

## CULTISM IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS AND ITS EFFECTS ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### **Abstract**

Cultism has been a menace in our society especially in the Nigerian higher institutions. It is seen as a ritual practiced by group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their mode of operations, are kept secret with the activities having negative effects on both members and non members alike. Based on the above, this paper examined cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions and its effects on National Development. In pursuance of the objectives, which is to identify the cause, effect and way out of cultism in our tertiary institutions, related literature was reviewed which revealed that some of the causes and effect include, to gain respect and recognition, societal frustration, admission of ill qualified students, Deprivation, hopeless, hereditary and others. In view of the above findings, the paper recommended among others. (i) That the government should equip the tertiary institutions with crime dictators instruments in strategic places and emotional stability of students tested before admission. (ii) Religious bodies and government and non-governmental organization should organize seminars, conferences, youth camps to teach them the ills of cultism, all these would reduce the practice of cultism in our tertiary institutions.

**Keywords:** Cultism, tertiary institutions, National Development.

Nigerian higher institutions are the havens for secret cult (cultism) activities. Hitherto very secret, the membership and activities of the cults are known and pervasive and contumacious. The devilish activities of the cults in higher institutions are one of the greatest evils of campus life. There is no existing institution of higher learning that has not experience the menace of cultism for one time or another.

The African concord (1994) reported that if secret cult must survive and thrive at all, it is not in an academic community. As we have today, the menace and the aggressiveness of cult members and cult related cases has led to loss of lives, properties has become a serious threat to the entire Nigerian nation and its education system. Cultism is a social crime despite that it has become a dread of most higher institutions in Nigeria. Raufus and Pemedede (2000) reported, that the problem of secret cult with its associated problem like killing, extortion, rape, manning, stealing and other social vices in our tertiary institutions have permanently imprinted the issue in the mind of the average Nigerian. The focus of this paper therefore is to underscore or study cultism, its negative effect on academic and national development and to offer some control measures.

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*Journal of Research Development, Volume 24 No.2, July, 2015*

### **Conceptualization of the Word ‘Cultism’**

The term cult is a Latin word which refers to worship, religion and faith. Odubunmi (1998) sees cultism as the information of a group of initiates or adherent around the figure of a god, a saint or even a living being. It may involve the practice of a particular doctrine within the body of religious belief. Lexican websters dictionary defines secret cult as a group of people who share common cause and whose mode of meetings and agenda are unknown to the public and where initiation into rank and file is usually done in secret.

Cultism is an activity practiced by a group of people who are adherent of a certain type of worship. In the contemporary context, it generally refer to a fraternal relationship between a group of people who are out to achieve a set of objectives for members, though these objectives is against the interest and norms of the larger society. Ikudenyisi (1998) saw cultism as a fraternal relationship which signifies brotherhood. All over the world, fraternities among youths, especially the type encouraged in higher institution of learning, exist to foster brotherhood, collective aspiration and pursuit of noble goals. They provide a platform for leadership capability development and a forum and opportunity for active participation in nation building, it was never intended to be an avenue for exhibiting juvenile delinquency and unrestrained, senseless, masochism, least of all and it was never intended to become an avenue to jeopardize life with impunity.

In addition, Ogunbameni and Daodu (2003) defined cultism to be any form of organization whose activities are only exclusively kept away from the knowledge of others but such activities are carried out at odd hours of the day and they often clash with accepted norms and values of everyday life. This is so because cults only pursuits the interest of the members and adhere strictly to their doctrines.

In summary, cultism can be defined as a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy, and initiation are kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non–members alike especially in context of this paper.

### **The History/Development of Cultism in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions (1954-2010)**

Cultism started in Nigerian tertiary institutions in the early 1950's. It originated at the University College, Ibadan, in 1954. It was then 18 years old Wole Soyinka and his members; Aig-Imoykuede, Pius Oledge, Raif Opara, Nat Oyeola and Olunuyiwa Awe. Who formed Pirate confraternity at the university college Ibadan. The common ideology which the founding fathers held in allegiance was the promotion of the dignity of the black man which was then seriously threatened by the discriminatory and oppressive practices of the colonial government and expatriates.

Lasisi and Edun (1999) asserted that confraternity commanded the respect and ration of many people. Some years after the graduation of the founding fathers internal wrangling and power tussle began to rent the organization as other similar organizations were formed such as Buccaneers, Eiey confraternity etc.

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As from the 1990s, the activities of secret cult has taken a horrifying and worrisome dimensions which many criminal activities including murder, arson, armed robbery and rape are frequently linked to their members, and lack of discipline. To that extent therefore, many of the purported cultist are actually gangsters or member of crime syndicates hiding under the umbrella of certain secret cults or societies. Hollowary (1989) examined the proposition that human aggression can only be explained in terms of capacity of human species to develop complex social communities on the basis of abstract idea. He explained that violence sprang from logic of the human condition. It represents typical and pathological response to frustration which is nevertheless inherent in Nigeria society as a result of bad governance, conflict begets frustration and in certain circumstances frustration begets violence.

Today there are more than one hundred modern secrets cults including the pirate confraternity in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Some of these secret societies/cults are as follows:

1. Pirates confraternity
2. The buccaneer confraternity
3. The Eiye confraternity
4. The Beo-Blacks movements of Africa
5. The Vikings
6. The mafia and lately
7. Black axe, rainbow, brother cobra, Ku Klux, Mafia, Musketeer, Degbam, and the Amazon pink ladies, daughters of Jezebels, and Marauders etc.

It is of interest to note that some of cults set off originally for good but deviated as time went on. For instance, the pirates confraternity set out to fight muribudun convention, neo-colonialism, tribalism and at the same time, defend humanistic ideas while promoting comradeship and chivalry amongst its members.

Buccaneers set out to pursue the same objective as it came out from pirates. Eiye confraternity started out as Eiye group with the objective of promoting a balanced physical and mental development with emphasis on sports and academic excellence.

The Neo-Black movement was born out of their determination to fight for the restoration of the culture, dignity and pride of the blackman. Their establishment was response to the Sharpeville and serve to massacres in South Africa. Its newspaper was called Black Axe (so named euphemistically as the Axe with which "Cut" the white man and those keeping the Blackman in bondage). This name, Black Axe, later became the synonym for the movement. The Vikings and the Mafia were created by government during the regime of General Sani Abacha. The Daughter of Jezebel and the Black Brazier were both female responses to all pervasive male chauvinism and domination on campus combined with the coincidental interest of the girl friends of the members of the male groups.

The Pirates confraternity succeeded in remaining the fraternity without imbibing or internalizing the culture of violence in shedding the image of cultism. The Buccaneers slipped into violence at some point and became deeper in intra fraternity violence. However, before the bubble burst and perhaps taking a cue from the pirates fraternity they took steps to restructure and re-organize in a way that rid their organization of violence. Significantly, the Buccaneers have not been involved in any of the campus violence in recent times. Much of the violence we have witnessed are tracked of the Eiyee confraternity, the black Axe, the Vikings and the mafites as they are called indeed, many lives has been lost in cults clashes and killing in higher institutions, not less than 150 students and others who have died as a results of intra-fraternity rivalry in the last ten years comment, Oguntease (1999). The number of killings keeps increasing as government and other stake holders are yet to come up with measures to check their activities in campus.

In addition, Erechiuawa and Adevanju (2000) who reported that between 1996 and 1999 more than three hundred and fifty Nigerian student were killed as a result of power struggle among the secret cult group in tertiary institutions while others were either seriously wounded or maimed in cult related violence. This killings calls for a study on cultism seeking for solution to either reduce or avoid the killing totally.

### **Theories of Cultism/Explanatory Theories of Causes of Cultism in Higher Institutions of Learning**

1. The political economy theory
2. The sub-culture theory

The political economy theory argues that the socio-economic formation influences the level of development of a state. Political economy is a mode of analysis developed by the conventional economist to seek for means of explanation on how the economic and social activities plays back on the state. This theory argues that any society that is unequally has inherent problems in it. These problems include corruption, robbery, cultism and such other vices.

The sub-culture theory suggests that wherever a subculture is allowed to develop, eradicating it becomes extremely difficult, cultism, corruption and other vices creped into our institutions of higher learning and today form a significant part of the subculture in these places. Once engrained in student subculture, they resist efforts aimed at their elimination. While discouraging, this does not mean that cultism cannot be minimized and/or controlled if coordinated and sincere action is put forward from all quarters of the society (Amaele, 2013).

### **Characteristics of Cultism**

1. Secretive: Holding secret meeting in hidden place commonly at nights
2. Disregard for the sanctity of life: during clashes or rival cult groups
3. Initiation: New members of secret cults must be initiated. According to Onoderho (1999), the initiation often involves various phases such as jumping from tall trees and is beaten mercilessly, stabbed and so on. Olatunyi (1995) Observes that initiation generally takes

places at nights in secluded area and is carried out by the leader called the “President” or Chief.

4. Intimidation of fellow student and also lecturers to obtain their interest

#### **Why Student Engage In Cultism**

- 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, etc cheating in examinations, intimidating lecturers into passing them (Onuoha, 1996).
- Search for responsibility some students join cults in order to perform certain service for the members for example some student may engage in cultism in order to fight for perceived injustice in their campus against their members.
- To gain respect and recognition and acquire protection against sanctions from members of the school community.
- To hide their weakness (inferiority complex) academic or social. Some are forced by older members to join. While there are others who joins because their friends are members.

#### **Reasons for Sudden Increase in Cultism in Nigeria (1990-2013)**

- i. Societal Frustration: Bad governance among the ruling class has brought untold hardships and frustration to both parents and students (only a relative population is excluded)
- ii. Deprivation, Hopelessness and Injustices: Some of the government policies both by the military and civilian favors only elites or few in the society that masses or greater population languish in deprivation and emotional torture which sometimes the only opportunity available to this class is to enter secret cult and express their situation.
- iii. Poor attitude of lecturers to work is another problem: some lecturers avoid lectures and travel out of the country only to appear two weeks to examination and threaten the student with examination questions they didn’t teach.
- iv. Inadequate Infrastructural Resources which brought about overcrowding in the classrooms, a class of 40 seats now contained 200 students. Furthermore, hotels and libraries etc are also inadequate for the students.
- v. Long Military governance also gave rise to extreme moral decadence in the society: Honor and integrity are no longer virtues to be respected.
- vi. Admission of ill qualified students who got admitted through bribery and corruption and which to go through threat and intimidation to both lecturers and fellow students.
- vii. Unemployment in Nigeria society is another serious reason for interest in cult activities.
- viii. Hereditary factor: some students take after their parents and in campus it is a normal life to be a member of secret cult. And of cause, some times leaders boast of cultism to survive in leadership and the younger ones think it right to belong.
- ix. Nigeria police force attitude to cultism: In some instance, culprits of cult activities go free in the hands of police. This encourages others to join too.

### **Effects of Cultism in National Development of Nigeria**

Cultism is a phenomenon that does no good to individuals, institutions, families or to the larger society Nigeria when we consider the negative effects of cultism on our national development. The effect to national development includes;

- i. Human Capital Development: cult activities have taken many lives and properties especially the youths. Also in most cases secret societies on campuses are made up of people between the age of 20-35 years. Such loses affect economic and social development of the country. It conforms to Erediuawa and Adeyanju (2000) who reported that between 1996 and 1999 more than three hundred and fifty Nigerian students were killed as a result of power struggle among the secret cult groups in tertiary institutions while other were either seriously wounded or maimed in cult related violence.
- ii. The sanity of human life: when human beings are butchered as animal in the name of practicing cultism. It calls for a rethink in schools. It is debasing that cult members priding on the number of heads killed by some of them. It questions the integrity of man and so it is a great loss to national development.
- iii. Moral decadence: cultism is associated with rape, extortion, maiming, stealing, arose, exam malpractice all are against the moral principles of higher institution. Adie (1997), asserted that cultist are the kind of students who disrupt university examination, carry guns or acid to examination halls and threaten lecturers in order to obtain good grades. This singular act questions the integrity of Nigeria education system and certificates in the international community.
- iv. Cultism affects the Nigeria legislation/laws: it reduces the standard of laws made in Nigerian National Assembly or by the military decree. A typical example is the decree 47 of 1989 that pronounced a number of jail term for any cultist found guilty (Onuoha, 1996). Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000 issued a three month ultimatum to all vice chancellors to eradicate cultism from campuses. It therefore questions the integrity workability of legislations made by Nigerian legislators and administrators.
- v. Cult activities yield no returns on the huge investment made by parents and society in these students. Instead, they lower productivity, slow down national development and breed a culture of violence, fear and insecurity.
- vi. Negative influence on Nigeria education system: cultism has so affected our educational system by disrupting academic calendars through the clashes and forcing the university to be closed against the university programmes. The creditability of education system is now being questioned.

### **Measures to Control Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions**

It is right that in the past measures that have been adopted by government and institutions to fight cultism. Cultism is detrimental and needs the cooperation of all asundry to control it. The following measures are suggested.

1. Government, non-governmental agencies and the media should set up their campaigns against secret cults and its destructive tendencies.

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2. Religious bodies and there likes should organize seminars, conferences, youth camps and employ the services of well grounded counsellors, teachers (psychologist), lecturers to educate and sensitize the youths on the danger of cultism.
3. Schools security agents should well equipped with modern security gadgets such as metal crime dictators, graduates of psychologist, and state security services members increase presence in schools to dictates cultists under normal school situation.
4. Reduction in bribery/corruption among the leaders in this country. If a leader or legislator, civil servants, lecturers teachers etc commit an offence. It should be treated in accordance to the stipulation of the constitution. To serve as a deterrent to others. It will help in control cult activities. The acts of injustices been done by leaders, lecturers and others should be avoided too.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper has established that cultism is detrimental to continual existence of tertiary institutions. We death on the following, the concept of cultism, reasons why students join secret cults, theories of cultism, reasons for sudden increase in secret cult activities in Nigeria schools, the negative effects of cultism on national development and finally the recommended measures to control cultism in Nigeria education system. There is an urgent need for all sundry to put hands on deck to fight to reduce cultism in our schools as it is effecting national development in Nigeria.

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