

Menace of Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: The Way Out

I. A. Ajayi, Haastrup T. Ekundayo and F. M. Osalusi

Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education, University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

**E-mail: isaacabiodun2005@yahoo.com, **< haastrup2006@yahoo.com >*

KEYWORDS Secret Cults. Societal Decadence. Confraternity. Criminal Oriented Behaviour

ABSTRACT The paper examined the menace of secret cults in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. The origin of cultism was traced to the Seadog confraternity (a.k.a Pyrates), founded by Wole Soyinka and six others at the foremost University of Ibadan in 1952. The peaceful, and non-violent confraternity set up then, in the 1980s, metamorphosed into a secret cult whose activities have been characterized by some bizarre and violent activities. It was against this background that this paper x-rayed the possible causes and consequences of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The major causes of cultism in tertiary institutions were influence of peer group; parental background; societal decadence; erosion of education standards; militarization of the Nigerian polity; lack of recreational facilities; quest for power and protection among others. However, some of the effects of cultism include loss of lives and properties, disruption of academic activities on campuses, unsafe university environments. It was therefore recommended that all the stakeholders in the university education system should fuse efforts to combat the menace. It was also recommended that government should be more aggressive in her quest to eradicate cultism in the universities.

INTRODUCTION

The most important and embarrassing problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is the menace and aggressiveness of cult members and cult related activities. Never before has the potential for destruction of lives and property on campuses been so great or escalated so fast and horrible as now. There is hardly no academic session without reported cases of cultism in most Nigerian institutions. There is no single Nigerian institutions of higher learning that has not experienced the menace of cultism for sometime now. According to Okwu (2006), as till September 2003, 5,000 students and lecturers have died on Nigerian campuses as a result of cult-related violent clashes.

The recent destructive cult activities on campuses are mind-boggling, irritating and distasteful. Lives of promising young men and women have been cut short by the bloody hands of murderous gangs on campuses.

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996) gives the sociological definition of cult as a small group or religious activities whose beliefs are typically secrete, esoteric and individualistic. Lexican Webster's Dictionary defines secret cult as a group of people who share a 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. Ogunbameru (2004) defined secret cult as any form of

organisation whose activities are not 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 the accepted norms and values of everyday life.

In summary, cultism can be defined as a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their mode of operations are done in secret and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike.

HISTORY OF CULTISM IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Cultism in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonization when a group of people with the main aim of seeking protection from their ancestors conducted rituals. Secret cults have always existed in many parts of the country. The Ogboni secret cult is notable among the Yorubas, Ekpe secret cult among the Efiks, Ekine cult in the Delta region and Owegbe cult among the Edos (Adelola 1997). Almost everywhere in the world, different types of secret rituals groupings are manipulated in the articulation of organisation functions for a variety of social and political purposes. These societies differ in what is kept secret and what is made public. In some, membership is secret, but the rituals are not, while in some others, membership is made public but rituals are secret.

According to Opaluwah (2009), one positive thing about these societies is that they do not harm unless provoked and they could serve as an instrument for cleansing the society of any cultural debris. The author argued that some even serve as socialization groups that initiate men and women into adulthood as in *Poru* and *Mende* societies in Sierra Leone and the *Oviaosese* in Ogoniland.

Today, cult groups in tertiary institutions are violent, maim, kill and carry out many anti-social activities on campuses. This calls for various efforts to outlaw them in the institutions.

Nigerian educational institutions were not associated with secret cults until 1952 when Wole Soyinka (now Professor) and six others (Olumuyiwa Awe, Ralph Opara, Tunji Tubi, Daign Imokhue, Pius Olegbe and Olu Agunloye) formed the Seadogs confraternity (a.k.a. Pyrates). The ideas behind the formation of the confraternity were both patriotic and altruistic as it was not imagined as a secret cult. The main objectives of the seadogs as summarized by Orintusin (1990) were: to fight 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.

Today, there are about forty-five (45) secret cults in Nigerian institutions of learning and are all equipped with an elaborate hierarchy, insignia and distinct attire. Some of the most notable of these secret cults include the Black axe, Eiyee confraternity, Vikings, Amazons, Buccaneer, Mafia, and Dragons. The female students are not left as they have their own groups among which are Temple of Eden, Frigates, Barracudas, Daughters of Jezebel among others (Adewale 2005).

Prevalence of Cultism on Campuses

Although the history of cultism on the university campuses in Nigeria dates back to some fifty years, its involvement in violence became manifest only some two decades ago. The existence of these groups on campuses has made life unsafe and meaningless to both staff and students. Their activities include: harassing any non-members who snatched a member's girl friend or 'sugar daddy' (in case of female cultism); harassing any female students who refuse their amorous advances; harassing any lecturer who insist on merit for passing examinations among others.

According to Akor (1994), one of the earliest 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. Adewale (2005) also reported the following: in 1991 a student of University of Port-Harcourt was beheaded during a feud between cult members; at Delta State University in Abraka, the activities of secret cult groups resulted in the death of a Principal Assistant Registrar and his wife; on 5th August, 2002 a 300 level economics student was shot dead and slaughtered at the Dallimore area of Ado-Ekiti, the capital city of Ekiti State.

On 8th June 2006, some cult members invaded University of Ado-Ekiti at 12 noon where they burnt the cadet's office, killed three students and wounded many students and staff of the university (Omoegun and Akanle 2007). The authors also reported that on June 28, 2006, a lecturer (Seun Oyedola) was abducted and killed during a clash between cults at the Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. Cultists have struck and killed many students in higher institutions in Nigeria, with the most gruesome happening at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife when about ten students were gunned down in a day by cultists (Jamiu 2008). Activities of cults is a sort of derailment from what started as a forum to awaken socio-cultural consciousness of our elite to fight oppression, racism and colour discrimination has been bastardized, due to various factors. Ogidefa (2008) also reported that on July 10, 1999, five students of Obafemi Awolowo University were killed (the slain students were George 'Yemi Iwilade, the then Secretary General, OAU Students Union, Tunde Oke, a member of Democratic Socialist Movement, Efe Ekede, Eviano Ekelemu and Yemi Ajiteru). On October 2003, three students—Kehinde Dosumu, Omotayo Suraju and Olalekan Ajao of Kwara State Polytechnic were killed.

Besides, Ogidefa (2008) also reported that Tony Ileogbuna, acting Head of Geology department at the Enugu State University of Science and Technology was murdered; Yomi Edeki of University of Benin was killed on February 4th; Tuesday, March 9, 2004 Vincent Uloho of University of Benin, Benin-City was also murdered in cold blood. Again, July 2004, Wale Adeyori and Banji of the Federal Polytechnic Ilaro were also killed; Ashifat Olatunji Saheed, a student

of The Polytechnic Ibadan was slaughtered in March, 2005; Gbenga Joseph, a policeman attached to anti-cult squad of Kwara State police command was killed by suspected cultist in June 2005. Cultists slaughtered Bolaji Toniwa, a student of Lagos State University in September 2005.

Causes of Cultism in Nigerian Higher Institutions

There are various causes of cultism on campuses some of which are examined as follows:

1. Influence of Peer Group: There is no doubt that peer group influence is a potent factor that compels young undergraduates to join secret cults. Ibeh (2005) posited that, the period of adolescence is marked by intense social relationship in any environment he/she finds himself. At adolescent, there is a shift of emphasis on social relationship from the parents to the peer group. As adolescent breaks the total reliance and contact with his/her parents, he/she shifts same to the newly acquired group which in most cases is any group on campus he/she embraces. Akinfolarin (2003) and Omoegun and Akanle (2007) also reported in their studies that peer group influence is one of the reasons students join cultism.

2. Parental Background: Students, who come from homes where codes of good conduct and discipline are strictly enforced, are proved to cultism. Olajuibge (2001) reported that parental background, lack of moral instruction at home and the manner in which the child is brought could be a factor in enrolment as a member of a cult. The author explained that excessive control by parents, too many rules could make individual tense and anxious while a child whose freedom knows no bound may be a ready candidate for cult membership.

According to Mgbekem (2004), some parents love their children to the extent of pampering them. When they do a wrong thing instead of scolding them, they allow the children go free from the offence. They grow up with such negative habit and consequently imbibe criminally-oriented behaviour which lead them to joining cult groups, Owoye (1997) also established a very strong link between weak and defective family background and influence and tendencies for students to join secret cults.

According to the author, parents themselves

might be members of secret cults. Cult members may come from broken homes where child abuse and neglect are very rampant. Ayodele and Ayodele (2002) also identified family breakdown as one of the causes of cultism on campuses. According to them, a child who comes from broken home is exposed to parental negligence and frustration. Such child is easily induced into cultism. According to Ogunbameru (2004), Freud's frustration – Aggression hypothesis stipulated that frustration leads to aggression either towards the perceived sources of interference or displaced to another object. Thus some students joined cult to get over the frustration they encountered because of broken home.

3. Societal Decadence: Ogunbameru (1997) lamented that the Nigerian society has willingly or unwillingly provided an enabling environment for all forms of crimes among which is the problem of campus secret cult. The author argued that Nigeria has replaced honour with dishonour as a standard attitude. Mgbekem (2005) also lamented that youths nowadays imbibed immoral values instead of inculcating moral and decent values. The author posited that this accounts for why the youth see or feel no qualms in joining secret cult. Okeowo (1994) also linked youths propensity to join cult to the general state of normlessness existing in Nigeria.

4. Erosion of Education Standards: The economic downturn in the 1980s and early 1990s in the country encouraged corruption and erosion of standards in the educational system. Most students gained admission into the universities with dubious credentials (Akinfolarin 2003). Such students, because of their low self-image find solace in cultism in order to survive the academic rigours at all cost. For such students, to survive the academic system becomes a game of survival at all cost and as such they join cult groups to intimidate lecturers and the school authorities.

5. Militarization of the Nigerian Polity: Adewale (2005) remarked that the culture of violence which has become part and parcel of the Nigerian polity has many faces among which are military coups, state sponsored violence, political assassinations, activities of ethnic militia and communal clashes. The author argued that the emergence of military coups in the Nigerian polity marked the official introduction of violence as a way of resolving political conflicts. Ibukun (1999) also highlighted militarization of the Nigerian polity for decades as a factor for cultism

in Nigerian tertiary institutions. While the happenings in the university are an offshoot of the larger society, violence became pressed into the psyche of an average Nigerian. Poor economic prospects that accompany democratic governance in Nigeria seem to make cultism an attractive option for youths. Besides, efforts by some power-drunk politicians to gain power at all costs, make them to train or recruit members as things in order to suppress their political opponents.

Other reasons for cultism in tertiary institutions (identified in literature reviewed) include lack of recreational facilities, decay in social life and increasing materialism of the society (Omoegun and Akanle 2007); lack of virile students union, erosion of traditional academic culture (Adewale 2005); quest for power, status and protection (Okwu 2006); the desire to hold elective posts in the students' union and the desire for security (Ajayi and Ayodele 2002).

Effects of Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

The attendant effects of cultism on the learning process cannot be exhausted as both intra and inter-cult clashes negatively affect the students in a very high proportion. It sometimes leads to incarceration, rustication or expulsion of both innocent and student members (Opaluwah 2009).

A lot of lives and properties have been destroyed through cult violence (Mgbekem 2004). Young undergraduates who are supposed to be leaders in future have fallen victims of trigger-happy cultists (Jamiu 2008). Our youth population is being gradually decimated due to cult activities. In the Niger-Delta where cult violence is widespread in recent times, properties worth billions of Naira have been destroyed in communities in the area. Communities have been sacked as inhabitants flee to different places for safety (Adewale 2005).

The peace on campus is adversely affected whenever there is cult invasion, this may result in suspension of academic activities for sometime. Times without number, academic activities in these institutions have been brought to a standstill due to cult violence. Campus cultists kill, maim and rape fellow students and even lecturers. Lecturers are threatened into awarding unmerited scores to cultist who do not attend classes (Opaluwah 2009). Mgbekem (2004) lamented that nights are

no longer safe in university hostels because of frequent cult disturbances and insecurity. Some parents now prefer off campus accommodation for their children in tertiary institutions for fear of being victims of campus cultists' rampage. In reality, cultism seems to put some lecturers who may want to punish students unjustly on their toes, as they may not want to be the next victim of cult's unwholesome activities. Besides, politicians who want to get to power by force, employ the cultists as political thugs to threaten opponents, and also to manipulate the electoral process.

Due to the activities of the cultists and their sponsors who supply them with sophisticated weapons to prosecute communal clashes or to gain upper hand in power struggles, there are illegal weapons in all nooks and crannies of the tertiary institutions, some cities, towns and villages. The cultists who are in possession of such illegal weapons sometimes used them for perpetration of crimes.

Solutions to the Menace of Campus Secret Cults

Over the past two decades, various attempts have been made to deal with the problem of cultism. The various measures taken to address the spate of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions include the enactment of Decree 47 of 1989 that pronounced a number of year jail term for any cultist found guilty (Fasanmi 2006). Ibeh (2006) also posited that Rivers State government made a law stipulating a ten-year jail term sentence without an option of fine for culprits of cultism. Also, the Federal Republic of Nigeria under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000 issued a three-month ultimatum to all vice-chancellors to eradicate cultism from the campuses. Some higher institutions also set up anti-cult groups consisting of the student body itself and some security agents to monitor and check the activities of cultists on campus.

Despite the various measures, it appears the proliferation of cult groups and their dastard acts continue unabated perhaps due to the lukewarm attitude of the government and the university authorities to enforce the rules. Ogidefa (2008) posited that there are allegations that some vice-chancellors were sponsoring cult activities in their universities to silence the voice of dissent. This appears not to augur well for a citadel of learning. The following are the suggested

solutions to the menace of cultism in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The following are the suggested solutions to the menace of cultism in Nigeria tertiary institutions.

Government and non-governmental agencies should step up their campaigns against cultism and its destructive tendencies. The evil nature of cultism should be explained to young people in schools at all levels through sensitization, seminars and workshops. Osaigbovo (2000) recommended that through seminars, workshops, symposium, posters, handbills and public lectures, cultism may be effectively combated.

Parents should desist from being members of secret cults and also prevent their children from joining bad groups. Moral education should be re-introduced in all spheres of our lives and the decadent society should be spiritually reawakened. The parents, religious organizations and government are to work jointly on this measure. Parents should be more vigilant concerning the activities of their children within and outside the home.

There must be improved facilities and improved living conditions on campuses so as to minimize perceived strain in the social system which underlines cultism on the campuses (Adewale 2005). Omoegun and Akanle (2007) suggested that universities should be reorganized, funded and should be provided with games so as to make universities attractive, involving, so that youthful exuberances of students will find a rewarding outlet in competitive sports like football, athletics which could engage students in their spare times.

The authorities of higher institutions of learning must show doggedness in their determination to stamp out cultism. They must brace up to the challenges of cultism, which has become one of the most potent evils of the recent time. Adewale (2005) suggested that it is very necessary for the committee of Vice-Chancellor of the Nigerian universities to adopt a common and uniform approach to solving the problem of cultism. The issue of former cultists who sometimes return to universities as staff must be looked into.

Students who do not belong to cults can be organised into anti-cult vanguard to watch and report cult members to the university authorities or to law enforcement agents. Jamiu (2008) posited that the school authorities must intensify armed patrol and surveillance on campuses. The

current effort where students form vigilante groups to monitor cultists should be encouraged. Prompt action concerning cases of cultism is also a necessary condition as delay in taking actions against offenders worsens the situation. It is suggested that any member of the public, no matter how highly placed, linked with the activities of cultism in campus should be tracked down and brought to book.

CONCLUSION

It has been established in the course of this study that the problem of cultism, among others, is a symptom of society, which is embroiled in moral decadence and where institutionalized and personal violence has become a way of life. Realizing the havoc which cultism has wrecked on both members and non-members of the academic community, all hands must be on deck to combat the menace. Besides, if the tertiary institutions' administration would come back to its glorious past as well as prepare the nation for the better days, there is the need to rediscover and teach the people concerned the goals of university education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore imperative on the part of the stakeholders in the university education (the churches, the mosques, parents, school administrators and the society at large) to fuse effort to eradicate the menace before it destroys the whole educational system. Besides, government should be more aggressive in her quest to eradicate cultism in the tertiary institutions.

REFERENCES

- Adelola IOA 1997. Secret cults in Nigerian institutions of learning: A periscopal appraisal. In: OA Ogunbameru (Ed.): *Reading on Campus Secret Cults*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press Ltd., pp. 51-69.
- Adewale R 2005. Violence in the citadel: The menace of secret cults in the Nigerian universities. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 14(1): 79-98.
- Akinfolarin WA 2003. Combating cultism in Nigeria's institutions of higher learning: The roles of the library. *Educational Thought*, 3(1): 297-304.
- Ajayi IA, Ayodele JB 2002. *History and Development of Education*. Ado-Ekiti: Petoa Educational Publishers.
- Akor A 1994. A malignant cult epidemic. *Guardian on Sunday* 20th March, pp. A8 – A9.
- Fasanmi JI 2006. Management of cultism in Nigerian

- institutions of higher learning. In: AA Owoseni, WB Ajayi, S Ajiboye, BO Omoyajowo (Eds.): *A Book of Readings on Cultism and Its Attendant Effects on Nigerian Institutions of Higher Learning*. A publication of the College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, pp. 115-123.
- Ibeh AE 2005. The Psycho-sociological imperatives of cultism in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. Being a Paper presented at a Seminar on Cultism and Its Effects on Nigerian Institutions of Higher Learning. Nov. 23 and 24.
- Ibukun WO 1999. A welcome address on the occasion of the conference on cultism in *Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria*. 2nd and 3rd September.
- Jamiu H 2008. Nigeria: The rising wave of cultism in Nigeria universities. *Daily Independent*, 18th November, P. 16.
- Mgbekem SJA 2004. *Management of University Education in Nigeria*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press.
- Ogidefa I 2008. Cultism in educational institutions in Nigeria: causes, possible solutions and counseling implications. www.devifinder.com (Retrieved on 19/02/2010).
- Ogunbameru OA 1997. The sociology of campus cults. In: OA Ogunbameru (Ed.): *Reading on Campus Secret Cults*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press Ltd.
- Ogunbameru OA 2004. Personality dimensions to cultism in Nigeria tertiary institutions: A sociobiological perspective. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 16(2): 91-98.
- Okeowo S 1994. Campus cults: manifestation of National decadence. *Nigerian Tribune* April 5, 1994, P. 5.
- Okwu OJ 2006. A critique of students' vices and the effect on quality of graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 12(3): 193-198.
- Olajugbe VI 2001. The role of guidance and counseling in checkmating cultism in Nigerian secondary schools. Paper presented at a Seminar in the Department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.
- Omoegun M, Akanle FF 2007. Perceived causes and effects of cultism in Nigerian universities: Prevention and solution with counselling implications. *Journal of Sociology and Education in Africa*, 6(1): 79-97.
- Opaluwah AB 2009. Cultism and Nigerian campuses: The way out. <http://www.gamji.com/article4000/News4512:htm> (Retrieved on February 20, 2009)
- Orintusin J 1990. The making of seadogs, the oldest cult. *National Concord* 27th July, 1990, P. 5.
- Osaigbovo JA 2000. Cultism and administration of higher education in Nigeria. *Professional Seminar for Ph.D*, Delta State University Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria.
- Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology 1996. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Owoeye J 1997. Campus cults: A study in urban violence. In: OA Ogunbameru (Ed.): *Reading on Campus Secret Cults*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press Ltd., pp.18-34.