

Curbing the Menace of Cultism in Nigerian Public Universities: The Way Forward

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Abstract

The menace of cultism in Nigerian public universities both Federal and State owned universities cannot be undermined. It is a monster with its ravaging effects, leaving behind its tales of woes such as loss of lives of would-be leaders, disruption of academic calendars, rape, wanton destruction of school properties, waste of resources, loss of hopes and aspirations, blackmail, threat, kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution, drug abuse and excessive consumption of alcohol. This paper delves into the meaning of cultism, highlights the historical development of cultism in Nigeria, discusses the rationale for cult related activities, elaborates on the menace and recommends the way forward to drastically curb its tenacious webs to make our universities safe, serene and secured, among which are full enforcement of the law against cultism, establishment of mobile police station in every universities and adequate funding to achieve 100% students hostel accommodation as the case with the private universities.

Introduction

Cult-related activities in public universities in Nigeria is one of the burning contemporary issues that have not spared any one high or low, academic and non academic staff, members and non-members, the students and the general public. It is the attempt of this paper to x-ray the meaning of cultism the havoc caused by this menace, the reasons often adduced for cultism and makes strong recommendations to nip it at the bud for Nigerian public universities to be citadel of excellence and scholarships as envisioned by the governments of Nigeria.

Cultism Exemplified

Cult activities constitute a major obstacle to quality assurance of Nigerian universities. Without mincing words, the activities of cultists are threatening to undermine and erode the very essence of university education (Nwankwo 2006). According to Igodo (2002:1):

precisely any movement organization or assemblage of people who share ideas and beliefs not to be made known to non-members is a cult. Equally, any association or organization that carries its activities, functions in secret is a cult.

The fact remains that non-members of a cult do not know its activities and this therefore reflects the nature of operation of contemporary secret cults in Nigerian universities. In another development, Rosedale and Langone (2004:1) define a cult as:

a group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea or thing and employing unethical manipulative techniques of persuasive and control... designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families or the community.

From the above definition, it is evident that some cultists are weak academically because they exhibit "a great or excessive devotion or dedication" to cultism to the neglect of their academic activities which invariably affects their performances negatively.

In the same vein, the secret cult and similar activities (Prohibition) Law, No.6 of Rivers State (2004:2) highlights a secret cults as:

any organization, association, group or body of persons whose membership, meetings and other activities are kept secret, and which promotes causes or engages in acts of violence, intimidation or harm in whatever manner against the public or any member of the public.

Similarly, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), Section 318(1) defines: *a secret society (cult) as any society, association, group or body of persons (whether registered or not) that uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols and which is formed to promote a cause, 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 to merit, fair play or justice to the detriment of the legitimate interest of those who are not members.*

To buttress this fact, Pemede (2002) defines cult 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. With the above definitions of scholars, Federal Government of Nigeria and Rivers State Government cultism is exemplified. Secret cults have been defined as secret societies in which members are usually bound by oath of secrecy. They are known to coerce and intimidate students to their membership. The modus operandi of cultism are kept secret from non-members until they are initiated. They are detrimental and dangerous to members, non-members, university communities and the society at large.

Historical Development of Cultism in Nigerian Universities

The historical development of secret cults in Nigerian universities dates back to 1952 when the Pyrates (Seadog Confraternity) was formed at the University of Ibadan by the likes of Professor Wole Soyinka, Pius Olegbe, AIg-Imokhuede, Olumnyiwo Awe, Nath Oyelola and Ralph Opara to “fight” injustice and oppression in the society. Therefore, the group utilized positive means for purposeful social service delivery such as blood donations to health institutions and financial assistance to indigent (poor) students.

Consequently, after about two decades of the existence of the Pyrates (Seadogs Confraternity) other cult groups were formed. They are the Bucanneers Association of Nigeria, founded in 1970 at the University of Benin, Mafia Confraternity (the Family) in 1979 at the University of Ife, the Vikings 1982 at the University of Port Harcourt, the Neo Black Movement (Black Axe Confraternity) in 1984 at the University of Benin; War Lords (Brotherhood of Don) 1985 at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma and the Jurists 1986 at the Delta State University, Abraka.

The proliferation of the cult groups became rife by the early 1990, when the following secret cults reared their ugly heads in our public universities which include White Angels, the Mgba Brothers, Dirty Virgins, the Red Devils, Daughters of Eve, Red Barrets, Black Barrets, Black Queens, the Amazons, Green Barrets, the Maphites, Dirty Bra, K.K.K, Supreme Daughters of Medusa, the Sharons, the River Angels, the Daughters of Jezebel, the Black Cat, Trojan Horse, the Scorpions, etc.

From 2000 till date, the activities of cultism in Nigerian public universities have assumed an alarming rate and worrisome situation, unleashing terrors and woes to the university communities and beyond.

The Menace of Cultism

Cultism is a monster that has eaten deep into Nigerian public universities with its ravaging effects. Cultism in our campuses has become a stubborn menace in recent times. Its devastating and negative impacts can be highlighted below.

- 1. Loss of Lives of Would-be Leaders:** The menace of cult activities has led to loss of lives of Nigerian leaders of tomorrow. A graphical representation in Table 1 below shows the death toll through purported cult clashes in Nigerian public universities from 2003 to 2006.

Table 1: Death Toll through Purported Cult Clashes in our Nation's Public Universities, 2003-2006

S/n	Name of University	No. of Clashes	No. of Death	Death in %
1	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	27	40	5.02
2	University of Abuja	6	7	1.11
3	Bayero University, Kano	12	13	2.23
4	Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto	9	11	1.67
5	University of Ilorin	19	20	3.53
6	University of Jos	7	8	1.30
7	University of Benin	18	20	3.33
8	University of Ibadan	15	18	2.77
9	University of Calabar	25	27	4.63
10	University of Maiduguri	12	15	2.23
11	University of Lagos	19	17	3.52
12	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	5	8	0.93
13	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	8	11	1.49
14	University of Port Harcourt	12	15	2.23
15	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	17	20	3.16
16	University of Uyo	8	10	1.48
17	Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	10	10	1.86
18	Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi	8	9	1.48
19	Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike	12	14	2.23
20	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	13	16	2.41
21	Federal University of Technology, Akure	16	18	2.47
22	Federal University of Technology, Owerri	7	8	1.30
23	Federal University of Technology, Minna	8	8	1.49
24	Federal University of Technology, Yola	4	5	0.73
25	Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	17	20	3.16
26	Abia State University, Uturu	3	4	0.55
27	Adamawa State University, Mubi	9	10	1.67
28	Benue State University, Makurdi	6	8	1.12
29	Delta State University, Abraka	6	7	1.12
30	Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki	12	14	2.23
31	Imo State University, Owerri	10	12	1.86
32	Lagos State University, Ojo	13	16	2.40
33	Nasarawa University, Keffi	6	8	1.11
34	Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa	5	3	0.93
35	Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye	23	24	4.26
36	Adekunle Ajasin University, Akoko	18	19	3.33
37	Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba	12	17	2.23
38	University of Ado Ekiti	15	17	2.77
39	Kano Univeristy of Technology, Wudil	3	5	0.93
40	Anambra State University of Science & Technology, Uli	10	8	1.00
41	Enugu State University of Science & Technology, Enugu	13	19	2.42
42	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho	18	19	3.34
43	Rivers State University of Science & Technology, Port Harcourt	30	35	5.58
44	Cross Rivers State University of Technology, Calabar	16	16	2.97
	Total	538	635	100

Source: Ndukwu & Ganagana (2007) in Ogbondah & Ezekiel-Hart (2010:58)

From the Table 1 above, it is evidently clear that there is high level of violence, aggression and bloodshed in our public universities. It is pathetic and alarming to see that within the space of three years, between 2003 and 2006, the Nation, Nigeria has lost 635 vibrant leaders of tomorrow who should have taken

their pride of place in driving the rapid development of Nigeria. This is really saddening and absurd and has adverse implications to national development.

2. **Disruption of Academic Calendar:** The nefarious activities of cults in our campuses have led to the disruption of academic calendar. It is difficult for students to finish their programmes of studies on schedule without being disrupted thereby elongating the duration of their programmes more than required.
3. **Rape:** The menace of cultism on our campuses did not spare violating campus girls against their will and consent at gun points. The cult members approach girls and their refusal most often lead to forceful penetration or rape, undermining the dignity of women.
4. **Wanton Destruction of School Properties:** In most cases, where cult groups clash, the aftermath is the wanton destruction of school properties – hostels, offices, vehicles, lecture halls etc. They commit arson at every slightest opportunities.
5. **Waste of Resources:** The menace of cult activities in our campuses have led to waste of resources. Funds earmarked for other projects will now be used for the renovation and replacement of infrastructure and vehicles destroyed and damaged by these students and their associates.
6. **Loss of Hopes and Aspirations:** Most of the students involved when caught or identified by the university administrators were expelled or rusticated which invariably leads to loss of hopes and aspirations. The same applies to innocent students who were killed by their strayed bullets.
7. **Blackmail and Threat:** The cultists resort to blackmail and threat for disciplined and principled lecturers who refused to obey them in awarding pass marks or collecting money in exchange, making the lives of these staff and families unbearable.
8. **Kidnap:** The menace of cult activities have manifested in kidnapping lecturers, university administrators and students from wealthy homes or whose parents occupy public offices. They ask for ransom before the victims are released.
9. **Armed Robbery:** Due to the fact that members of cults possess and use dangerous weapons and arms to operate in order to scare their non-members, they extend their operations into armed robbery within and outside university communities and all sort of vices such stealing, car snatching etc. Most of the armed robbery gangs apprehended by law enforcement agencies were mainly university students.
10. **Prostitution:** Both the males and females cult members are involved in unquenchable desires for sex. The male cultists have fleet of girls in the name of “flexing” or enjoying themselves. Their females counterparts have links to politicians, business magnate and foreigners or expatriates which they constantly patronize to satisfy their libidos with good cash in exchange, making them spend money on expensive dresses, phones, hair-do and even own cars which their parents could not afford and make foreign trips, with total neglect to their academic work.
11. **Drug Abuse and Alcohol:** The menace of campus cultism is also manifested in excessive use of drugs and consumption of alcohol making them wild, destructive, void of human feelings and abnormal which eventually take them away from academic activities.

The Rationale for Cultism

Various reasons have been accounted for this precarious situation which include:

- i. **The Home Background:** The family is the primary agent of socialization. It is the bedrock for the inculcation of appropriate moral values and behaviours in the child. The common adage that says “charity begins at home” cannot be disputed. Most students who find themselves into universities came from porous homes where discipline and moral values are weak. Consequently, they become susceptible to the lure and antics of the cultists. In addition, some students from wealthy homes and with political connections see themselves as Lords and can do anything and get away.
- ii. **School Environment:** An educational psychologist, Dr. Nelson Aderemi Oyewo has stressed the need for teachers to determine how the best possible environment can be provided for every child. Oyewo (2008) points out that the influence of the environment indicates that good teachers and good schools can have very good effects on the group as a whole and in some individuals in particular. When the environment is conducive for learning, it is difficult for students to exhibit anti-social behaviours or get involve in violent activities. Moreso, some staff of the universities both academic and non-academic were hitherto members of secret cults while they were students, hence, they give clandestine support to secret cult students.
- iii. **The Society:** The school is a microcosm of the society. The corrupt and materialistic realities of the Nigerian society which is based on the tenets of “the survival of the fittest” and “the winner takes all”

could cause the young adults to involve themselves in cult activities. In addition, the god father, political mentors and fraudsters who employ the services of young adults to further their parochial political interest and ambition help to create contact points in the form of secret cults for these young adults. The initiated students are protected by the society (their mentors) whenever they are arrested by the law enforcement agencies (Kalagbor, 2010).

- iv. **The Students:** The students themselves express various reasons why they join cults in schools. These reasons range from the need for sense of belonging and security, social identity, gain influence, affluence (wealth) to ability to get the beautiful girls on campuses, etc.

The Way Forward

For this menace to be tackled to the barest minimum, the following recommendations are proffered for the way forward viz:

1. There is need to enforce the laws of the land against cultism to the letter without respect of persons. For instance, Students Union Activities (Control and Regulation) Act, 1989 (Decree 47 of 1989) Section 2 recommends a fine of ₦50,000 and/or five (5) years imprisonment. Also, the Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law, No.6 of 2004 of Rivers State Government prescribes ten (10) years imprisonment without option of fine. The law also empowers heads of both secondary and tertiary institutions of learning to expel any student or person convicted under this law. In the same vein, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Sections 66(1g); 107(1g); 137(1b) and 182 (1h) disqualifies Nigerian citizens who are confirmed members of secret cults from contesting elections for political offices at any level. Consequently, Section 63 of the Criminal Code (Cap 42) of 1981 provides that any person who manages or assist in the management of an unlawful society is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for seven (7) years and Section 64 states: any person who (a) is a member of an unlawful society or (b) knowingly allows a meeting of an unlawful society to be held in any house, building or place belonging to, or occupied by him over which he has control, is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for three (3) years.
2. Both Federal and State Government should establish Mobile Police Station in every Federal and State Universities for maintaining law and order at any time and to instill fear and decorum among the students.
3. Public University Administrators should set up students vigilante group to monitor and report any suspicious character, movement and meeting to the authorities immediately.
4. Man O' War should rise up to their responsibilities in our campuses.
5. Also, Students' Advisers should rise up to their responsibilities and report any suspicious character to their HODs for immediate actions.
6. There is need for spiritual and ethical re-orientation, instilling moral values, the fear of God and the tenets of hardwork embedded in "suffer before pleasure".
7. Students should be conscious of their friends, ensuring that birds of the same feather flocks together.
8. There is need for adequate funding and collaborations to ensure 100% students accommodation as the case with the private universities. Admission should be based on available spaces in hostels. This will enhance close monitoring of students' activities and movements.
9. Parents should embark on frequent and unannounced visits to their children and wards to ensure that they are in schools and should know the friends their children and wards keep.
10. Admission of students should be strictly based on performance and not connections, bribery and corruption to enable qualified and academically-oriented students to gain access.
11. University administrators should ensure regular release of students results after each semester examination to enhance hardwork and furnish students academic status or standing.
12. Public university administrators should ensure that weak students are made to repeat or rusticated or withdrawn to serve as deterrent to others.
13. Awards should be given to students who have distinguished themselves exceptionally in character and learning periodically, not only at convocations.
14. Nigerian society should not celebrate men and women with questionable source of livelihood and wealth.
15. There is need for Nigerian leaders and the led to de-emphasize on materialism, short cuts and nepotism.
16. Elections in Nigeria should be transparent enough as such political class should not use the students as political tugs to rig elections.

17. Students should seriously attach themselves to religious groups of their own religion where sound teachings are shared.
18. There is need to introduce moral and religious education and peace education into the curriculum of Nigerian universities as general studies courses.

Conclusion

If Nigerian public universities will be places of research and development, centres of excellence and scholarships, factories for the production of the needed human capital, laboratories for moulding characters, enabling environments for peaceful co-existence, safe, serene, secured and to inculcate into the citizens respect for private and public properties and feelings for others, seats for cross-fertilization of knowledge and ideas, poultries for churning out future leaders for national development and platforms for the much needed scientific and technological breakthroughs, then the menace of cultism must be curbed as the recommendations are religiously implemented. All hands must be on deck to guarantee the security of lives and properties, the possibility of completing academic programmes on schedule and wooing foreign students and lecturers.

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