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**THEME: CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN
EDUCATION SYSTEM**

**SUB THEME CAUSES, EFFECTS AND
MANAGEMENT OF CULTISM IN NIGERIAN
INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING**

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Abstract

This paper looked into the causes, effects and management of cultism in Nigerian institutions of learning, with special reference to research works on cultism and reports made in our dailies. The meaning history, scope, causes and activities of cult members in our institutions of learning were analysed. Effects of this anti-progressive movement on students, Nigerian educational system and the entire masses have been pointed out. The paper concluded by proffering some workable solutions to the perennial problem of cultism in our schools.

Introduction

The rate at which cultism is growing in our institutions of learning is quite alarming. One can say that our institutions are gradually becoming a breeding ground for cultism and terrorism. This is nothing but a negation of the primary motive/purpose for which the institutions were established (Peter, 2002). The situation has become a great eye-sore which must be attended to without delay since the future of our great homes and our nation depend on our youths who are swimming in the hands of the devil the arch-enemy of man.

According to Laolu (2002), the problem of cultism has become a major political threat which we have to battle, in order to allow for the development of a crime-free society. This cancerous problem has consistently defiled the multi-dimensional steps taken by the school authorities and the government to avert it. Instead, it has been waxing stronger and stronger daily. What we have to realize is the fact that some stones that have not been completely turned over will have to be dynamically attended to in order to eradicate cultist for our schools. And also our youths to witness the much desired peace and educational progress within and outside the campuses.

What is Cultism?

Cultism, according to Beth, (1982), is seen as a religious group often based on immediate emotional experience rather than on a thought out ideology of most world religions. Advanced Oxford Dictionary defines cultism as a term coined out of the word cult, and that cultism is an extreme religious group that is not part of an established religion. Cultism, according to Agboola (1997), is seen by most Nigerians as nothing but an evil group, a devilish movement, and a satanic instrument, which should be wiped out of our society.

The response of the students of University of Ilorin, Kwara State Polytechnic and Kwara State College of Education to an interview conducted by Agboola (1997) revealed the way cultism is portrayed by students. Their responses include the following: that cultism is a wicked organization, group of harmful people, group that trains members to be bad, and society that protects and promotes its interest through violence.

Brief History of Cultism in Nigeria

The problem of cultism which has become a household topic in Nigeria today has not just started. In the past, it was a common thing among the aged. People

belonged to different cults like Ogboni Fraternity, Oshugbo Guild, Oro, Sanpona, Eluku, Gelede, Agemo, and a host of others (Aroyehun, 2000). Activities of these cults were not characterized by brutal and indiscriminate killing of innocent lives as we are witnessing today.

According to the report from the Christian World Magazine of 1996, secret cult in Nigerian schools can be traced to 1952 when seven student nationalists and patriots of University of Ibadan led by Wole Soyinka (now a Professor) started the National Association of Seadogs also known as Pirate Confraternity. The objective of the founder was to use it as an avenue for correcting the ills of the society which ranged from tribalism, nepotism, corruption to other obnoxious colonial anti-black dispositions. It also aimed at check-mating the excesses of lectures and all forms of students' victimizations (Aroyehun, 2000).

From the above, it can be seen that the aim for the formation of cults among students, was not to terminate innocent lives. Presently, cultism has completely lost its sense of direction and purpose. The cults have become ready tools in the hand of the devil for the termination of lives (Ladigbolu, 2000). It has developed into terrorism producing vandals with the sole aim of devouring indiscriminately and incessantly.

Scope of cultism in Nigerian Institutions

The number of cults has increased from one (Seadogs of 1952) to over 50 cults making our higher institutions hot beds for innocent students. These cults that have be-deviled our schools according to the findings of Agbola (1997), include the following:

Pirate Confraternity (Seadog), Black Axe, Eye Confraternity (a.k.a. Airlords), Jezebel, Pink lady, Black Scorpion, Buccaneers, Vikings, Rainbow, Black Beret, Ugbagba, Brother, Mafia, Amazon (for women), Black cat, People's Temple, and a host of others. The list above will bring sorrow to the heart of any woman who has passed through labour pains. What exactly has gone wrong with us mothers that has made the lives of our children to degenerate to this terrible state? And where is the future of Nigeria in a situation where darkness is virtually engulfing our higher institutions, whereas the societal values are to be acquired, but alas! They are truncated and erode. What on earth is responsible for this terrible social menace?

Causes/Reasons why Cultism is thriving in Nigerian Institutions of Learning

The causes of cultism in Nigerian schools, according to Aroyehun (2002), are not only sociological and psychological in nature but are also rooted in the socio-economic problems being faced in the society. Aroyehun's findings shows that students join secret cults due to the following reasons:-

- (i) Family influence:- Exposure of students to secret cults from home, lack of proper upbringing, separation of parents, lack of commitment on the part of parents, hence the replacement of parental authority and love with that of charismatic cult leaders over pampering i.e lack of proper discipline, spiritual foundation of children not properly laid.
- (ii) For recognition:- i.e ego boosting
- (iii) Lack of the fear of God in children

- (iv) For protection:- To protect themselves from unnecessary harassment from other students and lecturers many lack the security from home as parents run after butter and bread all over the place so their children make up for it in the cults.
- (v) To be feared and respected.
- (vii) Influences and persuasion of notable members of the society who serve as Patrons and advisers to the group
- (viii) Nothing bad in seen in it since some lecturers are members of the group
- (ix) Economically, Nigerian is very rich in human and mineral resources, yet, masses, especially the youths suffer economic and social deprivations. Out of poverty, many find it difficult to pay them school fees, buy handouts/textbooks etc. They see cults as a way out. They are easily lured through the buoyant financial assistance given to them by cult members and god-fathers.
- (x) Government's failure to meet the needs and aspirations of students and school authorities. There is the problem of inadequate hostel accommodation, inadequate funding, exorbitant school fees, and incessant close down of schools as a result of not meeting the demands of teachers (not minding the fact that idle hands are devil's workshop). Students are not sure of good jobs after completion of their academic programmes.
- (xi) Professor Ayo Banjo, Vice Chancellor (VC) of University of Ibandan in the Punch of Tuesday, February 19th 2002 recognized faulty admission policy as one of the causes of cultism in our schools. To him, our primary and Secondary school systems have failed to produce people with high moral Standard necessary to make the society free of social ills.
- (xii) Zainab Olokodare the student Union Vice President of the Lagos State University in the Punch of Friday, February 8th 2000 saw poor security Network which makes it easy for students to have access to the campuses through many routes as a major cause of cultism in some Universities especially their own University.
- (xiii) Fear of death on the part of University Security Officers contributes to the increase in the wave of cultism in our ivory towers.

Reported cases of cult activities

The nefarious activities of cult members have been consistently reported by researchers and the mass media. Reports have shown that cultism is a dreaded weapon used by students in maiming, killing and vandalizing lives and properties in and outside our institutions of learning. University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was punctuated by gunshots and with machetes tearing into the flesh and bones of students with heavy screaming of wounded students. (Nigerian Tribune, March 24th 1995). While students were reading for their examination in December at IBAS complex of Kwara State Polytechnic, cult members in black outfits stormed the complex at about 9.00 p.m

intimidating students with dangerous weapons. A threatening letter was also sent to a lecturer by cultists (Forerunner, August 29th, to September 4th 1996). The Bucanners and the Pirates clashed at Kwara State Polytechnic in 1996. This led to the death of two students (Forerunner, August, 29th 1996)

University of Benin was set ablaze by persons suspected to be cult members who were said to have been suspended from the institution (Sunday Tribune, March 17th 1996). One student was killed and several others injured when suspected cult members engaged some student union Government officials (SUG) in a clash at Lagos State University (LASU).the student was not only shot several times but was later cut with cutlass by the assailants. The student was killed while writing his final paper (The Punch, Thursday February) 14th, 2002).

At least three students died at Ibadan Polytechnic as a result of a violent clash that took place between two rival cults. For about three weeks in February, 2002, the Polytechnic witnessed an escalation in cult clashes especially in places like Apata,Sango, Alemiloke and other neighbouring areas of the institution. (The Punch, Thursday February 14th, 2002) All these cases attest to the seriousness of the problem of cultism in our society. The situation has become highly pathetic. Undoubtedly, cultism is having great effects on our youths and our society.

Effects of cultism on Nigerian society

Cultism has been recognized as a serious threat to the progress of our noble society. The effects are many and are needing urgent attention of all and sundry. They include:-

- Increase in crime waves in our society
- It dents the image of our noble nation.
- It damages our educational system. There is an incessant closure of schools as a result of cult activities leading to the production of half-baked elites.
- Conducive learning environment is truncated.
- Parents hopes are dampened, innocent students have their lives terminated, depriving the nation of future brains and leaders.

How to manage the global crisis of cultism in Nigeria

Efforts already being made are to be intensified. These efforts include the following:-

- Rustication of identified cult members. Recently Kwara State Polytechnic expelled 33 students who failed to appear for interrogation on cult activities. Some of the students are on their HND programmes, 5 who were found to have links with cultism are to renounce their membership publicly and in writing to be endorsed by their parents/guardians. 41 students (21 of them were on their HND programme) were also expelled from the Polytechnic for their involvement in cultism.
- Death penalty should be added to Decree 4 of 1987 which was promulgated by Babangida administration against cultism. Long imprisonment that it carries has not really solved the problem. Those who kill should be killed and it

should not be seen as draconian in nature. Dangers of cultism should continue to be made known through the mass media.

- Philosophers of old recognized that the soul must be one of the major focus of our education in order to have the society sanitized. Thus, teachers are expected to cooperate with God in their relationship with learners. They are not to perpetrate cultism at all, but to be God's right-hand men in shaping the future of the society. We need to go back to God for solution to this problem by ensuring that religious studies are made compulsory for students up till the senior secondary school level.
- Parents, especially women with their feminine touch, have much to do in solving this problem. Parents have to: Monitor what the children watch on the television and what they read from obnoxious books. Take heavy disciplinary measures against children when they misbehave regardless of the age of the child.
- Bring up children by nurturing them in conformity with the norms and values of our society. Amicably address factors leading to broken home/relationship which leads many children to wrong hands. Drum the evils of cultism into the ears of their children make efforts to spend quality time with their children so as to understand them and give them the necessary security endeavour to meet the needs of their children and wards in order to prevent them from being lured to cultism through financial assistance.
- Religious Associations (Church/Mosques) should openly condemn cultism. The police force should equally perform their duties as expected i.e without fear or favour.
- Government should increase the funding of all the institutions. Funds for curbing cultism should be given to all tertiary institutions. There is need for effective security network in our institutions. There is the need to employed adequately trained and well-equipped security officers to curb the activities of cultists on campus.
- There should be serious screening of students for admission to Nigerian Institutions especially the higher institutions. Each tertiary institution should be granted greater autonomy to conduct entrance examination and screen their candidates before they are offered admission. Through this, those with shady characters could be screened and denied admission.

Conclusion

The causes, effects and management of cultism have been seriously addressed in this paper. Cultism has been a serious problem in Nigeria, and something, as a matter of urgency, must be done about it. The suggestions given above, if given attention, will go a long way in eradicating this cancerous problem from Nigerian institutions of learning.

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