

**SECRET CULT AND CULTISM: ANTIDOTE TO THE HYDRA-HEADED
MONSTER IN NIGERIA'S TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

BY

JIMOH KAYODE IBRAHIM

*Department of Social Studies,
Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin.*

Abstract

Cultism is a term that is commonly used but mostly misunderstood by all and sundry. In recent times, it creates fear and resentment to the general public and most especially to the members of various tertiary institutions. It now makes academic environment unsafe for learning and research. The paper attempts to examine the causes and effects of the menace, and how it can be controlled so as to restore sanity into our educational system in particular and the entire society in general. The paper recommended among other things that our school curriculum should be revalued to include more creative and manipulating activities that will engage youths in positive and functional activities.

Introduction

There is no gainsaying the fact that education is the greatest legacy, which parents and a nation can give to their youths, especially in modern time. Ajayi (1997:31), succinctly submit that "Education is the weapon to the future, the road to the future". It therefore means that national development rests on the quality of education that the future leaders are bequeathed with.

However, nothing is more heart breaking in the country nowadays than the frightening upsurge in several vices in the nation's tertiary institutions. The menace of secret cult in our educational institutions call for a drastic remedy as the institutions serves a breeding ground for the nation's future leaders. This is being threatened today by the present of cult activities of our youths. One can then agree with the submission of Okofia (1989:8) that "no nation can hope for a better tomorrow when it youths are swimming in the ocean of vices such as cultism".

The worry it has generated has been running through the veins of well meaning Nigerian. Recently, in one the of the 29th meeting of committee of vice chancellors held in Lagos, the then vice chancellor of Lagos State University, professor Fatiu Ademola Okesode did not mince words when he said the it was an irony that University system was faced with the Thorny and shameful problem of cultism. And he charged his colleagues at the beginning of the committee meeting that:

If we all agree that the youths of today are the leaders of tomorrow, let us resolve here and now to find lasting and effective solution to this cankerworm, if we are to bequeath a peaceful, progressive and egalitarian society to generations yet unborn.

The situation has become more alarming now because the crop of Nigerian Youths that engage in cultism with its attendant horror and embarrassment of the campuses are children of the well-to-do in the society. The menace has even spread to our post - primary institutions like bush fire. Cultism has become a topical issue considering its social and contemporary relevance to our educational development. In his view, Aloba (199:16) maintains that nothing has shaken the very foundation of the nation's academic community and threatened internal security more than the hydra-headed monster called cultism in institutions of higher learning.

What is cultism?

BBC English Dictionary (1992:275-76), defines a cult as a religious group with special rituals, which is regarded by many people as extreme or dangerous.

Cultism, as we have it today, approximates to secret and bizarre religious practices or unusual ritualistic practices by cliques. It has become a way of life in which members use coercion, fantasy, threats, gradual persuasion and hallucinating drugs to get others initiated into their fold. Once initiated, the culprits take their withdrawal oaths on blood, their lives and those of the members of their families or friends. Where withdrawal is not possible, it may lead to the instant death of the affected member. This explains why membership is not easily identified it is kept very secret Bamidele (1994:7). It is observed that cultism dangles various attractions and inducements before the would-be- members. These include promises of receiving immense material wealth fame, beauty, power, finding husbands for desperate female members, excelling in academics, success in business and acquisition of various spiritual powers and ability to torment non-members.

Emergence of Cultism in Nigeria

Experts have estimated that 3000 cult exist throughout the world with membership of about 3 million, most of whom are young adults.

Eluwa (1998) Tamouno (1997), traced the history of cultism in Nigeria to the pre-colonial era. He argued that members of such societies had, over a long period of existence, established their roots in the culture and societies where they existed. He said:

For centuries, secret societies from pre-colonial times to the present have learnt the delicate art of how to exist with management and Government without too open or too frequent confrontation but with bloody consequences.

In Nigeria today, membership of secret cult cut across different strata of the society, including the young and old, men and women, boys and girls, the rich and the poor, and the literate and illiterate, (Eluwa 1998). Some get initiated with their full

knowledge and consent while others are ignorant. Secret cults and members are found everywhere in the society. They are recently found bases in our schools.

History has it that cultism in our school grew from a relatively harmless form of socialization in the 1950s during the days of Professor Wole Soyinka. These were days when education was a great value in Nigeria, and tertiary institutions were very few, some intellectuals came together to fight for what they thought were their rights, to enforce justice and order on campuses, fight racism, and order on campuses, fight racism, tribalism, victimization and inequality. In order to pool resources and be thoroughly armed, they formed a club and named it "The private confraternity". (Adejobi, 1998:42). Hence, the founders formed theirs as any other social club, but today, it can hardly be said to be pursuing those laudable objectives.

Today, cults such as Black Nationalists, Buccaneers, Eiye, Black Axe, Black Barret, Vikings, daughter of Jezebet etc have emerged with their activities shrouded in secrecy. They hold their meeting in secret and carry out most of their nefarious and devilish acts under the cover of darkness. All these acts could be traceable to the increases in the exposure of our youths to violence in various ways due to their access to different communication media. So today, cultism has turned our institutions of learning to night mares where cultists torture innocent students with constant sickness, nightmares, and dreams failures in academic pursuits, fears, rape, injury and premature death. Such victims may give in and get initiated in order to escape from the torture.

Causes of Cultism

The phenomenon of secret cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria has also been attributed to the general moral decadences in the entire fabric of the Nigeria society. The worldwide economic crunch is biting seriously; many homes parents are failing woefully in their basic responsibilities to their children in an attempt to meet up with the economic demands in the homes, both parents have neglected their children to the care of some house helps, such neglect extended to school life. A child who has never known parental care, warmth, love and accommodation, can easily fall prey to the myriad's of competing socializing forces most of which are in the negative direction. For girls, the idea of experiencing freedom for the first time in a University environment; with both parents living very far away, is like a dog that has been let loose.

They take to prostitution after which they wantonly display the returns from such illicit outing very recklessly to the frustration and displeasure of the other less venture. Some members of the student population. They do this by enticing the boys, who in attempt to redistribute the ill-gotten money call the attention of the secret cult extortioners to execute their usual game plan.

Another theory on why students join secret cult has to do with the woeful and shameful malpractice in all campuses of tertiary institutions. Take the case of admission racketeering: The prevalent illegal admission in almost all institutions of higher learning as it affect the issue of open sales of admission to expelled secret cultists from other institutions to secure admission in some other unsuspecting higher

institutions. Such "new" students easily find their "bearing" among their secret cult syndicates and they continue their heinous activities unabated.

Another factor that encourages cultism in our Educational institutions is the poor funding of most of the State Universities in our country; basic facilities cannot be provided, some of the infrastructures are far cry from what they should be.

The facilities for learning are so poor that the students cannot be adequately pre-occupied with academic activities. In order to fill the vacuum so created, they resort to secret cult activities which make life difficult for other student on campus.

Hostel accommodation is another vexations area where secret cult activities blossom. The hostels are breeding grounds secret cult activities. At the beginning of each academic year, the recruitment drive for new members is a very serious affair in the hostels. Most often these new students on admission very easily find their way into the willing hands of existing cults. Also, the inability of most of our educational institution to provide adequate hostel accommodation for all students on campus where their activities could easily be monitored by the relevant organs of government has occasioned the upsurge of secret cult activities in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Students therefore, have to resort to hiring some private hostels outside the campus and in most cases, these hostels are generally a haven for secret cult activities since they are usually not under any stringent rules and regulations as in institutional hostel. Infact, many secret cult members generally prefer off campuses accommodation to any official one where they would be subjected to the hall rules and regulations.

Authorities of the various institutions of higher learning have been known to be very cautious in taking drastic disciplinary measure like expulsion, rustication or even suspension against any cult member because of the danger posed by the return of such erring cultists to campus after serving the punishment. In many cases, because of the lapses in the judicial system, the courts overturn the orders of the authorities of the institutions. This is so because the decree 47 of 1998 which out -lawed secret cults in our Educational Institutions and imposed a fine of N50,000:00 (Fifty Thousand Naria) or a 5 year jail term or both has several loopholes which had been making it difficult for both the police and the institution of higher learning to prove allegations of membership against suspected secret cultists since their activities are mainly nocturnal.

Also in some cases, cult members who are children of influential persons in the society or within the institutions themselves are shielded by such persons and frustrate the prosecution of their children.

In addition to protection by influential parents, it has also been suggested that such parents are themselves member of some societal traditional secret cults. Even some academic staff who was secret cult members in their student days still retains their membership as patrons and they act as shields for their secret cult offenders.

Effects of Cult Activities on the Society

Secret cult activities affect the whole nation politically, socially and economically. The cultists always want to be relevant in the control of power at

the centre (in the institutions) at all cost. When such move is resisted, violence will ensure. They often connect their Alumna who are highly placed in the society for assistance. The question that comes to mind is where do they get the sophisticated weapons they use in unleashing terror on the campus, community? The trauma of the parents or the dependent relations of those killed will forever be remembered. Normal academic activities are disrupted which leads to frequency closure of schools; Lectures are rushed in order to make up for lost time in a session.

Also, students who belong to cult often, find it difficult to obey school rules and regulations. They therefore, end up receiving half-baked education because they cannot abide by the rigor of decent and socially acceptable common school routines. Immoral practices are common among cultists. These cultists constitute a menace to the societal development of any nation. Moreso, evil practice in our Educational institutions make cult members lose respect for human feelings for fellow humans. They often threaten the lives of their colleagues and Teachers.

It is equally important to note that cultism has turned our institutions of learning into a hell of a place. Our leaders of tomorrow have become killers and blood thirsty devils. The problem has assumed a wider dimension now that some cult members have reportedly turned to full scale armed robbery, to the extent that what deserves attention is the way of arresting this cankerworm whose negative effects on people are daily spreading into all aspects of our social, political, economic and educational life.

Cultists terrorize, harass both lecturers and students, rape female students and maim members of the academic community. They spearhead such activities in campuses of our higher institutions as rebelling and rising against constituted authorities and rioting which more often than not culminate in the loss of the lives of innocent members of the academic community.

Academic activities at any active cult-infested institutions will always be at its lowest ebb culminating into low productivity on the part of the staffers and students. Nobody will want to take to risk or dare any form of threat genuine or not. Cult members pass examination without sweat, if not the consequences on the erring course lecturer will be grievous. The incessant violence diverts attention of the school authority from pursuing the fundamental purpose for which these institutions are established to fighting cultism. These are enough to scare parents from sending their children to such infested institutions. Education will be commercialized by those with low records of cult activities.

It also has to be noted and admitted that students learned many things from homes which they bring to the school. At home, many parents are free thinkers, and members of cult which are often observed by the children and even some students have been initiated into cults by their parents. The schools now become the avenues where such students now externalize what has been internalized at home. We should not forget that some students in their activities; such students become cult leaders if they are so inclined.

Conclusion

Cults activities in our institutions of learning are issue that touch on the life and success of the generality of students in the higher educational institutions as well as the development and security of the large society.

Therefore, it calls for appreciable attention. One cannot under estimate the grave danger it poses to the future of the country, hence all hands must be on deck to cleanse the system and restore sanity and confidence in our educational system.

As a result, our country should endeavour to give the youths sound academic training rather than to look the other way while our youths rot away. Parents, guardians, religious leaders, teachers and government have roles to play in re-invigorating both the moral and spiritual lives of the younger generation.

Recommendations

It is not an over statement to say that in trying to solve most problems affecting the nations' cooperate existence, the concerned authorities usually fail to recognize the root cause of such problems but only apply the dose which invariably fail to heal the problems. The menace of cultism in our institutions of learning is one of such problems which the concerned authorities had failed to examine thoroughly its foundations.

The general social and physical conditions in our institutions of learning as they exist today need over hauling and repair to make learning and stay within the institutions inviting, enduring and academic. It is not an over statement to say that the general learning conditions in most of the nations institutions is frustrating, depressing and crime-breeding. Under such conditions, there is the tendency for students to form various organizations through which they think a general social evaluation could be accomplished.

Campus life is an outgrowth of the general living condition in the large society to which students come and would return.

Therefore, if the general living condition in the larger society is hopeless, directionless, bleak and full of uncertainties the tendency is for the youth - the future generation to resort to various anti-socio activities and acts such as cultism.

To arrest the present livelessness and uncertain future conditions, the government at the various levels should re-order their priorities, create more jobs, recreational facilities and other motivational facilities that will make life work living for the youth.

The idea of misplacing value on academic work and certification to get gainful employment, and ascend to the top of social ladder, which make most of our student want to reach the top at all cost with minimum academic effort. Since there is the belief that most people get jobs, and ascend to the top through membership of "socio-cultural" club a sort of "mafia" then many of the students in tertiary institutions form and join various campus cults as a way of realizing their socio- economic ambition. In

this connection, it will not be far -fetched to say that in an attempt to realize their socio-economic ambition, through certification, many of the students had resulted into examination malpractice seriously backed up by secret cults. Thus, the solution to the above is that the government should de-emphasize the too much premium placed on certificate and money-making and encourage creativity on the part of the students.

Another possible solution is the revaluation and expanding of our school curriculum to include more creative and manipulating activities that will engage the youths in positive and functional activities rather than a daft and a dull school environment. The teaching of moral education and the formation of religious associations that preached against cultism in the institutions.

As charity begins at home, the family life education should be expanded to the grassroots to educate parents on the need to bring up their children to conform to societal norms and shun cultism.

Similar to examination malpractice a decree against cultism in our institutions of learning should be promulgated and that the decree operates without discrimination as to whose horse is gored.

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