



Cultism as a Ticking Time Bomb in Nigerian Schools: Challenges and the Way Forward

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Abstract

This paper focuses on an overview of cultism in Nigerian schools. The theoretical concepts as well as the historical background of cultism were x-rayed. This paper sees its elimination as most ideal and feasible, in the course of time, but regrets that for now only its minimization, a step toward eradication, can boldly be talked about. It suggested ways of affecting such minimization and make several proposals for its eradication or elimination. The disastrous effect of cultism should therefore be a concern to both educators and the entire society who should struggle tirelessly to remediate the ugly situation.

Keywords: Cultism, Students, Time bomb, challenges, Way forward, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

In the history of mankind, there is hardly any issue on education that has generated a more serious discussion and raised more concern and threat in Nigerian today than the issue of cultism in our private and public institutions of learning. This is because apart from its frequent and increasing occurrences, cultic practices have eaten deeply like cankerworms into the fabric of the nation's educational system. In fact, Lannap and Rimfat (2008) asserted that cultism, which has scampered into our education system several years ago, has assumed a dangerous dimension that poses a threat to man's history and may be equal to a war.

There is no doubt that cult activities have become a serious societal malaise that threatens everybody. In fact, the situation today has become so gangrenous in such a way that our higher institutions has become breeding ground for social vices and other kind of criminal acts who hide under the banner of one cult group or the other to perpetuate heinous crimes against fellow students, lectures or school authorities who are either innocent or also belong to one cult group or the other.

On the surface, one is easily tempted to regard the activities of cultism at any point in time as a purely exclusive matter between the school authority and the students. Putting together education and the society therefore, the members of cultic activities are the society therefore, the members of cultic activities are fanned by influential sponsors who, for their selfish political and economic gains, may use students to achieve their ends.

From the foregoing, it becomes obvious that cultism in Nigeria schools come into operation when basically law abiding individuals put themselves or allow themselves to be forced into a self-reinforcing situation of inferiority and dependence on a force believed to be stronger than themselves. Therefore, by way of objective reasoning, students are not to be bamboozled by flamboyant claims of benevolence by some apostles of darkness but to see education as a positive catalyst that has the capacity to make the learners transform their society into a better place, from one generation to the other.

DEFINITION OF CULTISM

Various definitions have been given to cultism. For the purpose of this paper, we shall attempt to mention few of them. Marshal (1994) defined cultism as a small group of religious activists, whose beliefs are typically syncretic, esoteric, and individualistic. Anele (2006) sees cult to do with extreme form of devotion or enthusiasm to a particular cause or principle and is often given a religious gap, which makes its activities and the participants to appear esoteric in the eyes of the uninitiated.

Lannap and Rimfat (2008) described secret cult as associations whether registered or not but used secret sign, oath, rites or symbols, formed with the aim of promoting a cause, the purpose of which is to promote the interest the members and aids one another under any circumstances without due regard to sign, oath, rites or symbols. In a related development, Nwanna-Nzewunwa, Girigiri and Okoh (2007) viewed secret cult as a group that uses symbols and oath, whose meetings are held secret. To them, its members are under obligations to promote the interest of its members, and each under all circumstance to merit the legitimate expectations of those who are members.

Cultism can thus be described as a group of people or organization with certain secret sign, oath, symbols that are nocturnal in its "normal" operations and it members are usually

under spell to maintain absolute secrecy on the identity of the group and its “business”. A member is bound to execute at all costs any assignment given to him/her by the group.

A BRIEF ORIGIN OF CULTISM INTO NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

The emergency of cultism in Nigerian schools is traced to the formation of the Pirates confraternity at the then university college, Ibadan in 1953. Prior to 1953, precisely in 1952, Professor Wole Soyinka (Nobel Laureate) had formed the “Big seven”, a group whose aim was to:

- Serving as a vanguard for social freedom of students;
- Opposing the growing tyranny of the university authorities; and
- Challenging European cultural imperialism and colonial mentality of campus life of the time (Girigiri, 2003).

The Big Seven noted that the university was populated with wealthy students association with the colonial powers and a few poorer students striving in manner and dress to be accepted by the more advantage students, while social life ‘was dictated by tribal associations. The motto of pyrate confraternity was “Against all conversions” while their logo was “the skull and cross-bone and “cap’n” Blood and Long John Silver” were the names answered by members.

As Rimfat (1999) observed, the original aim of the Pirate fraternity of Soyinka at the University of Ibadan was to cater for social and recreational life of members and also to fight backward working convention trends and complacency on campus.

In the year 1972, Bolaji Carew and several others were expelled from the Pirates due to their inability to meet expected standard. Anele (2006) attested to this trend when he noted that the internal dissension among members of Pirates, which was occasioned by disciplinary measures meted out to deviants among them, created schism, which culminated in a breakaway group mobilizing and forming the Buccaneers confraternity in 1972. They were also known as National Associations of Seadogs (NAS) and later, Bolaji Carew founded the National Association of Sea Lords and that of Eiyee confraternity or National Association of Air Lords in 1965 at the University of Ibadan.

Yet, one share the view of Udeorah (2006) that, in the year 1976 some young men and students came together to form another organization known as “Neo-Black movement of Africa” (Black-Axe confraternity). It was believed that those who muted the idea of forming the organization were some of the runaway blacks, who fought the apartheid policy in South Africa and escaped to Nigeria. Their sole aim was to fight against oppression of blacks in the society, especially in the universities. “Aye men” was the slogan used by them while their logo and symbol was the “Black Axe”. This started at the University of Benin in Edo State.

The family fraternity cosanostra (Mafia confraternity) was originally formed at University of Ilorin in 1978. But its operations formally began in 1980 at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. This cult group was patterned after the notorious Italian Mafia. It later spread to Abia State University as “Campus Mafia”.

National Association of Adventures (Supreme Vikings Confraternity) started its operations in 1982 at the University of Port Harcourt in Rivers State. The Supreme Vikings later gave birth to another cult group known as Dewell and that of Klansmen confraternity came up with the Deebam group, both fighting for supremacy and causing problems even outside school

environments. In 1986, the Eternal fraternity order of Legions Consortium (Kruk Kruk Klan) was formed at the University of Calabar in Cross River State. The name was taken after a popular California organization—EFOLK. The cult group was noted by Udeorah (2006) to worship a demon commonly called “Ogor”. The Brotherhood of the Blood (Black Beret) was so notorious and founded at Enugu State University of Science and Technology.

Today on our campuses – be they universities, polytechnic, colleges of education and even in many secondary schools, there is a plethora of secret cult organizations. Some of them includes – Red Sea Horses, Royal Queen, Temple of Eden Fraternity, The Amazon, the Dragons, the Frigates, Ostrich Fraternity, Cappa Vendetto, Daughters of Jezebel, Burkinnafaso Revolution fraternity, Black cats, Green Beret fraternity, Trojan Horse fraternity (Nzimiro, 1999 & Ugwulebo, 1999). All these groups are essentially for male, females or both that has permeated the fabric of our institutions and they exist only to unleash terror on innocent citizens who they adjudge as daving “arred”.

In fact, there is hardly an academic session that ends without hearing or recording of secret cult activities in our schools which portray sustained evidence that Nigerian institutions do not operate in a hitch free academic programme.

CAUSES OF CULTISM IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

Several factors have been advanced as contributing for youth involvement in campus cultism. Some of the reasons could be economic, biological, political, psychological, social, historical, social and cultural inclinations. Specifically, Rotimi (2010) identified some of the causes that induce students to join cultism to include lack of virile student union, erosion of the traditional academic culture, absence of intellectual debates and all other activities that are component of traditional campus culture.

The family as a powerful agent of socialization plays central role in promoting cultism. For instance, parents who are members often initiate their wards from homes even before they are admitted into the school system. Some homes may be so uncared for and the children are left to other neighbor to initiate them without the consent of the parent or guardians. Mezieobi, Nok and Nwosu (2012) attests to this trend when they noted that “the school clients are in the home and the society from where they come to school and are readily imbibing societal negative values.

Girigiri (2013) have imputed the reasons why students join cultism to include the fact that belonging to group is natural human activity just like belonging to other groups and on the positive side of the equation, student join secret cults for different reason. Other reasons could be highlighted as thus:

- People may join cultism so as to liberate themselves from the domination of one group over the other;
- If there is physical abuse and someone want to seek redress at all cost, such an individual have no other option to get the desired justice through cultism;
- Some people might be cultist through luring one to it as a result of ignorance;
- A lot of frustrated individuals from broken homes are susceptible to join cults;
- Sometimes a new convert may be required to provide a victim for the next meeting, which should come from his/her family. Such a person would replace the donor in the meeting;

- The activities of the group previously may serve as a source of attraction to an individual to join them;
- Some students uses such opportunity as an avenue of securing girlfriend through the employment of intimidation and or guarantee of protection in school;
- The fear of passing semester examination or academic frustration may induce a student to join cultism;
- The power struggle for ascendancy in schools often leads to proliferation of secret cults; and
- An individual may also join cult group in order to obtain desirable secondary goals.

CHALLENGES OF CULTISM IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

It has been worrisome to the entire society as the family unit from where the society comes is in shambles. Even, at the secondary school level, bad company keeping has started to yield its sinister dividend on the part of the students. In most of our institution today, the atmosphere of insecurity and untimely death or loss of life is the order of the day.

Similarly, higher institutions in Nigeria home – suffered all manners of distortion in their academic calendars, mainly as a result of cult clashes, with the attendant killings, maiming and arson. Sometimes this is done through series of demonstrations to cause mayhem that lead to the abrupt closure of schools from time to time.

Our political scene can never be exempted from blame too. Most of our politicians now go to schools especially higher institutions to recruit and sponsor student cultist as thugs whom they use to unleash terror on their opponents. PM news (2010) supported the above view when he stated, that cultism would never be a thing of the past because the cultist are being used as political thuggery and hooliganism by the politicians.

The value system of our present society has changed tremendously that the society had embraced indiscipline and other social ills. Hence the youth lack adequate parental care and few youth give consideration to honesty, morality and disciplines.

If there is any joy derived on cultist activity, such happiness is often momentary as negative effects used to over shadow the happiness. The activities of the cult members and the adverse consequences of these activities are often causes of sorrow and distress to innocent parents, schools and the general public. In fact, the problem here is not the killing nor the disruption of the various academic programmes, but why the measures employed to curb cultism have failed.

WAYS OF CURBING CULTISM IN SCHOOLS

The dimension which cultism in Nigerian schools have assumed in recent time call for concerted effort by the students, peer groups, parents, government and so on in order to provide a way forward for cultic activities. Therefore some factors could be eliminated by putting in place the following recommendations:

- Aesthetic education should be incorporated into the content of school curriculum in our various schools. This will go a long way in promoting certain problem solving into the students.

- There should be full implementation of the anti-cult law and decree which provides for imprisonment of culprits to the letter. Nobody is above the law.
- Jamiu (2012) opined that the factors which attract students to join cultism must be identified and neutralized by the school authorities so that there will be little or nothing to attract them with. He also added that guidance and counsellors should be posted to schools to talk to the students on the evils of cultism.
- Parents and teachers should help the students develop worthwhile interests, values and life goals that would enable them resist likely temptation and pressures from secret cult members.
- Cult members who are not amenable to change in schools should be treated criminally and expelled from the institution.
- School management should ensure that campus clubs and associations exist only on certain stipulated condition and must be registered.
- Vocational skills development programme should be floated for student so as to occupy their free or evening periods.
- The prevalent culture of violence in the country had aided a dimension to the rising wave of cultism in schools. Therefore, government should rise up to the task in several areas to make people feel more secure in and outside their homes.
- Our educational institutions should be adequately funded and managed so as to provide conducive atmosphere that would offer student freedom in all ramifications.
- Opaluwah (2013) suggested that there must be improved facilities and living conditions in the school in order to minimized perceived strains in the social system which underlines cultism in our schools.

CONCLUSION

It has been established in this paper that cultism poses serious threats to every Nigerian child school going age and the entire public that required urgent attention. Although there are a lot distractions and several factors militating against effective cult management. It is in the light of this that the paper attempts to provide a comprehensive measures that if strictly followed vigorously; they will almost eradicate the increase wave of cultism in the Nigerian school system.

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