

Measures against Cultism and Cult Activities in Campuses: The Urgent Need For Peaceful Academic Progress In Higher Institutions In Nigeria

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Abstract

Cult has been defined by many specialists in education. It is a small group of people who have extreme religion beliefs and who are not part of any established religion. It is an organization whose activities are kept away from the knowledge of others. Cult activities started in the 1950s at the University of Ibadan purposely to produce future Nigeria leaders who would be very proud of their African heritage and capable enough to abolish convention. It was meant to sight 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. Nowadays, cult members in campuses are noted for violence and they display high levels of crudity and barbate. They kill members and non-members during clashes and all times, pose serious threat to both students and staff of institutions. In many cases, schools close down as a result of their notorious activities and academic progress is disturbed at the instance of their activities. The worst of it all is that their increase daily in number and strength in Nigeria campuses. This research therefore extorts the origin, objective and the activities of secret cults in tertiary institutions in Nigeria with the hope of suggesting measures of curbing the groups from tampering with the peaceful academic environment of the institutions.

Keyword: Measures, Cultism, Academic Progress, Higher institutions.

1. Introduction

Cult has been defined by many specialists in education. It is a small group of people who have extreme religion beliefs and who are not part of any established religion. It is said to emanate from great and excessive admiration or belief in a person or idea. This could be manifested in rituals, praise songs, chants and worship. Secret cult therefore is a set of practices, belief system or idea whose essence is known only to the inner members and excessively admired and defended even to the point of death. Olowe (1999) wrote that cultism is a word used to refer to group activities that are characterized by secrecy, rituals which often involve blood of human, and animals, violence and wanton murder. The Oxford English Dictionary describes cultism as a system of religious worship or exercise, administration of a person or thing. The American Family foundation (1986) defined cults as;

A group or movement exhibiting great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing and employing unethical/manipulative or coercive techniques of persuasion and control (e.g. isolation from former friends and family, debilitation, use of special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management, suspension of individuality or critical judgment, promotion of total dependency on the group and fear of leaving it), designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families or the communities. (P.119-120.)

In the same vein, the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996) defined cult in anthropological perspective as "a set of practices and beliefs of a group in relation to a local god". It goes further to give a sociological definition of it as a small group or religious activists whose beliefs are typically secrets, esoteric and individualistic. Ogunbameru (1997) wrote that a secret cult is an organization whose activities are kept away from the knowledge of others. Aguda (1997) explained that "these activities are essentially covert, disguised and are usually carried out behind closed doors". Cults are groups of people joined together by common interest with a brotherly feeling. Cult could be seen as a specific system of religions worship especially with reference to members' right and deity.

It could be summarily disclosed here that a cult is a group of people irrespective of age, gender, colour or socio-economic status that form an association (which may not have legal backing) with the intention of achieving some goals. The accomplishment of such goals may or may not be detrimental to the welfare of non-members. Cults exist all over the world.

2. The History of School Cultism in Nigeria

The origin of cultism in Nigerian universities can be traced to the period when a group called Pyrates Confraternity also known as National Association of Sea Dogs was founded at the University College, Ibadan now called the

University of Ibadan in 1953. The University college was then an affiliate of the university of London .It has the skull and the crossbones as its logo.

The Pyrates Confraternity was founded by the African Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka and a few others popularly known as G7. Their original aims were said to be very lofty and noble. They aimed at producing future Nigeria leaders who would be very proud of their African heritage (kalilu, 1995). The association specifically aimed at abolishing convention it wanted to revive the age of chivalry.Members were said to have maintained these characteristics –cleanest, brightest and the most political conscious among students. The confraternity aimed at fighting in a non –violent but intellectually and effectively against the imposition of foreign conventions and find a lasting solution to the problems of tribalism and elitism.

The founding fathers of this confraternity included Professor Wole Soyinka who was first democratically elected “captain of the society with the name, captain blood, Professor Muyiwa Awe was called the Long John Silver, Pius Oleghe, Ralph Opara and Aigl’Moukhuede.

3.Multiplicity of Cult Groups in Schools

After some years that the leaders of pyrate confraternity left the university, things started to change as other confraternity emerged with different aims attitude and mode of relationship with members and non-members. Adetola (1997) claimed that the first notable departure came in 1968 with the formation of the Eiye confraternity at the University of Ibadan. The formation arose as a result of some members not been able to meet the high academic standard originally set by the sea Dogs confraternity. First of the decamp resulted to the formation of “Buccaneers “ the association which later led to another de-campee (Eiye confraternity) other protestant groups which sprang up from the pyrate confraternity included Black eye, Vikings, Mafia dragons, Black beret and the following female counterpart unions –Temple of Eden, Frigates, Barracudas, Daughter of Jezebel and others.

The pyrate confraternity was said to have dominated the University scene for twenty years before the emergence of the Buccaneers confraternity which was also called the sea lords. Adigwu (1999) confirmed that every prominent Nigeria student by then belonged to the pyrate confraternity and their presence was felt in all the nook and crannies of the society. As at 2003, Nadike in Hazzan(2011) explained that there are about 45 secret cults in Nigeria institutions of learning .Cult groups include Black Axe, eye, amazons, White Angels, Black brassiers , Family mafia, black cats, Trojan Horse, The jurist, maphites, Seafearers, the Dragon, the Belt boys , Fox. There are klukluxklan , the executioners and the Red sea Horses, sonmen and the knight cadet.

4.The Objectives of joining Secret Societies (Cult) in the Society.

Personal investigation on the activities of secret cults shows that the sons and daughters of highly placed individual who are also strong members of the secret societies usually enlist in cult groups .Their parents who are strong members usually have strong economic power and political influence. The advantages make them finance and run secret societies which invariably serve as points of attraction to poor students in the schools who need serious financial help. They hope that their financial predicaments can be solved by taking this measure of becoming a member. Also some academically poor students yet maintains that they want to get a degree by all means. Becoming a member of a society will give them the opportunity of having rapport with both influential students and some lecturers who are members of cult groups. The opportunity may usher them the chance of passing well in their school examinations. Nigeria is certificate crazy, hence every person wants to get a degree or higher certificate because it is a” meal ticket” to position of authority and probably wealth.

Some students especially the female ones join cult groups because their boyfriends are members. They either join voluntarily after they are introduced to such or join by “accident” or pressure from their fiancé or boyfriend. Some could join by accident after they were introduced into the society without prior knowledge of the introduction and they are made to know that they would not say their experience to anybody. Refusing to become members after this may cause the student death at any point in time. As a result the student will therefore accept to become members against their wish(es).

Olufemi (1997) posited that the inability of institutions to forward progress reports of students to their parents and guardians makes it easy for rusticated or students whose studentship have been terminated either because of academic laxity or other indiscipline acts remain in school and their idleness in most cases gives room for cult activities.

Also, the academic and non-academic staffs of institutions of higher learning are strong members of these societies. They encourage some students to enlist as they serve as sources of help to students when they need help. Some students have known the problems associated with a single-parent or broken homes while some of them experience problems of communication at home as a result of the type of parents or relatives that they live with. Some live where they have no freedom of association, expression and good or cordial relationship with other people. The

campus life therefore ushers a serious advantage for them to associate and behave freely with mates. Some have strongly identified with older students who provide a parental image for them.

Also, many young people pursuing cults today are involved in search for identity and a quest for spiritual reality that provides answers to their questions. Ogunbameru (1997) posited that some students join these groups because of the need for financial assistance; and to secure girlfriends or self-protection. Some students are equally said to have joined cult groups because they are seeking after meaning, direction, comfort and love. The youth especially those from broken homes, destitute and youngsters who have flexible minds easily fall prey to the entreaties from cult members.

5. Characteristics of Present Day Cult Groups in Nigeria Schools.

Cult groups are always in conflicts with rival groups and they always strive to undo each other. Cult group are in most cases in illegal possession of fire arms; get involved in drug abuse, violent crimes, like armed robbery, illicit sexual escapades, killing of innocent student, academic and non-academic staff, arson, rape, extortion of money/materials from people; physical attacks, threat, blackmail, and other related inhuman practices. According to Hazzan (2011), the characteristics of campus cult include acts of terrorism and instilling fear in non-members; being at logger heads with school authorities in most of the time; operation at night, non-respectability of school rules and regulations and collective defence of members at all times.

6. Menace in Cult Activities in Tertiary Institution in Present Day Nigeria.

Cult activities in schools are no more the same with their activities in 1950s and 60s. At the initial stage, violence was not said to have manifested in the conduct of members of cult groups. The peaceful group members later snowballed into exoteric group gangs whose members were highly skilled in ritualism and vandalism. The peace on campus initiative (an organization formed to help control cultism in Nigeria campuses) in September 2003, explained that 5,000 campus students and lecturers have died on Nigeria campuses as a result of cult-related violent clashes. New Age, 2003.

The prominent effect of cultism on campuses students is mass killing of learners. Examples of terrible attack include the one of July 10th, 1999 at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. In the same University before the occurrence above, one cult member was shot and killed during attack in 1991. In February, 1999, the students leaders organized a campus wide search, which found eight secret cultists in their hide out. This enraged the Black axe confraternity, who organized a murder squad that hacked the student union Secretary General to death on his bed.

In the same vein, Adekunle Azees, a student of Iree Polytechnic was killed sometimes in the school for befriending a lady who was said to have been admired by a cultist. The girl went on to disagree with the demand made against her by the cultist but was later gang-raped by 12 cultists of the mafioso confraternity. Also, in September 2005, Bolaji Tomila a student of Lagos state university was killed. In October 2003, three students of Kwara state were murdered by cultists. Also, in June 2005, a policeman and leader of anti-cult Square of Kwara state police command were killed by suspected cult members from the federal polytechnic Offa. Also a student (Ashifat Olatunji Saheed) from the polytechnic Ibadan was murdered in 2005. At the university of sciences and technology, Enugu, the head of department of geology was murdered by cult members in October 2003.

Cult activities have disrupted the peace and school calendar of many institutions in Nigeria. For example Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo was closed down for months because of cult activities. Also the activities became virulently violent and secrecy became their ways of life. Their activities included "dealing" with any non-members who snatched a member's girlfriend or "sugar daddy" (in case of female cultists). Their activities also included "settling" lecturers in cash or in kind. Female cultist began to operate prostitution rings and having their photographs displayed in popular hotels. Secret cult's activities have increased in the recent times in the recent times in devastating and dangerous proportions. The members have become nightmares to the general student community, parents and even succeeding governments. A reported 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. In 1993, fifteen students of the University of Port Harcourt were jailed for terms varying from five to thirty years for belonging to secret cults. (Daily Times, 23rd January, 1993). In Delta State University, Abraka, the death of a principal Assistant Registrar and his wife was caused by the activities of two cult groups in a clash (The Black axe and Buccaneers).

7. Effect of Cultism on the Learners

Students become members of cult groups because of the advantages which they feel they could derive from being members. Students seek extra personality leverage that can make them achieve what they wish but cannot ordinarily

get. It is on record that some learners in schools seek girlfriends, exam grades, materials, control of territorial turf and other benefits that are obtainable by commensurate intellectual, physical and social stimuli which cultists do not have.

Some of the negative effects of cultism on learners are early death because of incessant violent clashes; exposure to group attack; change in life style e.g. imitation of smokers, drunker, rapist, home-sexualist, smugglers, and criminals of different categories. Also some cultist get involved in activities which lead to their loss of self will. For example, many students lose their studentship because of cult activities which may not allow them to do serious academic works or involvement in crimes or disturbance of academic works.

8. Effect of Cultism on the School Community

The school environment in most cases and because of cult activities is disturbed and become unsafe for staff and students. There is psychological disturbance in schools especially when cultists are on rampage.

Also, evidence has shown that some academic staff members have been alleged to have compromise grades in the face of threat of cult attacks. Many tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been sighted as the “homes” of cult and so, their students are denied admissions into Universities when they seek such.

Many schools that have witnessed different attacks of cult members have lost not only their students, but have also lost their staff, buildings and other useful school resources to attacks.

9. Effort to Combat Cultism in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria.

Several efforts have been made by the government, religion institutions, individuals, and school authorities in the country to reduce the rate of cult and its activities increase in Nigerian schools.

The federal and state governments have in many cases advised students to desist from cult activities. The governments have made provisions for the trial of a cult suspects in schools and in fact many students have been tried and jailed for cult offences. The military government has passed appropriate decrees and civilian government has enacted legislations deemed appropriate to stamp out secret cults. University authorities have made appropriate regulations and oaths for students to sign against becoming members of secret societies. Also, tertiary institutions have made improvements of infrastructure and religion group have preached against cultism in many occasions. A step taken against cultism included the enactment of Decree 47 of 27th December, 1989. The decree empowered the governing council of each University to prescribe any society operating within the campus, pursuing activities which are not in the interest of national security, public safety, order, morality, and health. Also, some state governments have also formed intelligent units, which during the military interregnum worked very closely with different tertiary institutions to fish out suspected cult members. The more has yielded some result. Owoeye (1997) reported that the eastern Zone of the miscellaneous offences tribunal at Enugu in 1993, jailed 15 students of the University of Port Harcourt for being members of secret cults. Before the time, the Guardian of 20th March, 1994 reported that suspected cult members were caught in the Ondo state. In 1990s the military government of the then Oyo state abolished the boarding house system as it was seen as an avenue for students holding meetings in the night.

10. Suggestions towards Curbing Cult Activities in Tertiary Institutions.

Cult activities could be curbed through the use of curriculum innovation. Peace education can be taught as a school course in tertiary institutions. In the course, issues on cultism such as its much effect etc can be taught to students. Apart from this, more schools should make their students sign oath against becoming members of cults during the matriculation programme specific punishment against offenders should be heralded and made to function. School environment should provide for students’ needs and opportunities for poor children to study without hardship. Such programmes as bursary award, loan award and scholarship should be encouraged and given to needies without partiality. Prompt academic results of students should be made available to the parents, guidance and students so that the issue of rusticated or students that have withdrawn staying in campuses and using their time to get involved in ordeal acts would be removed. At the same time school activities or more academic rigor must be put in place so that students would have little or no time for unlawful congregations.

While recreation centers, film shows, symposia, conferences, seminars and workshops should be encouraged at all times in our tertiary institutions. These programmes must strictly relate to the menace involved in cultism and peace disrupted activities or issues. The exposure of the secret acts in these groups would make students understand the more the activities of cult groups and the evil effect that may accompany being a member.

While it should be understood that the source of cultism is the society itself, the government should be up and doing in meeting the demands of the people. These same reasons for joining cults in schools are the same reasons for becoming a cult member in the society. To this end, the government representatives should maintain disciplines their acts especially when it comes to financial aspect. Government should be judicious in their distribution of booties

(resources) and services to the members of the society. Also, the government should make provision for good security for the people. This is because some people seek for membership of cult for security reasons.

In the same vein, school authorities should be prudent and democratic in their activities as many anti-democratic acts of many institutions breed discomfort and instability in many institutions of learning. The autocratic over lordship of school leaders or decision on students may engulf instability.

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