

Curbing Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Cultism has generated a lot of fear, tension, insecurity and closure of schools. Neither the school authorities, parents, the public nor the government have developed an acceptable framework on how to curb the menace of secret cult in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. This work examines cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions with the aim of proffering means of curbing the menace in the system. The study highlights the causes of cultism in tertiary institutions to include among others influence of peer group, parental background, and societal decadence. It reveals the effects of cultism on Nigeria's tertiary educational system to include expulsion and dependence on drugs. The study suggests proper moral upbringing of children at home, enlightenment campaigns in schools and adequate counseling of students by competent guidance and counseling personnel in schools among others as effective ways of preventing cultism in tertiary institutions.

Keywords: *Cultism, tertiary institutions, secret cult, society*

INTRODUCTION

Cultism can be traced from the Adamic age when there was a drift of loyalty by man from God to the serpent. This action as it is common today is a serious act of insubordination. The serpent became a direct image to which Adam submitted his loyalty to. As sourced from <https://www.google.com.ng/search?dcr=0&source>, cult is a system of religious veneration and devotion directed towards a particular figure or object. Also having Latin origin cultus, cult is literary the "care" owed to deities and to temples, shrines or churches. Cult is embodied in ritual and ceremony. Its presence is made concrete in temples, shrines and churches and cult images, including images and votive offering at votive sites. The term cult identifies a pattern of ritual behaviour in connection with specific objects within

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a framework of spiritual and temporal coordination. Ritual would include (but not necessarily limited) to prayer, sacrifice, votive offering, competition, procession and construction of monuments, according to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult_%28religious_practice%29. Usually, cult is a practice of few members of society. As a result of the drift from the main source of power and authority - God the omnipotent, there is an element of squabble, hatred, fight, war, faction, creating etc. among the available cult groups. According to Meriam Webster online dictionary, cult is a small group that is not part of the larger and more accepted religion and that has belief regarded by many people as extreme or dangerous (<https://www.Merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cult>).

With these ongoing in human mind, the history of cult in the context of this work is traced to the first human creature - Adam who traded the loyalty of God to the serpent making it an undeniable object of worship, protection, power, influence (undue) among others are some of the reasons people dabble into cultism. Hence, the history of cultism in Nigeria Tertiary institutions dates back to pre-colonization when a group of people with the main aim of seeking protection from their ancestors conducted rituals. According to Hamza (2011), secret cults have always existed in many parts of the country. Among the many secret cult groups are the Ogboni secret cult which is commonly found among the Yorubas, the Ekpe secret cult found among the Efiks, Ekine cult in the Delta region and Owegbe cult among the Edos (Adelola, 1997).

Nigerian educational institutions were not associated with secret cults until 1952 when Wole Soyinka, Olumuyiwa Awe, Ralph Opara, Tunji Tubi, Daign Imokhuede, Pius Olegbe and Olu Agunloye formed the Seadog confraternity otherwise known as Pirates (Hamza, 2011). The ideas behind the formation of the confraternity, according to Hamza (2011), were both patriotic and altruistic as it was not imagined as a secret cult. The main objectives of the Seadogs were to fight non-violently but intellectually and effectively 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 most Nigerian tertiary institutions, there are more than 45 secret cults who are equipped with elaborate hierarchy, insignia and distinct notable secret cults on our tertiary institutions include Vikings, Amazons, Buccaneer, Mafia and Dragons (Adelola, 1997). According to Adewale (2005), the female students are not left out as they have their own groups among which are temple of Eden, Frigates, Barracudas,

Daughters of Jezebel among others. They are easily identified by the actions and behaviours. The ways of identifying a cultist are: (a) opposing critical thinking, (b) isolating member and penalizing them for leaving, (c) emphasizing special doctrines outside scripture, (d) seeking inappropriate loyalty to their leaders, (e) dishonoring the family unit, (f) crossing Biblical boundaries of behavior (versus sexual purity and personal ownership) and (g) separation from the church (<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/06/the-seven-signsyoure-in-a-cult/361400/>). The presence of cult groups on campuses has made life unbearable and unsafe both to staff members and students. The activities of cult groups on campuses include harassing any non-member who has in their judgment offended them, harassing any female students who refuse their love advances, harassing any lecturer who insists on merit for passing examination among others (Hamza, 2011).

Akor (1994) asserts that one of the earliest secret cult violence occurred at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1985 when a non-cult student incurred the wrath of another student, who was a cult leader for snatching the latter's girlfriend. In 1991, a student of the University of Port Harcourt was beheaded during a feud between cult members, Adewale (2005). The activities of secret cult groups resulted in the death of a Principal Assistant Registrar and his wife in Delta State University, Abraka at the Dallimore area of Ado-Ekiti in August, 2002. Cult members also invaded University of Ado Ekiti at 12 noon, burnt down the cadet's office, killed three students and wounded dozens of students and staff of the University on the 8th of June, 2006. Speaking further, Hamza (2011) submits that on June 2006, a lecturer, Seiun Oyedola was abducted and killed during a clash between cults at the Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye in Ogun State. The list of incidences of cult activities in our tertiary institutions is endless. It should be noted here that cultism is associated with occultism practices.

The challenge before the administrator of tertiary institutions in Nigeria today, therefore is how to make our campuses safe and free from the menace of cultism. Cultism has remained a problem for tertiary institutions in Nigeria and the larger Nigerian society since the first decade of the existence of tertiary education in Nigeria. It has been worrisome to have children on campuses and several measures had been adopted to curb cultism and occultism practices some of such measures were the expulsion of the cultist caught and outright ban of cultism on campuses. The problem is not the killings in our campuses but

why the measures employed to curb cultism have failed. This work examines cultism in Nigeria tertiary institutions with the major aim of finding ways of curbing it.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CULT AND OCCULT PRACTICES

It is important at this point for a study of this magnitude to appraise the disparity between cult and occult in varied perspectives. As contained in an Online source (<http://www.equip.org/g/perpectives/the-occult-what-is-the-difference-between-the-word-cult-and-occult/>), the term "cult" is typically used by the secular media to describe religious or semi-religious groups whose members are controlled in almost every single respect by a single individual. Some good examples are Hare Krishnas or Scientologists.

To orthodox Christian, however, the word "cult" takes on a wider meaning. Not only can groups be considered cultic in the sociological sense, group may be deemed cultic in a theological sense as well. What this means, is that groups which claim to be in harmony with Christianity but deny foundational Christian doctrines - such as the Trinity, or the unique deity of Jesus Christ - are cults in a theological sense. Thus, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Christian Scientists qualify as cultists (<http://www.equip.org/perpectives/the-occult-what-is-the-difference-between-the-the-word-cult-and-occult/>).

Now, while the word "cult" is always used with reference to a particular group, the word "cult" is typically associated with esoteric and mystical practices. It deals with hidden or secretive means to attain personal power, and is characterized by a reliance on the supernatural to achieve its ends. The occult includes such practices as fortunetelling, witchcraft, or trance-channeling. Additionally, tarot cards, crystal balls Ouija boards, and horoscopes number among the many tools which are used by occultists. Clearly, the occult deals directly with demonic force (<http://www.equip.org/perpectives/the-occult-what-is-the-difference-between-the-words-cult-and-occult/>).

However, not all cults indulge in the occult. For example, it would be unfair to link the Jehovah's Witnesses and the United Pentecostal Church in an overt sense with the occult. Now, while a clear distinction should be drawn between the terms "occult," we must keep in mind that they are both connected with teachings which oppose the word of God (or moral standard of behaviours) (<http://www.equip.org/perpectives/the-occult-what-is-the-difference-between-the-words-cult-and-occult/>).

CAUSES OF CULTISM IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

The menace of cultism in Nigeria's tertiary institution has become a source of concern to both the parents, school authorities and the government. The causes of this menace are as follows:

Influence of peer group: According to Ibeh (2005), the period of adolescence is marked by intense social relationship in any environment he finds himself. At the stage of adolescence, there is usually a shift of emphasis on social relationship from the parents to the peer group. This Omudu (2014) asserts that the company you keep influences your life. This implies that gradually a person takes the form, character, traits, likes, dislikes, habits and nature of those he associates with. This according to him will have positive or negative impact of your life. If you are a close associate of a thief no matter how much you hate stealing. Sooner or later, you will start making excuses for the thief or even join the fellow to steal. This is also same with cultism. As adolescent breaks the total reliance and contact with his or her parents, the same shifts such to the newly acquired group which in most cases is any group on campus he or she embraces. In his study, Akinfolarin (2003) reports that peer influence is one of the reasons students join cultism.

Parental background: This is a serious factor for enlistment into cultism. Learners who come from homes where codes of conduct and discipline are strictly enforced cannot easily join cult group on campus. However, parental background, lack of moral instruction at home and the manner in which the child is brought up, according to Hamza (2011), could be a factor in enrolment as a member of a cult group. Excessive control by parents with too many rules could make individual tense and anxious while a learner whose freedom knows no bound may be a ready candidate for cult membership. Mgbekem (2004) asserts that some parents love their children to the extent of pampering them. They are not scolded when they commit offences. Such negative behaviours continue to grow and consequently they imbibe criminally oriented behaviour which leads them to joining cults groups. In some families, parents themselves are members of secret cults. Such parents are very happy should they know their children take after them. In most cases, the parents initiate their children into their cult group and develop strong hate for any child who resists such

attempt. Cult members may also come from broken homes where child abuse and neglect are very rampant. A child who comes from broken homes is exposed to parental negligence and frustration. Thus some students join cult to get over frustration they encountered as a result of family background.

Societal decadence: The eroding societal values and moral decadence witnessed in our society are critical issues that are affecting us negatively. Ogunbameru (1997) asserted that the Nigerian society has willingly provided an enabling environment for all forms of crimes among which is the problem of cultism in our tertiary institutions. According to him the Nigerian society has replaced honour with dishonour as a standard attitude. According to Mgbekem (2004), youths nowadays imbed immoral values instead of inculcating moral and decent values. This according to him is why the youth see no qualms in belonging to secret cult groups. The propensity of the youth to join cultism according to Mgbekem (2004) could be linked to the general state of normlessness existing in Nigerian society.

Erosion of education standards: The economic recession in the country according to Hamza (2011) encourages corruption and erosion of standards in the educational system. Most students gain admission into higher institution with dubious credentials. According to Akinfolarin (2003), such students because of their low self-image, find solace in cultism in order to survive the academic system. As such they join cult groups to intimidate lecturers and the school authorities.

Political influence: This is also another serious aspect that pushes many people including students to join cultism. Today, it is obvious that political bigwigs use cultists for political vendetta, to snatch ballot boxes and eliminate rivals. Also, those who get contract as political compensation are mostly cultists.

Why some students join cults

The reason young people join Boys scouts, Girls guide, Red cross, Boys Brigade, Man-O-war though these are not secret cults could likely be the same reason they join secret cult some unknowingly and some consciously. Hanior (2014) identifies the following as reasons students join cultism:

Greed: Students who are greedy would want to jump at anything that will make them rich.

Security: Some join cult group just for security purposes. They feel that once in a cult group, they are secured from harassment by lecturers and sometimes for fear of death they are bound to join cult group.

Protection: Some students join cult groups in order to protect their interest and the interest of their members. This account for cult clashes on campuses.

Sense of belonging: Some students join cult group just because of the kind of friends they make. They do this just to feel that sense of belonging to tough group. To them, they are untouchables in society they belong to because they are members of a cult group. This accounts for the negative peer group influence in our society today.

The negative influence of the social media: Electronic media is another reason that makes some students to join cult groups. This could be through an invitation on a Facebook over a particular club membership; those who are not spiritually discerned will fall victim of such cult group invitation without knowing it.

Ostentation: Quest for big things, making it in life overnight is some serious reasons that drive people to join cult groups. The desire to achieve success in academic is one reason why students join cult group, academically they assume that membership of such group will make them excel in their studies. Especially, if they get to know that majority of their lecturers are members. They forget to know that God is the author of knowledge.

Parental background: Poor family background and poverty have been looked upon as another reason many youths joined cultism.

It should be noted however that irrespective of what seems to be the reason one gives for joining cult groups, no such reason is good enough to warrant the decision to be a cultist. Even the reasons listed above cannot be in any way a good reason to join cultism.

Effects of cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

The sad effects of cultism can be seen in the attendant negative effects it has on the learning process of the learner. The intra and inter-cult clashes negatively affect the learners. Late night meetings and several outings of the group struggles with the time such students should have for lectures and personal studies. This sometimes leads to incarceration, rustication or expulsion of both the innocent and student members. According to Hanior (2014), another sad effect of cultism could be death and injury to the victim. Cults' clashes could result to death or injury of those involved. In the Niger-Delta where cult violence is widespread, properties worth billions of Naira have been destroyed in schools and communities where cultists reside. The peace that was experienced in our tertiary institutions have been eroded as a result of cult activities, academic activities in most tertiary institutions where cult activities persist have been brought to a standstill due to cult violence (Hamza, 2011). According to Hamza, Campus cults kill, maim and rape fellow students and in some instances even lecturers. Lecturers who are not members of any cult group are threatened and asked to award unmerited scores to cultists who do not attend classes (Omudu, 2014). Mgbekem (2004) asserts that in most of our tertiary institutions today nights are no longer safe because of frequent cult disturbances and insecurity.

According to Hanior (2014), cult members also depend on drugs to enable them perform their bastardly acts. Drug abuse is the indiscriminate use of drugs that are not prescribed by a medical practitioner. It is a case of self-medication because there is no proper diagnosis of the illness before drug is taken. However, cultists depend on the use of illicit drugs like Indian hemp, cocaine, opium and so on the danger of drug use and abuse is such that most users become misfit in society physically and spiritually. No wonder the behaviour exhibited by cultist is a clear evidence that their brains has been affected (Hanior, 2014).

Preventing cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria

Cultism has generated a lot of fear, tension, insecurity and closure of schools neither the school authorities, parents, the public nor the government have developed an acceptable framework on how to ameliorate the menace of secret cult which has continued to create insecurity of life and property on campuses (Kosemani, 1997).

One of the major steps school authorities have used as a measure of curbing cultism on our campuses is the expulsion of secret cult members. This measure have not proved to have been a viable solution to the problem, particularly as the expelled cultist easily gain admission into other tertiary institution to continue a more organized secret cult activities. Most pathetic is this age where education is seen as more of cool cash business than a veritable means of human capital development. The emergence of private schools becomes a dumping ground for rusticated cultists who find refuge in the hands of these private tertiary institutions. This has been possible because we do not have an organized admission system. Again data collection and recording has not been perfected. We do not have social security numbers. Expelled students in one tertiary institution can easily gain admission into another. Another is that those who are not able to re-enroll in other institution of higher learning have often taken to armed robbery thus becoming a bigger problem to the society, while on their part , the various secret cults do enlist new members to replace expelled ones.

The issue of banning secret cult on campuses has not helped either. This has not proved to be a solution since secret cults are still in existence in our campuses. This measure has failed because secret cult organizations carry out their activities on campuses in secret. They operate at night sometimes, they do not make public their time, date, and place of meetings. To curb such organization by use of force has proved difficult over the years, since it has not been easy to know whom to arrest.

Hanior (2014) identifies the following as preventive measures that must be taken to curtail cultism that; there should be enactment of anti-cult laws. This should be put in place to serve as deterrent to would-be members. Again, those found guilty of cult activities would be punished under the law.

There should be proper moral upbringing of children. The saying that bad morals corrupt good morals is very true in our society. Parents should ensure that their children are properly disciplined in the fear of God. This will make them honest and good citizens.

The schools should ensure that adequate counseling of students by competent guidance counselors is put in place. With proper observation by teachers of student under their care, they will be in a proper position to know those students that exhibit deviant characters that need counseling.

There should be enlightenment campaigns by government, non-governmental organizations and the mass media on dangers of cultism. The

social media should be widely utilized in this regard. The tertiary institutions should reactivate debates, drama, sports in schools to occupy the minds of the students. The saying that an idle mind is the devils workshop is true when students are not engaged in other extra- curricular activities. The government and authorities of our higher institutions should ensure that those students that renounce cultism are rehabilitated and protected. Religious, and moral instruction should be made compulsory as part of general studies programmes in our tertiary institutions.

Students' enrollment in schools should match available facilities by reducing physical discomfort of student. School authorities should not create enabling environment for secret cult to thrive. Schools should provide comfortable accommodation for students, there should be well organized orientation programs for new students so that cult members will not take advantage of the ignorance of new students to make them join cultism.

CONCLUSION

This study exposes the fact that cultism is actually taking root in the Nigerian academic system. The major aim of the study was to find ways of curbing this menace. The study has shown that the Nigerian tertiary institutions were not associated with secret cult until 1952. The negative impact of cultism in Nigeria tertiary institution could be seen in expulsion of victims from institution of learning and even death as a result of cult clashes. This work discusses the causes of cultism to include influence of peer group, parental background, societal decadence and erosion of educational standards. Greed, security and protection of interest of their members are some of the reasons students join cults. The effects of secret cult in our tertiary institutions include dependence on drugs, death or injury of the victim among other sad effects. Based on the above assertions, it is evident that though belated, it is quite necessary to bring back in strong force moral education in all stages of the Nigerian education system. No level or educational stage should be seen being higher than being taught moral education. Religious leaders should preach consistently the sermon of morality in their various churches or mosques, especially those with reasonable level of good moral standard and teachings. According to Kosemani (1997), parents should be ready to accept discipline and cooperate with the school authorities to fight cultism in the education system. Children should be allowed to interact

with their mates while parents keep close watch on the type of interactions, encourage good ones and discourage the bad ones. Parents should be interested in teaching their children good conduct that could lead to success in life and discourage cheating to succeed. According to Abraham Lincoln, it is more honourable to fail than to cheat and pass. Parents should work hard to provide the basic needs of their children. When children are comfortable they are most likely not going to be aggressive and will be less dependent on friends that could lead them to join secret cults.

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