

CULTISM AS A SOCIAL MENACE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

One of the major types of social menace in our citadel of higher institutions of learning all over the country is cultism. The menace has eaten deep into the fabric of our institutions so much that efforts being made by both the institutions and government to eradicate or minimise it has proved abortive. Rather the phenomenon is increasing with every sophistication and dimensions. In the past, objects such as axes, cutlasses, daggers, etc. were the main weapons used by the cultists in confrontations. Presently arms and ammunitions are being employed by the cultists in their confrontations. In this paper cultism has been defined as a phenomenon that exhibits the attributes of a cult. The origin and history of cultism and the categories of cult groups in Nigeria is fully discussed in this write up. The paper went further to itemise the various causes of cultism, why students join cults, and ways of eradicating or minimising cultism. A comprehensive list of secret cults is also presented in the form of an appendix.

Introduction

Cultism and other social vices amongst youths has become the order of the day in our tertiary institutions. The story is the same anywhere you go in the country with regard to the type of menace cultists unleash at each other and at their unsuspecting victims. The negative effect of cult activities in our tertiary institutions is overwhelming. Cultism has turned our institutions across the country into battle grounds with an atmosphere of fear and insecurity.

The activities of cultists in our institutions of higher learning are on the increase and their mode of operation is becoming more sophisticated despite stringent measures being taken by management of the institutions to eradicate or minimise them. This was the reason that made me to react, in my welcome address during the *Act Right Initiative Campaign* launched by the *Campus Transformation Network*, in Benue State Polytechnic Ugbokolo on the 3rd of May, 2004, with strong conviction that the fight against cultism is not a fight against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places (if I may borrow the assertion in Ephesians 6:12 of the Holy Bible). I strongly support the *Act Right Initiative Campaign* and similar campaigns in our tertiary institutions and also believed that such religious approach will do better in eradicating or minimising cultism and other social vices than the canal approach being employed by the Heads of the institutions. If we are to curb, if not to eradicate cultism and other social vices in our society in general, there is the need for a team work by parents, governments, institutions, and religious bodies.

The Meaning Of Cultism

Cultism derives its meaning from the word 'cult'. An attempt to define cult will lead to the meaning of cultism. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1975) defines the word cult as "a system of worship especially one that is different from the usual and established forms of religion in a particular society", whilst Chambers Everyday Dictionary (1985), defines cult as "a system of religious belief, worship or devotion to enthusiastic often excessive admiration". Oxford Dictionary (2000), defines cult as "a system of religious worship that is expressed in rituals; the term here is defined as "a group of people engaged in a form of ritual usually under oath binding the members to a common cause such a group of individuals operate covertly in furtherance of their objective, which usually is detrimental to the interest of others". It is a group of people, which places a secondary need in the position of a primary need. It can also be any group, with emphasis on secret initiation or ritual for the purpose of group, help group protection but whose activities are clandestine in nature. Cultism is therefore a phenomenon that exhibits the attributes of a cult.

The religious and the non - religious groups attached different meanings to cult, while the religious groups define cult as a religious movement, which neglects or distorts the messages of the

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scripture, the animist considers it a secret association of people with common belief for mutual help and protection.

There is no clear-cut distinction between cults and secret societies. However, modern day cultists in an attempt to separate their association from religious cults they refer their organisation as fraternity (a society of people with brotherly feelings and common interest). This is an attempt to remove the negative aspect usually associated with secret society and religious cults. The *Ogboni* secret society is known as the *Ogboni Fraternity* founded in 1914. *Armoc* is also known as fraternity and is considered one of the world's oldest fraternities.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), in Section 318 defines a secret society as follows:

A "Secret Society" includes any society, association, group or body of persons (whether registered or not).

- i) That uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols and which is formed to promote a course, 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;
- ii) The membership of which is incompatible with the function of dignity of any public office under this Constitution and whose members are sworn to observe oaths of secrecy; or in The activities of which are not known to the public at large, the names of whose members are kept secret and whose meetings and other activities are held in secret.

I lie Origin And History Of Cultism:

On a global basis, the origin of secret cults could be traced to China. There it was founded as a "benevolent associations for laudable and objectionable purpose, to every aspect of their life, politics, religion, commerce, trade unions, and the criminal under world, organisation or opposition to government, formation of self-protection units against robbery gangs among others".

In Africa, secret cults/societies could be traced to the Egyptians, formed on the intellectual objectives, aimed mainly to enhance occultic process. Others were the Babylonian Greece where various kinds of cults, such as Solar-Mystery cult existed.

Historically, secret cults are not alien to our societies. The *Ogboni Fraternity* and the *Osugbo* are not new to the Yorubas. There are others such as the *Ekpe* society, the *Ekine* cult and *Owegbe, Gelede, Egungun, and Oro*, which existed in Nigeria before the advent of the colonial masters. Since independence these societies were deprived of their initial political functions and relevance however, they survived purely for social and cultural function.

There are indications that cult activities in the Universities came into existence in 1952 at the University of Ibadan, when a group of seven, led by professor Wole Soyinka, Olumuyiwa Awe, Ralph Opara, D. Aig-Imoukhuede, Tunji Tubi and Olu Agunloye founded the *Seadogs Confraternity* (a.k.a *Pirates*) with the following objectives:

- i) to fight against moribund conventional - colonial mentality in the university system i.e. the compulsory wearing of formal dresses to the cafeteria, idea of students behaving as over lords and pro British behaviour;
- ii) to fight for humanistic ideas to revive the soul in the campus, to establish discipline, orderliness and orientation to laudable national objectives; iii) to fight against corruption, tribalism and elitism

However, twenty years later, *Pirates Confraternity* began to change significantly, breaking into divisions and derailing from its traditional focus due to rancour, feud, and fractionalisation. It began with the break away of a faction of the group known as buccaneers led by Dr. Bolaji Carrew in 1972. The *Viking's Confraternity* later followed this. There are also records that in 1967, the *Panama Pirates Confraternity* was formed at University of Lagos, this was immediately followed by the formation of the "*Dragons' Confraternity* at the University of Ife, Ile-Ife. Today, various cult groups besiege our institutions all over the country.

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Classification of Cult Groups in Nigeria

Prominent cult groups in Nigeria can be broadly classified into five groups: namely, Classical Confraternities, God-father Secret Cults, Female Cults, Mafia Cults and Terrorists' Cults.

- i) **Classical Confraternities:** these include *Pirates* formed in 1952, *Buccaneers* formed in 1972, and *Vikings*.
 - ii) **God-father Secret Cults:** under this group we have the *Malcorn*. They are groups formed to pitch tents against lecturers and oppressive students.
 - iii) **Female Cults:** these include the *Amazon*, *Black Brassier*, and *Charlie's Angel*. They are spy groups for the male cultists e.g. the *Black Axe* Confraternity has its female cult known as *Black Ladies* clubs formed in 1992 in University of Benin and inaugurated in 1993, in University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
 - iv) **Mafia Cults:** under these groups we have the *KKK*, *Egbe Dudu* and *Mafia*. The common features of this group are drug, terrorism, nefarious activities, rape and oppression,
 - v) **Terrorist Secret Cult:** these are violent in nature.
- A list of secret cults is presented in the appendix attached at the end of this paper.

Factors Responsible for the Growth and Spread of Cultism in our Institutions

Cultism on our campuses today is partly traceable to the following reasons:

- i) The long years of military rule, which did a climate of jungle law and the routine brutahsation of the civil populace, characterised by military and security operatives;
- ii) The use of discretionary admission as well as the admission of some students who barely made their WAEC or SSCE but had high scores in JAMB into our higher institutions, the resultant effect being that these students find it difficult to cope with academics and they resort to difficult tactics including assistance from cult groups to intimidate hardworking lecturers and students; iii) The presence of some non-students in the hall of residence of higher institutions enable such persons to be used by outside or other forces to foment on campus;
- iv) The access of student cult members to sophisticated weapons of assault, some of which at times cannot be matched by the police;
- v) Some Heads of institutions intentionally use some of the cultists against the others, some use them to fight perceived enemies on campus or counter the influence of other interests including difficult Student Union Government on campus;
- vi) The existing anxiety and fear as a result of lack of security on campus;
- vii) It has been observed that most of the violent activities of the cults are either during initiation on recruitment or during examinations; viii) Lack of adequate facilities, which permits over crowding in halls of residence.

Reasons why students join cults

Some of the reasons why students generally join cults are enumerated below:

- i) Obtain privileges which otherwise would not be attained;
- ii) Have a sense of power, influence and prestige among certain social classes;
- iii) Command authority and respect from members of the society;
- iv) Have a feeling of belonging and worthiness in the scheme of things among certain groupings;
- v) Fight against perceived injustice and inequity in society or in a certain behaviour;
- vi) Terrorised people be exhibiting capability to inflict violence on perceived adversaries;
- vii) force and intimidate people to grant unjustified request for their devilish design; viii) to gamer for their members' rights and privileges associated with higher echelon of the society;
- ix) membership provides avenues for financial assistance;
- x) membership provides security for girl friends;
- xi) Offending campus cult members are usually protected against sanctions from colleagues, lecturers, university authority and government;

- xii) Students from troubled and broken homes who lack proper parental care and those who are shy and lack confidence use cult membership to acquire boldness to engage in certain activities;
- xiii) Some join cult out of inquisitiveness;
- xiv) Students join cults because they are aware that people at larger society join secret societies for security, power influence and wealth.
- xv) Some cult members lured student whose parents are well placed in the society to assist other members financially and otherwise.

Ways of Combating Cultism

In order to eradicate or minimise cultism in our institutions of higher learning, we need to adapt the following strategies:

- i) There is need to have a very penetrating and effective outfit for identifying the member of secret cults and their plans at all times. As a result, the relevant security outfits should closely and effectively police our campus,
- ii) The Management of campus cult problems must be on continuous basis with the development of cooperative programmes among the institutions to tackle and prevent the spread of cult activities to checkmate their spread and movement,
- iii) There is need to have face-to-face interview before students are registered into various courses. Orientation courses should draw attention to cult problem,
- iv) A cult intelligent unit involving police, SSS, and students should be established in each campus,
- v) There is need to provide recreational facilities to keep students busy on the campus,
- vi) There is need to streamline (the number of students on the campus to allow for effective monitoring, vii) Parents' forum should be established on the campuses and this forum, a way to monitor wards should be emphasized,
- viii) All campuses should organize "Operation Rid All Non-students" from Wall of residence,
- ix) The Student Union Activities (Control and Regulations) (No.47 of 1989) should be amended to remove the option of fine and empower Head of Institutions with expulsion,
- x) The laws of the institutions, which state that only students found to be of good character and learning may be awarded certificates, should be respected. The legal system, therefore have no right to change such laws in order to satisfy the selfish yearning of few individuals which undermine the well being of larger society, xi) Any student found involved in cultism should be expelled and prosecuted and his name entered into the central expelled student register located at Federal Ministry of Education and advertised with his photograph to prevent re-admission, xii) Murder, arson, rape, illegal possession of arms etc. that resulted from case of cultism should be prosecuted in line with criminal code, xiii) Accessories to the crime should be prosecuted in line with criminal code and act No. 47 of 1989. xiv) The oath of matriculation should be amended to include an undertaking to abstain from cultism. xv) Efforts should be made to bridge the Communication gap between students, staff and the authorities.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF SECRET CULTS

1. Agbaye
2. Amazon
3. Bees international
4. Black Axe: Nep-black movement
5. Black: beret fraternity
6. Black E3rassene
7. Black brother
8. Black Cats
9. Black Ofals
10. Black Sword
11. Black Scorpions
12. Blanchers
13. Big 20
14. Blood Suckers
15. Brotherhood of Blood
16. Buccaneers (Sea Lords)
17. Burkina Faso, Revolution Fraternity
18. Canary
19. Cappa Vendetto
20. Daughter of Jezebel
21. Dreaded Friends of Friends
22. Dragons
23. Eagle Club
24. Eiye or Air Lords Fraternity
25. Egbe Dudu
26. Executioners
27. FF
28. Frigates
29. Fangs
30. Family
31. Green Berets Fraternity
32. Gentlemen's Club
33. Hepos
34. Hell's Angels
35. Himalayas
36. Jaggare Confederation
37. Jurrists
38. Klu Klux (KKK) Klan Confraternity
39. Knight Cadet
40. Klan Konfraternity Klansman
41. King Cobra
42. KKK Boys
43. Maphites or Maphlated
44. Mai com X
45. Mafia Lords
46. Mgba-Mgba Brothers
47. Musketeers Fraternity
48. Neo-Black Movement
49. N. Association of Adventures
50. Nite Hawk
51. Nite Rovers
52. Osiri
53. Ostrich Fraternity
54. Panama Pyrate Confraternity
55. Phoenix
56. Predators
57. Pirate Seadogs Confraternity
58. Red Devils
59. Red Fishes
60. Red Sea Flores
61. Royal Queen
62. Scavengers
63. Scorpions
64. Sons of Night
65. Thomas Sankara Boys
66. Third Eye Confraternity
67. Trojan Horses Fraternity
68. Truth Seekers
69. The Mafioso Fraternity
70. The Soiree Fraternity
71. The Scorpion Fraternity
72. The Vikings
73. Vipers
74. White Angels
75. Wairus
76. Temple of Eden Fraternity
77. Sunmen
78. The Odu Confraternity
79. Black Ladies Club
80. Black Cross
81. Bats
82. Fliers
83. Airwords
84. Soko
85. Daughters of Jezebel
86. Hard Candies