

MENACE OF CULTISM IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: THE WAY OUT

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Abstract

The issue of cultism has in spite of many efforts at reducing it, soared up in the Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Cultism has cast gloom over the educational sector. It is repeatedly said that the youths are the future leaders but it is a little wonder what the future holds for the youth of this country which has a good proportion of her youth as secret cult member. It therefore became imperative to carefully redress the issue of cultism in our tertiary institution where reason should rule over emotion. Undoubtedly, the issue has assumed horrifying proportion as cultic violence thrives even more. Therefore, this paper highlights why the Youths join the obnoxious set-up with relevant examples. The effects of cultism are unveiled; the realistic ways to even out the menace in tertiary institutions in Nigeria are equally discussed. It was discovered from the study that cultism among the students of tertiary institutions is real and urgent solutions is needed by government and institution at large to curb it. To collect and analyze the necessary data, the writers turned to secondary data from published and unpublished sources such as text books, journals, newspapers, and online resources, as well as context analysis. It was therefore suggested that, to curb cultism in Nigeria educational system, there is need for collaborative effort of the parents, school, religious organizations and government towards the moral upbringing of their children.

Keywords: *Cultism, menace, Nigerian, tertiary institutions,*

Introduction

The essence of education generally is to make people better human beings and create better societies. All over the world, universities and other institutions have often been regarded and referred to as citadels of learning. But as a result of incessant secret cult activities, these citadels of learning have turned out to be the centres of violence. 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 undergraduates. Cultism dates back to kingship and leadership struggles among men in the country. An example of such in our society is the Ogboni Reformed Fraternity, an organization whose membership is currently at six million drawn from wealthy and professional classes. Cultism is a social crime which is very rampant in universities, colleges of education and polytechnics all over the country, it is social menace which is not restricted to only the institution of higher learning but that which is a common phenomenon that characterized the entire society the secondary schools are not left behind. Cultist activities are something laden with blood. It may be the blood of an animal or that

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of human beings.

According to Obadere (2020), 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 centering around their secret symbols. Cultic activities are sometimes laden with blood which may be the blood of an animal or that of human beings. He claimed that during initiation rites or during rival groups 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, negative effects on both members and non-members alike (Ajayi, 2015). Thomas (2022) asserted that confraternities operated at no degree of violence when emerged in the 1950's. Unfortunately, they were later hijacked 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 of their power consolidation.

Campus cult in Nigeria have been traced back to 1952 when Prof. Wole Soyinka, winner of the 1986 Nobel prize for literature and a group of six friends formed the Pirates Confraternity Elite at the University college Ibadan, then part of the University of London. It was formed with the aim of producing future Nigeria leaders who should be very proud of their Africa heritage. They have skull and cross bones as their logo while members adopted confraternity names as "Capon' Blood" and "Long John Silver". The pirates cultivated a style that ridiculed colonial attitude. They proved popular among students even after the original members moved on. Membership was opened to every male students regardless of tribe or race. For almost 20 years, the pirate, a non-violent body become established in all tertiary institution that emerged in post independent Nigeria as the only confraternity on Nigerian university campus (Jekayinfa, 2018).

According to Thomas (2022), the emergence of campus cult as they are known in Nigeria today began with a split of early 1970s, in pirate's confraternity. 1972 Bolaji Carew and several others were expelled from the pirates for failing to meet expected standards. In reaction to this and other events, the pirates registered themselves under the name National Association of Seadogs (NAS). The Buccaneers of Seadogs was founded by Carew. In 1980s, confraternities spread over the 300 institutions of higher education in the country. The Neo-Black movement of Africa (Black Axe) emerged from University of Benin in Edo state while the Supreme "Eiye" confraternity (National Association of Air Lords) broken off from Black Axe in 1983. Students at the University of Calabar in cross River State founded the Eternal Fraternal Order of the Legion Consortium (the Klansmens Konfraternity) while a former member of Buccaneers confraternity started the Supreme Vikings confraternity, the Adventures of the De Norsemen Club of Nigeria, the following year. In the mid-80s, it had become evident that some of the cults had been adopted as elements in the intelligence and the security services serving the then military government. They were used against students' union and University staff who were the only organized groups opposing military rule.

In 1984, Prof Wole Soyinka, extricated himself from emerging trend, initiated the abolition of the pirates' confraternity in all tertiary institutions. By then, the phenomena of violent cults had developed a life of its own. In early 1990s, as the end of the second Republic drew near, confraternity activities expanded dramatically in the Niger Delta as they engaged in a bloody

struggle for supremacy. The family confraternity (The campus mafia or the mafia), which modelled itself after the Italian mafia, emerged. Shortly after their arrival, several students were expelled from Abia State University for cheating and "cultism " a reference to the voodoo practicing confraternities, which marked the beginning of a shift of confraternity activities from the university to off campus. The Brotherhood of the Blood (also known as Two-Two, Black Beret), another notorious confraternity was founded at Enugu State University of Science and Technology (Thomas, 2022).

Cults that were established in early 1990s are; Second Son of Satan [SSS], Night Cadet, Sonmen, Mgba Mgba Brothers, Temple of Eden, Trogan Horse, Jurists, White Bishops, Gentlemen Clubs, Fame, Executioners, Dreded Friends, Eagle club, Black Scorpion, Red Sea Horse, Fraternity of Friends The klansmen confraternity expanded their influence by creating a Street and Creek Wing, Deebam to expanded their influence by creating a street and Creek wing, Deebam to fight for and control territory outside the Universities through violence and crime. In response, the supreme Vikings Confraternity [SVC] established their own street and creek group, known as Dewell. When this group was unable to match Deebam, the SVC created the second confraternity wing. The outlaws, another well-known street and creek confraternity began to be formed. These includes the Black Brazier (Black Bra), the Viqueens, Daughters of Jezebel and the Damsel. Female confraternities have supplied spies for all allied male confraternities as well as acted as prostitution syndicates (Thomas, 2022).

The Concept of Cultism

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996) gives the anthropological definition of a cult as a set practices and beliefs of a group in relation to a local god. It also gives a sociological definition of it as small group or religious activities whose beliefs are typically secret, esoteric and individualistic. 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 (Udoh & Ikezu, 2015; Atuoma & Nwosu, 2015; Ajayi et al., 2021). Ogunade (2020) defined a secret cult as an enclosed organized association or group devoted to the same cause. It is an enclosed group having an exclusive sacred ideology and a series of ties centring on their sacred symbols. Adeyanyu (2021) opines that a cult is secret to the extent that its members, organization rules and modus operadi are supposed to be unknown to non-members. Ogidefa (2018) defined cult as a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership admission policy is initiation formalities as well as their mode of operations are done secret and kept secret, with their activities having negative effect on both members and non-members. According to Pemede (2021), secret cult is defined as a group of people engaged in a particular set of worship that involves rituals and an oath that binds them together as one entity.

The 1999 constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in section 318 (a), (b) and (c), however, defines secret society (cult) to include any society, association, groups or body of persons (whether registered or not); a. That uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols and which is formed to promote a course the purpose or part of the purpose of which is to foster the interest of its members and to aid one another under any circumstances without due regard, merit, or injustice to the detriment of the legitimate interest of those who are not members. b. The membership of which is compatible with the function or dignity of any public office under this constitution and those members are sworn to observe oaths of secrecy. c. The activities of which are not known to public at large, the names of whose members are kept secret and whose meeting and other activities are held in secret. This connotes that the activities and everything that cultists

engaged in as regards to their ideology is basically secret and remain open to their members only.

Causes of Campus Cultism

Cultism on campus has been attributed to the laxity on the part of the government and schools. The issue of campus cultism despite the havoc it caused to the societies have continued to spread rapidly in Nigerian society. Family problems also account for the reign of cults and their nefarious activities. The editorial Daily Times of March 1998 comments thus: "Due to service race for material aggrandizement, parents have abandoned their responsibilities". The school as an agent of socialization provides an avenue for the perpetration of the negative activities of the cultists in some instances. Muiyiwa (2021) while quoting Abati and Udeni (1994) maintains that society in some cases has been found to adopt violence as a convenient means of conflict resolution. As such, assassins now stalk the land like law enforcement agents, and armed robbers have become public heroes. The resultant effect of these situations on Nigerian youth is their involvement in cult activities.

However, in line with what operates in Nigerian schools, the following are causes of cultism:

- The desire to gain recognition
- Protection against the institution's authority
- Provision of social security
- Avenue for securing girl/boyfriends of their choice
- ignorance
- Peer group influence
- Poor parental care
- Population (overpopulation)
- Lack of commitment on the part of some school authorities and their agents
- Imposition of the ideology
- Social heritage (culture)

Reasons why Students Engage in Cultism

Most of the students who join secret cults are adolescents of age bracket (15-23 years) and they do so as a result of personal volition or out of intimidation (Onodarho, 2020). Such of the unwilling recruits may have join cultism due to the influence of their friends who they want to show that they are not men. Some of the strategy cultist use to lure and recruit new members are cajoling, set up, talent hunting and intimidation (Oraekwe, 2020). According to Oyemwimina and Aibiye, (2015), there are so many reasons which compel student to join a cult. Basically, the following are some of the reasons:

Crave for Supremacy: To be seen as a lord or tough guy, because to them, toughness ensures a lot of benefits, free access to any female student of one's choice, free entry and exist in parties; free access to other students' belonging such as pail, electric iron, radio, money, cheating in examinations, intimidating lecturers into passing them (Onuogha, 2018).

Search for Responsibility: Some students join cults in order to perform certain service for the members. For example, some students may engage in cultism in order to fight for perceived injustice against members in their campus.

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 another 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 intimidation from fellow students. They also 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. 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 (2018) 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 avenues 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. With this therefore, many students from poor home fall victim of this cajole. Peradventure, they do not that 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 as a way out after which he/she becomes 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. Moreover, they think they 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 do not 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, 2017). 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 him/herself. At adolescent, there is a shift of emphasis on social relationship from parents to peer group (Ibeh, 2015).

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 cultists would make their goals achievable.

Nevertheless, Oraekwe (2020) opines that youthful exuberance, peer group influences

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and pressures are the main factors that make students join campus cults. He stated that the students are generally lured into cults by the illusive gains and attractions presented to them by members of the cults. These attractions according to Oraekwe (2020) include:

1. Protection from academic failure: members are promised assistance by other member during examinations and in doing assignments and quizzes.
2. Lecturers who are members or patrons are also said to be available to assist the student members to pass their examinations, even to the extent of influencing other lecturers to pass those members that fail their subjects.
3. Provision of Job: Graduate cult members are said to be greatly favoured if they happen to seek employment in establishments where their members are at the helm of affairs.
4. Disposition to getting a girl of their choice easily: cult members use all forms of threat and intimidation to woo any girl of their choice.
5. Facilitating winning students (union) elections: Cult members always vigorously support their members who contest election into student union government association and clubs.
6. Conferment of tough or big guy image: Membership of campus cult gives a student an image of one who has command, authority dominion and power of manipulate on at his disposal. This makes other students to fear and envy him. Cult members feel that they belong and that they make things happen, and that they are the talk of the campus. They regard themselves as the happening guys or hard guy of the campus and no one can dare them. Cults hold this attraction for the new entrants.

Students who join cult groups for the above reasons 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. Thus, they do not know that segregation exists in cult organization as well.

The Effects of Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Many students became cultist without knowing the inherent dangers associated with cultism. According Atuoma and Nwosu (2015), some of the negative effects of being a cult member include:

Life of Insecurity: A lot of lives and properties have been destroyed in the course of clashes between different cult sects 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 ones have been killed. The most unfortunate thing is that, those who were not party to what led to these clashes are mostly the victims. Majority of the cultists ignorantly walked into the hands of their assailants without the prior knowledge of a clash between their cult and a rival cult, thus, a cultist lives a life of insecurity (Obamwonyi, 2014). He is never sure if the next momentous clashes can erupt any moment, time and place.

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 (Obadere, 2020).

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

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authority is total. This means a cultist does not have control over his or her life and to a reasonable extent, the cult authority dictates or determines activities of their member. Any one who falls short of their rules and regulations pays dearly for it.

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 (Udoh & Nwosu, 2015).

Threat to Cultist Academic: According to Ufuoma (2022), 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 cultists suffer for the offence committed by other cultists from the sister school of whom they 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 results in the basket of carry-overs usually prolonging their stay on campus. Also, cultists abandon their examinations for the fear of being attacked by members of rival cults or picked up by law enforcement, thereby ending up with automatic spill-over (final year) and beg of carry-overs. Almost all the cult clashes recorded occur during examination periods.

The Threat of Law Enforcement Agents: Cultists are living in perpetual fear of being arrested during and after cult clashes. A lot of cultists have abandoned education for their fear of being arrested after being named against cult operation. Those caught by the police languish in cells in the police stations.

Measures to Control Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Cultism is a major social vice bedeviling 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 the government, schools, parents and religious institutions and every element of social structure in society. That the strategy of control must focus on the home, school, religious institutions, government and the society.

Home

The battle for the eradication starts from the home and parents should ensure the under-listed responsibilities thus:

- (a) Parents should desist from being members of secret cults and also discourage their children from being members.
- (b) Show good examples and 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 correction of any negative trait in the children.
- (d) The parents must work closely with the institutions' authority to arrive at a lasting solution (Rischler, 2022; Opoluwah, 2020).

School

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- (a) Admission must be based on academic and moral merits, while a proper administrative system should 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) The school authority should try as much as possible to enforce law and order in the school and provide basic amenities that would take care of the students' welfare and make the environment conducive for studying.
- (d) The lecturers should act as model for their students to emulate. They should start on time to teach them moral and values of the society.
- (e) Any academic or non-academic staff found to be cultic should appropriately be disciplined.
- (f) Regular impromptu search of suspected cultist room must be embarked on.
- (g) The Security Department must be empowered for the proper policing of the campus (properly trained, equipped and funded).

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.
- (d) Government, non-governmental agencies and the media should set up their campaigns against Secret cults and its destructive tendencies.
- (e) Government and school authority should provide effective Anti-cult groups.
- (f) Guidance Counsellor should be posted to every tertiary institution in Nigeria with the duty of counselling the students and staff only. These counsellors should be charged to report systematically cases of unexplained and unjustified advances of students to female or male lecturers and that of lecturers to school authorities.
- (g) Government should know that nobody is above the law and whoever that is guilty of cultism whether he or she is from rich or poor family should be made to face the music accordingly. This will serve as detriment to those who have joined or to those who have the intention of joining the secret cults.
- (h) Government should reduce the high cost of education in Nigeria so that everyone can afford it.

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.

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. The expected societal roles in the reduction of cultism in tertiary institution generally include:

(a) Dignity and respect should be accorded to industrious, honest and good conduct persons rather than to worshipping money. Religious organization should desist from honouring fraudsters simply because they are wealthy.

(b) Leaders must imbibe the fear of God and put to an end inordinate acquisition of materials wealth to the detriment of the down trodden.

(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.

Students

(a) Students should be encouraged to imbibe the fear of God and be of good morals.

(b) Students should be encouraged to resist any form of coalition from the cult members and report to the school's security department or a nearby police station as earlier advised.

(c) Whenever a student is having any misunderstanding with cultists as a result of other issues besides advances at them to join a cult department, it is not advisable to seek for the assistance of other cultists to settle their misunderstanding. They can use it as an opportunity to exploit you financially. Non-cults should avoid close relationship with cultists.

Conclusion and Suggestions

From the discussion so far, it is crystal clear that the future of any society depends on the youths that are in such a society. However, for the betterment of the youth and the society at large, the following are suggested to even out cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

- Awareness programmes on the negative effects of cult activities
- Total expulsion from school and total ban on students' involvement in cultism.
- Employment opportunities (it will raise students' hope of getting a better job rather than wasting their lives).
- Leadership by good example. The government and teachers have a lot to do in this aspect.
- Sanitization of the whole society for example, through programmes like War Against Indiscipline and Corruption, Human Rights Violation Commission, Economic and Financial Crime Commission, etc.
- Continuous monitoring exercise of students' activities on the campus. Students' Affairs and Security Unit have a lot to do in this aspect.
- Admission should always be on merit to check overpopulation and the unserious elements. There is a need for a central pool for data processing on admission to curtail the re-admission of the expelled cultists.
- Good government policy (socio-economic and political).
- College management should promote harmonious relationships in the schools. In doing this, Adewale (2019), suggests that management should demonstrate honesty and accountability, avoid discrimination and communicate with students.
- The Parent Teachers Assembly should be established in all Nigerian Schools.

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