults demands the involvement of every element of social structure in society. That the strategy of control must focus on the home, school, religious institutions, government and the society.

1. Home

The battle for the eradication starts from the home and parent should ensure the under listed responsibilities.

- (a) Parents should desist from being members of secret cults and also discourage their children from being members.
- (b) Show good examples, instil moral discipline and fear of God to their wards.
- (c) Parents should indulge in counselling, follow-up of their academic/social lives, associate and partner with the school for the correct of any negative trait in the children.

2. School

- (a) Admission must be based on academic and moral merits, while a proper administrative system must be put in place to address the academic, social and welfare need of students.
- (b) A comprehensive orientation must be organized for all the new students expressing the various recruitment strategies and negative effects of the cultism on campus.
- (c) Any academic or non-academic staff found to be cultic should appropriately be disciplined.
- (d) Regular impromptu search of suspected cultist room must be embarked on.
- (e) The Security Department must be empowered for the proper policing of the campus (properly trained, equipped and funded).

3. Government

- (a) Politicians and others in government circle should learn to curtail their urge for material acquisition, put the interest of Nigeria above their selfish interest and provide leadership by example.
- (b) Government should avoid symbolic policies and formulate workable policies aimed at reducing unemployment, corruption, poverty, illiteracy, etc.
- (c) Government and school authorities should avoid using cult groups in pursuing their selfish interest. The decree 47 of 1989 should be strictly enforced.

4. Religious Organizations

- (a) Religious organization and social institutions still remain a force to reckon with in the crusade against crime.
- (b) Aggressive evangelism of waging war against cultism in all tertiary institutions should be allowed by all religious groups in the country.

- (c) Moral messages should be preached while the cleric lives reflecting fully the messages and stop celebrating wealth as this will reduce crime generally in the society.

5. Society

Society encompasses the home, the school, religious organizations, business organization and government. Children are raised up in the homes, trained or brought up in the schools and finally ending in larger society. Listed below are some of the expected societal roles in the reduction of crime generally.

- (a) Dignity and respect should be accorded to hard labour, honesty and good conduct rather than to worshipping money. Religious organization should desist from honouring fraudster simply because they are wealthy.
- (b) Leaders must imbibe the fear of God in ordinate acquisition of materials wealth to the detriment of the down trodden must stop.
- (c) The communities where tertiary institutions are situated should assist such institution by providing genuine information about individuals and groups whose activities are questionable. Landlords should be advised to properly screen students or other tenants who come to live in area of high student concentration. All such reports should be copied to school authorities or law enforcement agencies.

6. Students

Students who are non-cultists who find themselves in a situation where they are being lured by cultists, never to allow such discussions get far. Tell the cultist point blank that you are not interested in such discussion because you don't desire to belong to any cult group. If he persists just quietly walkway from him. Don't be scared that you will be harassed or intimidated, knowing that cultist always use the instrument of fear to intimidate. If you are resolute in year decision, that you don't want to belong to any cult, they will leave you alone. When a student is continually harassed and intimidated as a result of uncompromising stand in refusing to join a cult group. The best bet is to report to the school's security department or a nearby police station as earlier advised.

It is advisable at this junction that whenever a student is having any misunderstanding with cultists as a result of other issues besides advances at them to join a cult, there is always a change of such misunderstanding developing to different stages. The student will do himself good by reporting the matter to the security department. Do not employ the assistance of other cultists to settle your misunderstanding. They can use it as an opportunity to exploit you financially. Non-cults should avoid close relationship with cultists

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