

An Appraisal of Cultism as a Contemporary Social Vice in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study examined cultism as one of the contemporary social vices in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The concept of cultism and its brief historical background and original objectives were considered in this paper. It also discussed the characteristics and different types of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The causes and effects of sectarianism and some strategies to curb sectarian activities on campus were outlined, such as education on discipline and moral values by parents, avoidance of bad company by students and others. The paper suggested that the government should introduce the death penalty that religious leaders should preach and realign their values, and that campus publication such as newsletters, journals and magazines should be encouraged to publish to expose cult activities.

Keywords: Cultism, moral decadence, tertiary institution, social vices

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INTRODUCTION

One of the critical and embarrassing problems facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is the menace and aggressiveness of cult members and cult related activities. According to Tolutope (2021), there is hardly no academic session without reported cases of attacks, killings and maiming of cultists in operations in most Nigerian tertiary institutions. The persistent prevalence and remorseless activities of secret cults in the Nigerian educational institutions have wrought countless destruction and mayhem on the lives and psyche of so many Nigerians. They quickly invaded secondary and even primary schools in the country. Members of the armed forces were associated with their cruel activities. Cultism and many other social vices are linked to the economic hardship caused by poverty brought about by corruption. A cult may be said to proceed from a great and excessive admiration or belief in a person or an idea. This may be expressed in rituals, hymns, songs and worship. It is an undeniable practice that should be difficult to refute even with the best of arguments. Cultism

is defined as a secret cult or mysterious organizations whose activities are kept secret out of public knowledge or consumption and uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols which is formed to promote their activities. It is seen as set of practices, belief systems or ideas which essence is only known to the inner members and is excessively admired and defended even to the point of laying down their lives (Opaluwa, 2009). According to Adetunberu (2006) there are about hundred different cult groups in Nigerian Tertiary Institution. He maintained that as at September 2005; over 6,000 students and lecturers had died o Nigerian campuses as a result of cult related violent clashes. The existence of cult groups and its activities have been on the increase in our tertiary institutions leading to disruption of academic programmes and activities, loss of lives, insecurity and destruction of infrastructures. Promising young men and women lives have been cut short by the bloody hands of murderous cult gangs in universities. Cultism invasion in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria also comes with series of violence,

torture, suppression and unwarranted intimidation perpetrated by their groups and this has spread beyond institutions of higher learning to secondary schools in Nigeria (Fasanmi, 2006). Admittedly, it is important to note that the quality of higher education and learning depends not only on the content of teaching and the curricular but also on the life in the campus. Echekwube (2005) revealed that many students join cult groups unaware of the negative impacts of the membership of cultism on their academic pursuits. However, many students perceive the impact of cultism on academic performance as high. Others perceive cult members as frequently having problems with their learning.

The concept of cultism

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996), defines cultism as a small group of people whose religious activities and beliefs are typically secret, esoteric and individualistic. Lexican Webster's Dictionary defines secret cult as a group of people who share a common cause and whose mode of meetings and agenda are unknown to the public and where initiation into rank and file is usually done in secret. In the words of Ogunbameru (2004), secret cult is any form of organization whose activities are not only exclusively kept away from the knowledge of others but such activities are carried out at odd hours of the day and they often clash with the accepted norms and values of everyday life. One can therefore say that cultism is a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, Policy and initiation formalities as well as mode of operations are done in secret and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members.

The origin of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions

According to Echekwube (2005). Cultism in Nigeria begins in the pre-colonial era when a group of people with the aim of seeking protection from their ancestors conducted rituals. Everywhere in the world there appear to be different types of secret ritual groupings are maintained on the articulation of organizational functions for a variety of social and political reasons. These secret societies differ in what is kept secret and what is made public. In some of them, membership is secret but the rituals are not; while in some instances, membership is made public but the rituals are secret. The origin of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions could be traced to 1952 when seven friends known as the Magnificent Seven who founded the Pyrates Confraternity in University College, Ibadan. They include Mr. Wole Soyinka (now a renowned Professor), Ralph Opara, Pius Oleghe, Ikpehare Aig-Imoukhuede.

Others include Nathaniel Oyelola, Olumuyiwa Awe and Sylvanus U. Egbuche .

The objectives of the organization were:

1. To fight against un-acceptable conventions of dress, etiquette and behaviour.
2. To fight for humanistic ideals which review the soul life on campus and establish discipline, orderliness etc in youngsters; and
3. To fight against corruption and tribalism

Some characteristics associated with secret cults

Ogidefa (2008) revealed some characteristics associated with cultism as follows:

1. They operate mostly at night and usually move in groups.
2. They performed initiation to all new members mostly in an inhumane way.
3. They always engage in violent, instill fear on non-members, and Take vengeance for their members even my killing others.
4. They speak in coded language understandable by their members only.
5. They also have certain signs or appears which members only understand

Classification of cult groups in Nigeria

According to Itedgere, (2006) the prominent cult groups in Nigeria can be broadly classified into five groups:

1. Classical confraternities: These include pirates formed in 1952, Buccaneers formed in 1972 and Vikings.
2. God-father secret cults: Under this group we have the Malcom. They are groups formed to pitch tents against lecturers and oppressive students.
3. Female cults: These include the Amazon, Black Brassier and Charlies Angel. They are spy groups for the male cultists e.g. the Black Axe confraternity has its female cult known as Black ladies clubs formed in 1992 in University of Benin
4. Mafia Club: The common features of this group are drug, terrorism, nefarious activities, rape and oppression.
5. Terrorist secret cult: These are violent in nature. A list of secret cults is presented in the appendix attached at the end of these papers.

Various Types of Cults in Nigeria

According to Abdu (2013) there are about hundred different cult groups in Nigeria and some of them that to

Table 1: Some of the list of cult groups in Nigeria Universities.

Names of cult groups in Nigeria Universities	
1. The Pyrate confraternity	16. The Jurist
2. The Buccaneers	17. The Temple of Eden
3. The Black cats	18. Royal Queens (women only)
4. Black Brassier (women only)	19. The Blood suckers
5. The Vikings	20. The seven colours
6. Trojan Horse fraternity	21. Executioners
7. The Amazon (for women only)	22. The Ninjas
8. The Black Beret	23. The Blood lines
9. The Mafia	24. The Night Cadet
10. The Black Scorpion	25. The Dreaded friends of friends
11. The Dragons	26. The National Association of Adventurers
12. The Termites	27. Tha Black night
13. Gentle men s club	28. The Burkina Faso Revolution
14. The Vampires	29. The Black cobra
15. The Eagle club	30. Eiye confraternity

exist in educational institutions in Nigeria include (Table 1).

Causes of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions

The various causes of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions can be examined as follows:

Parental background

According to Olajugbe (2001), parental background and lack of moral instruction at home and the manner in which the child is brought up could be a factor in enrolment as a cult member. While some parent who are members of cult groups may try to initiate their children, some may love their children to the extent of pampering them. This means that when they do a wrong thing, instead of scolding or beating them, they allow the child to go free from the offence. Such children grow up with such negative habit and consequently, imbibe criminally-oriented behaviours which make them to be attracted to joining cult groups. Ayodele (2002) opined that cult membership may be as a result of broken homes where child abuse and neglect are very rampant.

Peer group influence

Most students join secret cults as a result of peer influence. Ibeh (2005) stated that the period of adolescence is marked by intense social relationship in any environment the finds himself. At adolescent, there is a shift of emphasis on social relationship from the parents to the peer group who can easily influence them to join cult on the campus.

Poor academic performance

Those who are academically poor do engage to in cultism to cover up their academic weakness. Omoegun and

Akanle (2007) indicated that most students gained admission into the tertiary institutions with dubious credentials and such students find solace in cultism because of their low self-esteem and to survive the rigours of academics at all cost. For such students, to survive in the academic system it involves a game of survival at all cost, so they join cult groups to intimidate lecturers and the school authorities.

Societal moral decadence

Nigerian society has willingly or unwillingly provided an enabling environment for all forms of crimes among which is the existence of campus secret cult. Okwu, (2006) argued that Nigeria has replaced honour with dishonour as a standard attitude. He maintained that the happenings in the universities are offshoot of what happens in the larger society, violence became impressed into the psyche of an average Nigerian. The activities of some power-drunk politicians who wish to gain power at all cost, led them to train or recruit young people as thugs in order to suppress their political opponents and most of these recruits are students who seeks further spiritual by joining cult.

Those who desired to be feared by others: Some students join campus cults in order to create fear in the minds of their colleagues and staff. This will allow them to get away with whatever evil e.g befriending girls, or controlling others. Some students who have the desire to terrorized and exploit female students or their male counterparts usually see the membership of campus cults as the means of fulfilling such desire.

Seeking of undue protection: Most students who are fearful usually join campus cults in other to enjoy protection enjoyed by members. Jamiu (2008) believed that cultists do work vehemently to protect the interest of their members not minding what it takes to do so.

Redundant students who have been expelled but not willing to live the campus can easily join cult in order to cover their idleness or to unleash revenge on their so-called offenders.

Effects of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institution

The effects of cultism on the campuses cannot be exhausted as both intra and inter-cult clashes negatively affect the students and the institution in stupendous proportions. Opaluwah (2009) revealed that the effects of cultism in tertiary institutions on the society are numerous and some of them are listed as follows:

1. It promotes social vices such as violence, rape, murder, drug abuse, examination malpractice among others. Insecurity on various campuses.
2. Their activities usually lead to premature death of innocent students, staff and other members of the society who become victims of cult violence.
3. Expulsion: Culprits of cultism are usually expelled from tertiary institutions and they become nuisance to the society.
4. It ruins the life of the affected students as some are killed in cultist violence and some become insane as a result of smoking Indian herbs and using hard drugs.
5. Academic calendars of various institutions are disrupted as a result of cult activities which usually lead to their closure. There are instances where some institutions are closed for more than two months as a result of cult violence.
6. Destruction of school facilities. According to Adewale (2005), some cult clashes are so catastrophic that loss of infrastructure and other resources will be colossal and eventually the funds that would have been expended on the provision of other facilities and infrastructure on the campus will be used in replacing the damaged ones.
7. It can lead to incarceration of the culprit.
8. It leads to poor academic performance and drop out.

Preventive measures against cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions

In view of the identified causes of cultism in Nigeria tertiary institutions in the preceding section, the following solutions are suggested:

1. Parents should teach their children the way of God and inculcate in them good moral values.
2. Parents should teach their children good morals; they should also scold or discipline them whenever they do wrong.
3. Parents should desist from being members of secret cults and also prevent their children from joining bad

groups.

4. Students should avoid bad companies that can lure them into cultism and other unwholesome association.
5. Government should enact laws stipulating a ten or twenty years jail term sentence without an option of fine for culprits of cultism.
6. Establishment of counseling centres: These centres should be manned by professional counselors and students should be encouraged by the counselors to face their studies squarely and make their studies priority to other social events.
7. Government and nongovernmental agencies should step up their campaigns against cultism and its destructive tendencies
8. Students should of only identify with religious groups or fellowship can build their spiritual. This can provide divine protection against all forms of evil powers or influence.
9. Student should open up to appropriate persons when unduly harassed or intimidated by others to join cult.
10. Students should avoid any undue pressure to seek protection from others rather they should seek protection from God whose mercy will always make them triumph over evils.
11. School authority should intensify armed patrol and security surveillance on campus . The current effort where students form vigilante groups to monitor cultists should be encouraged

Conclusion

The impact of cultism is not on academics alone, it also exerts its influence on the individual, educational institutions and society at large. Therefore, serious efforts towards the reduction or total elimination of cultism must be adopted in a bid to finding lasting solution to its menace in our tertiary institutions. This should take cognizance of the Nigerian society, as the higher education institutions are a micro Nigerian society. Finally, cultism could be reduced to the barest minimum if only all the stake holders and every member of the society is involved in the strides towards eliminating it.

The way forward

Taking into cognizance the menace of cultism and its increasing negative effects on tertiary institutions in Nigeria as well as the society; the study therefore suggests that it is imperative on the part of stakeholders in the education sectors, churches, mosques, parents and the society at large to join hands to eradicate the menace before it destroys the whole educational system. Besides, government should introduce capital punishment to those proven to be involved in cult related activities to serve as a deterrent to others. Finally, campus publications like newsletters, journal and magazines

should be encouraged to publicize the activities of cults as a way of exposing the cult activities to ridicule some of the foibles of the students and staff alike in our campuses.

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