UGLY MONSTER IN NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING AND WAY FORWARD FOR ITS ERADICATION FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE TO PREVAIL

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Abstract

Education in Nigeria is facing many challenges at present. There are monsters eating up the Nigerian education system to the extent that mass qualitative and effective learning is in doubt. Cultism is an ugly monster in our schools. Violence and criminality are rampant in our higher institutions of learning. There are cases of killing, assassination, kidnapping, sexual harassment and abuse, thuggery, destruction of properties, stealing, burglary, examination malpractices, poor academic performance of students etc. Academic work is frequently halted and students are either suspended or expelled from the school system because of cult activities. This paper examines cultism and effects of cult activities, reasons why students join cults and the way forward for its eradication in our higher institutions of learning for academic excellence to prevail and for the nation to be moved to a greater height in industrial development.

Education is a process by which individuals are transformed to have change in behaviour through learning. Learning is paramount in the school system through school programmes. School programmes are curricular and co-curricular activities planned to make students learning balanced for an all round development. According to Ighalo (2009: 90),

Co-curricular activities are different programmes that take place in the school system to augment curricular activities. There is a lot more to be learnt by children for successful living which curricular work fail to impart. Co-curricular activities are activities that take place in and outside the school and they are very important for social, physical, intellectual and emotional development of students

In co-curricular activities school clubs and societies and cultural groups are formed. It was in this process that the Pirate Club was formed in 1953 in University of Ibadan by Professor Wole Soyinka and a group of 7 students to cater for the social and recreational lives of members. "Pirate" was formed as a social club and aimed at fighting non-violently, but intellectually and effectively against the impositions of foreign conventions and to promote the spirit of chivalry. "This PIRATE, which is one of the cult groups in our institutions of learning today was initially legally approved as a social organization but, like other similar clubs it metamorphosed into a cult group" (Usman, 2008)

There was a serious disagreement among the leaders of pirate and a cult group known as the VIKINGS broke away from PIRATE confraternity. VIKINGS was founded by a Norwegian Eric-de Red who schooled in one of the South Eastern universities in Nigeria. Other prominent cult groups are the Black Axe, Eiye, Black Beret, Black Sword, Black Scorpion, Kku-klux-klan, Bats, Son of the Night, etc introduced in Nigerian schools. Little by little, cult groups gradually multiplied itself in our higher institutions of learning. Ehase (2006:1) lamented,

Multidisciplinary Journal of Research Development, Volume 22 No. 2, July, 2014

"But soon what started as a social club turned into a dangerous cult involved in the massacre of students. Just how the cult spread to the other universities in the country or how, according to a Nigerian Universities commission (NUC) report, 33 cult groups sprang up from the 'social clubs' remains a mystery to many. That these groups have become tools for power, revenge and status is not new to anybody. How their member increased and how they resorted to violence is what many people have sought explanation for".

However, Nwokeji [(2006) reported, "The investigation shows University of Nigeria, Nsukka as having the greatest number of student cults. In this citadel of learning, there are about twenty one (21) secret cults in existence where several students are wasting their youthful energy in drug addiction, thuggery and warfare". Moreover, Professor Onakerhoraye, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Benin had told journalists that security report indicated that about 5,000 cult members, a sixty percent of the student population belongs to the 35 identified cults on campus at the university. (The Guardian Thursday November 22, 1997, p4). Cultism is a scourge that has spread in our higher institutions. Qualitative and effective learning is lacking in our higher institutions of learning because of cultism.

Concept of Cultism

Cultism is a secret organisation that is interested in the destruction of lives and properties. Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (6th edition 2000) defines cult group as a small group of people who have extreme religious beliefs and who are not part of any established religion." While Akinbobola (1989) opined that cult and secret societies are organizations whose objectives are not made public and whose members are under oath or bound by obligation or other threats with the aim of promoting illegitimate and self interest.. According to Onyechere(2006:21),

Cults are generally regarded as groups of people who share and propagate peculiar but secret beliefs only to members. Their procedures often involve secret rituals like swearing by some deity, human blood and other occult procedures. Initiation rituals frequently involve procedures which could be considered grotesque, deviant, out rightly criminal and unorthodox. Cults in campuses operate as criminal gangs. They are involved in planning and executing crimes in and around the campuses including armed robbery, murder, rape and arson. Under various laws of the land and the various institutions, campus cults are illegal.

Cult is a system of religious worship that is expressed in rituals and it has connection with traditional worship as a result of ritual involvement in the process of worship. Moreover, Adewoye (1997) stated that cult is a number of aberrant or bizarre organizations that impose human restrictions on their members. According to him secret cult is characterized by the following features: absence of publications or public knowledge of their activities; memberships are unknown except to members; modus operandi is unknown except to members; they have close personal relationships and strong sense of unity; violators among members face serious sanctions; and meetings are in seclusion. Cult is a form of worship that emphasises ritual devotion to a god or person as distinct from theological religion and their members are severely punished when they violate their tenets.

Cult members usually initiate new members from students entering campuses. Initiation ceremonies involve severe beatings to test their endurance, drinking of alcohol mixed with blood, male raping a popular female student or a female member of the university staff. Girls are required to have six rounds of rough sexual intercourse or fight with a group of women or against a much stronger man. Cults also charge annual membership fees of between 10,000(US \$ 80) and 30,000

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naira (http://www.wikipedia.com/confraternities in Nigeria). However, Iyoha, Okpere, Odion and Dare (2010) outlined cultist initiation materials as

- Candles of different colours
- 2. Red blood from animal
- 3. Member's blood
- 4. Indian hemp, cocaine, heroin prepared together
- 5. Incense of all kinds
- 6. Skeleton of a human being e.g. head, hand and legs
- 7 Colouring (red) to give the mixture a red form

"Cultism is like a world of war and cultists are always in the war front. Perhaps, this is why they are always in hide outs. Probably because any attempt to reveal their identity may mark the end of the road for the person" Iwuagwu [2002].

Effects of Cult Activities in our Higher Institutions of Learning

The activities of cultists create fear, anxiety, uncertainty, death, and disruption of academic activities, destruction of school and private properties and humiliation in schools. Our institutions of higher learning are constantly on fire because of the devilish activities of cult members. Iyoha *et al* (2010:28-29) disclosed,

Cultism is becoming a perennial and agonising problem in secondary schools and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It makes the government, students, management, members of the community and cult members to sleep with one eye open. Cultism has systematically infected our institutions to the extent that both cultists and non-cultists within these institutions and environs have lost peace. These cultists maim, rape, act as thugs for business men/politicians, kill or assassinate, thereby causing unrest and terror in these institutions in particular and the society in general.

Nevertheless, Anwuluorah (2008:7) opined,

The youth's involvement in cultism is a serious concern for many Nigerians. The secret cults engagement in nefarious activities like armed robbery, petty stealing, murder/killings, rape, hard drugs, cruel acts, rudeness and fighting. The above lend support to the claim made by many that most of the unrest and the state of anarchy in educational institutions are due to cultism.

Some of the effects of cultism are outlined below

1. Disruption of Academic Activities and Examination Malpractices

- i. Students who lack the confidence to face the rigours and challenges of academic work seek refuge in campus cults in order to obtain favourable grades through intimidation and blackmail (Onyechere, 2006)
- ii. Normal criminal activities for cults include intimidating professors into giving high grades, including the burning of their cars or briefly abducting their children (http://www.wikipedia.com/confraternityinNigeria).

- iii. In 1995 a graduation ceremony of a university was disrupted when a graduating student was shot dead (Usman, 2008).
- iv. A University examination and record block was burnt down to ashes to prevent the graduation of students because some cult members could not graduate because of poor performance in their examinations (Usman, 2008).
- v. There was expulsion of 40 students and three teachers over cultism by the authority of the Tai Solarin College of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode (The Guardian Thursday Nov-22 1997 p. 37).
- vi. In 2011 a female lecturer in Department of Guidance and Counselling, School of Education, College of Education, Igueben in Edo State was severely beaten and robbed by a group of cultists.

2. Violence of Killing and Assassination

In 1995 as a post graduate student of University of Benin, I witnessed an activity carried out by a group of cultists when the student union government was holding a meeting at the university auditorium. The secretary general of the student union, a five hundred level engineering student was attacked and killed by a group of cultists in broad day light. Usman (2008) reported Anayo Okoli's reports outlining cult activities in 1997 thus;

- i. February 1997: Two students were killed at Lagos State University Ojoo and other two were murdered at the University of Benin.
- ii. April 1997: Two students of Lagos State University were murdered in a bloody cult clash.
- iii. June 1997: one student of Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta was murdered in bloody cult clash. Two students were killed at the polytechnic Ibadan. One student was killed at Ogun state university. Two students of Port-Harcourt were murdered.
- iv. July 1997: Seven students of the polytechnic were charged to court for murders resulting from cult activities, 264 students of Ibadan polytechnic were suspended. Six female students of Federal Polytechnic Ede were arrested. The University of Lagos expelled 30 students. Ehase (2006) gave the following reports.
- v. July 10, 1999: Five students were shot and killed in a most bizarre massacre by Black Axe secret cult at Awo Hall of Obafemi Awolowo University of Ile-Ife. The secretary General of the students' Union Government was equally killed.
- vi. Two undergraduates of the University of Jos were shot dead early Sunday morning by gunmen suspected to be cult members.
- vii. Death toll in the bloody clash that occurred at the University of Ibadan between members of Eiye confraternity and Axe secret cut groups. The victims were gunned down and matcheted to death by suspected cultists during sporadic gunshot exchanges.

- viii. These assaults are sporadic and tens of lives are lost with each episode more so because a clash in one institution could trigger 'solidarity' clashes in different other institutions in Nigeria. A newspaper report says that about 115 lives have been lost by cult related killings between June 1993 and end of 2003. It was also reported that;
 - ix. The exact death toll of confraternity activities is unclear. One estimate in 2002 was that 250 people had been killed in campus cult related murders in the previous decade, while the Exam Ethics Project Lobby group estimated that 115 students and teachers had been killed between 1993 and 2003. However, these figures pale in insignificance when compared with the recent cult activities in Benin-city the Edo state capital in 2008 and 2009 with over 40 cult related deaths recorded monthly (http://www.wikipedia.com/cofraternity-in-nigeria.)

Moreover, in 2012 at College of Education, Ekiadolor in Edo state a female student was beheaded by cultist. Her body was dropped at the college gate while her head was carried away. Students of the college protested and the school was temporarily closed down.

3. Cultist Kidnapping

Many cases of kidnapping were reported in our campuses.

- i. On April 2013 Prof. Mrs Isiramen of Department of Religious Studies and Cultural Management of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State was kidnapped.
- ii. On 21st June 2013 Edo State police command paraded 36 persons allegedly involved in kidnapping, robbery and cultism including the cult leaders and allegedly majorly involved in recent killings in the state. The suspects were arrested with cache of arms including AK 47 riffle, two AK riffle magazines, 23 rounds of 7:62mm life ammunitions, two mgum pump action guns ,one English made cut to size double barrel gun and 107 live cartridges(http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/06/edo-police-parade-36-suspected-kidnappers-cultists).
- iii. On 17th December 2011, two students of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijabu Ode were detained at state criminal Investigation Department Abeokuta Ogun State for their alleged involvement in the kidnapping of a fellow student. (http://www.gbooza.com/group/crim/forum/topic/19yrs-old-varsitycult.-Leader-arrested, for-kidnapping)
- iv. On 27th January 2013, the former Vice Chancellor, Abednigo Ekoko of Delta State University was abducted on Sunday morning as he left the church service in Uzere Isoko South L.G.A. Ogwashi-ukwu [http://campusportal.com.ng/delsu/former-delta-state university-vice-chancellor-kidnapped]

4 Thuggery Acts

Cultists are involved in thuggery. Lecturers and their children are beaten and manhandled for one reason or the other. Some lecturers are intimidated and threatened. Academic activities are halted in campuses and fear of uncertainty freeze human beings. During elections in Nigeria, politicians made good use of cultist to disrupt election exercises. "In the Niger River Delta, confraternities are deeply enmeshed in the conflict in the oil rich delta. Most of the campus cults have been accused of kidnapping foreign oil workers for ransom, while many of the militant groups, such as the movement

for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) employ confraternity members as combatants (http://www.wikipedia.com/ confraternity-in-Nigeria).

5. Stealing and Robbery

There are many cases of stealing and robbery by cultists in campuses and its environs. They robbed co-students and lecturers alike. Laboratory equipment, electrical facilities, library collections, furniture and stationeries are vandalized. "The majority of confraternities as of 2005 were engaged in a variety of money-making criminal activities, ranging from cyber crime to armed robbery and kidnapping. Cult members may also get money from political figures who wish to intimidate their opponents" (http://www.wikipedia.com/confraternity in Nigeria)

6. Promiscuous Acts

Cults are well involved in promiscuity. They require cult members to involve in raping girls and women, to engage in rough sexual activities, to drink blood etc before they are accepted as members. Some girls who are not members of cult groups are raped in campuses. Some female groups in cults operate as prostitutes early in life. However, Anunobi (2001) lamented the harm promiscuity has done to our tertiary institutions students and lecturers alike. Cases of rape, prostitution, lesbianism (supe), homosexuality and masturbation are prevalent in our institutions of learning. This promiscuous acts lead to cases of sexually transmitted diseases, loss of virginity, abortions, unwanted teenage pregnancies, sterility, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and even death.

7. Drug Abuse

Cult members are used to hard drugs in order to operate at higher levels in any of their activities. Ighalo and Ighalo (2008:154) stated,

The abuse of hard drugs and other psychotropic substances have been identified to be closely related to high incidence of violence, secret cult activities, rape, armed robbery, school drop outs, academic failure, traffic and industrial accidents, unsafe acts in work places, health hazards, and other notorious crimes.

Our youths in higher institutions have access to hard drugs and these drugs are even dangerous to their own health. These hard drugs are in forms of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, alcoholic drinks etc. These hard drugs are eaten, smoked, swallowed, drunk or injected in the veins. The effect of drug abuse made it easy for cultists to engage in criminal activities in campuses. Drugs make them bold, fearless, courageous and criminally minded but narcotic drugs have much impact on the brain. They may lead to insanity or madness and even death. However, Iwuagwu (2007:62) lamented, thus:

Cultism is a dark world and cultists are lost in the world of cultism. The thoughts of cult's activities and its associated "insecurity" feelings have turned their minds. They are unable to reason anymore. They can't even tell if cultism is good or not because they are lost in it.

Cultism is an ugly monster in Nigerian Higher institutions of learning. Many students are in cults and involve themselves in devilish activities instead of becoming shining stars in academics.

Reasons Why Students Join Cult Groups in our Higher Institutions of Learning

Cultism is a secret society that is not healthy but many students are in it. Initiation of members involves horrible traditional rituals yet daily, many new members are initiated for reasons best known to them. Some of the reasons why students join cult groups are as follows:

1. Power and Status

Many students join cult groups to have power. They want to acquire power to resist victimization and oppression from lecturers and the university authority. They want to be popular.

2. Protection

Many students especially females join cult groups to seek protection and security. They felt that the "godfather" and some tough students will protect them from anything that might affect them in the campus or outside.

3. Revenge

Some students join cult groups in order to use the devilish power of groups to revenge whenever they are intimidated, victimized or their girl friends or sugar daddy snatched from them.

4. Poverty

Poverty is one of the major causes why students join cult groups. Many students are from poor homes but they are in schools to acquire knowledge. Some students from rich homes initiate these poor students into cultism with little gifts and mere promises.

5. To Get Money/Financial Gain

Some students join cults in order to make money through stealing, armed robbery and kidnapping. Cultists look for money by all means as to enable them carry out their own violent attacks. Moreover, Onodarho (2006) revealed that "secret cults" are devilish avenues of making money by their leaders. Taxes and levies are imposed from time to time on members who have earlier sworn under blood oath to be faithful to the ideals and dictates of the cult."

6. Ignorance

Many new students gaining admission into universities join cult groups because of ignorance. These new students are not aware of cults and cult devilish activities but through tricky means are initiated into the group. According to Osasebor (2010) "Some new students are deceived into mid-night fellowship which turns out to be anti-Christ mode of worship and wrong initiation into the synagogue of Satan."

7. Peer Group Pressure

Students at adolescent stage can easily make friends with colleagues without proper understanding of whom their friends are. These cult friends lure innocent students into cult groups. Never the less Calvert (1975) as quoted by Osasebor (2009) asserted that it was more urgent for boys entering into school to learn peer norms than to learn school's rules."

8. Parental Background

Some parents are members of cult societies either when they were in schools or in the wider society. Their wards in schools now easily join cult groups because daddy or mummy is a member of one.

Parental influence is very strong in shaping children's life style but this is negative influence that leads to destruction of one's life.

9. Unemployment

Unemployment is a social problem in Nigeria. Many graduates at the end of their studies cannot secure good jobs to take care of themselves. The fear of unemployment has turned them to cultism. Echekwube (1999) identified fear of unemployment after graduation, inability to pay school fees, alienation etc as sources of frustration, which some renounced cultists confessed as predisposing them to find solace in cultism.

10. Influence of Lecturers who are Godfathers

Some lecturers persuade students to join cult groups because they are also cult members. These cult lecturers act as godfathers to these students by offering help to them when the need arises. But Iyoha *et al* (2010) lamented, 'There are even situations of lecturers being cult members. If the lecturers who are those that impact knowledge and at the same time help in killing the zeal for knowledge of decent and intelligent students. I wonder where we are headed to.'

11. Political Office Holders

Many students join cult because they want to render service to politicians. Some politicians even recruit cult members. Such cult members are used for violence against political opponents, rigging of election, thuggery, personal security. This new development makes some cult members feel that they are important.

12. Academic Frustration

Some students when they discovered that they are not meeting up with their academic work become frustrated in life. As a result of frustration, they join cult groups in order to find solace.

13. Lack of Moral Training

Some children are not trained to be disciplined at home. While in schools they resort to indisciplined acts. They easily join cults in order to get full opportunity to act defiantly or mischievously.

14. Influence of Mass Media

Students while viewing some programmes on the television choose models. Some of the movies shown to viewers on video clubs in television programmes encourage viewers especially adolescents to be tyrants and wicked. Some magazines equally give wrong information to children about life. Pictures of killing and assassination by dubious ones are revealed to students. Later, this negative information makes children to join cult groups in order to practise what they learnt from media.

15. Broken Homes

Some parents as husbands and wives live like cat and dog. Most times divorce is the end of the marriage. Children are neglected and rejected. They are left to satan to care for. These children when they get admission into higher institutions join cult groups to find assistance, joy and security. Ehase (2006) gave the following reasons.

16. The advent of brain drain negatively affected the intellectual participation and maturity of students in Nigerian universities.

- 17. The increasing decay of Nigerian universities due to underfunding (which continues till date), caused overcrowding, high students-staff ratio and a decline in recreational activities that could harness youthful energies, thus creating an attitude of territory and violence among students. This factor's persistence is attributed by many to be a consequence of bad governance.
- 18. Parallel events outside the university affecting the nation as a whole involved the military regime and its attendant coups, which heralded and promoted the mentality of violence as the ideal.

Although there are many reasons why students join cults, these reasons are trivial as cultism is evil.

Way Forward for Eradication of Cultism in our Higher Institutions of Learning for Academic Excellence to Prevail

Qualitative education guarantees useful knowledge by those who acquire it. According to Ibidapo-Obe[2013:16]

Great nations over the ages have always claimed superiority over their neighbours based on superior knowledge and the efficient ability to utilize same to their advantage as mass and qualitative education is the most veritable avenue to guarantee useful knowledge generation.

This statement is a fact but the question is how do our under graduates acquire mass qualitative and effective education to guarantee useful knowledge for national development. The scourge of cultism in our higher institutions is severe and the wave has psyched almost all our undergraduates not to be serious with their studies. Some of our undergraduates are half baked because of the activities of cultism. Nigeria is determined to be among the super power nations in the world hence vision 2020. For this vision to be achieved mass qualitative and effective education must be pursued by all university undergraduates. In this case, cultism and its activities must come to an end. For cultism to be eradicated in Nigerian higher institutions of learning, the following recommendations are given.

- 1. Good parental upbringing.
- 2. Practical moral education.
- 3. Proper modelling from adults and government.
- 4. Value oriented education.
- 5. Good school clubs with defined goals should be registered.
- 6. Non registered students should not be allowed to operate in the campus.
- 7. Effective guidance counsellor friendly dialogue with students about need for human feeling and dignity.
- 8. Mass orientation campaigns against entering cultism should be organised for new students.
- 9. Stickers, t-shirts and pamphlets should be used as avenues for sensitization and discouragement of new students against joining cults.
- 10. The government should urgently solve the problem of under-funding in Nigerian universities.
- 11. All Nigerian citizens should surrender their fire arms-guns and dangerous weapons.
- 12. Name of cults and their members should be compiled and sent to the law enforcement agency for proper monitoring.
- 13. Encouragement of individual employment opportunity through acquisition of skills in entrepreneurship courses in schools.
- 14. Godfathers and sponsors of cults should be severely dealt with.
- 15. Court members should be up and doing in trying cultists.

- 16. Religious institutions should be more serious with our youths to indoctrinate them in virtues before they leave their homes.
- 17. Students found involved in any ritual activities should be expelled after severe punishment. The House of Representative Bill, Secret Cult and Secret Society prohibition Bill, 2001 as quoted by Ehase (2006) should be fully implemented in higher institutions in Nigeria. Thus:
- 18. Imprisonment of culprits-a jail term of five years or a fine of 250,000 naira or both.
- 19. Closure of affected universities for two years.
- 20. Rustication of culprits.

Conclusion

Higher institutions of learning in Nigeria are in the war front because of cultism and its activities. School environments are no longer conducive for effective learning. Lives of students, lecturers and other personalities have been destroyed. There is terror and sorrow because of cult activities. All hands must be on desk to eliminate cultism in our schools in order to maintain high academic excellence in our campuses. Effective learning will uplift individuals and the nation to a greater height. Cultism in our higher institutions must come to an end to enable our undergraduates acquire mass qualitative and effective education for meaningful survival in the society.

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