

## **Eradicating Cultism in Tertiary Educational Institutions in Nigeria: The Role of Guidance and Counselling**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focused on the strategies for eradicating cultism in tertiary educational institutions and the role of guidance and counselling in tackling the problem. The paper examines the immediate purpose of tertiary education, including research, conferences and publication, as well as teaching and learning. Therefore, it is self-evident that for this noble purpose to be achieved, colleges, polytechnics, and universities need peace, serenity, and a conducive atmosphere to conduct their business. This, unfortunately, is not the case in Nigeria, as cultism has been firmly established in all the institutions of higher learning, making life, academics and research in the various institutions a risky exercise because of their violent and intimidating activities. The paper suggested, among others, that the government should form a National Inter-fraternity Council (NIFC) comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Education, the University community, the law enforcement agency and the host community. It was also suggested that guidance and counselling be strengthened and enough funding be given to do their work. This will restore the peace and glory of the ivory towers.*

**Keywords:** *Cultism, Tertiary educational institutions, Guidance and Counseling.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tertiary educational institutions are institutions of higher learning where knowledge is imparted to its seekers, and research is undertaken in various fields of human endeavour. It is the post-secondary level of the national education system, which includes universities, polytechnics and colleges of technology, colleges of education, advanced teacher training

colleges, and other institutions allied to them (FGN, 2014). These institutions may be publicly or privately sponsored and are meant to contribute to national development by teaching and learning those creative and innovative skills which will enable persons exposed to them to become self-reliant and valuable members of the society to which they belong.

It is, therefore, germane to appreciate the truism that for these tertiary educational institutions to achieve their objectives effectively, there is a need to establish an effective, conducive, serene and non-threatening environment that will enhance academic activities at the highest level. To achieve this noble objective, tertiary educational institutions of higher learning, through the instrumentality of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), admit thousands of young people to come for studies and preparation towards the world of work and other higher responsibilities. These adolescents and young persons who come from different psychogenic and biogenic backgrounds begin to interact and socialise with one another. Many a time, those who come from negative backgrounds influence others with their unwanted behaviours of drinking alcohol, smoking both cigarettes and Indian hemp, stealing, womanising, raping, abortion, robbery, and internet robbery (popularly known as yahoo-yahoo, yahoo-plus etc.). Often, these miscreants come together to form gang cliques and become partners in crime, thereby disrupting the much-needed atmosphere of peace that makes research and learning a pleasurable activity.

#### **DEFINITION OF CONCEPT: WHAT IS CULTISM?**

Cultism can be defined as a ritual practice by a group whose membership, admission, policy, initiation formalities, and modes of operation are done in secrecy and kept secret. Secret cults are organisations whose activities are known to members only (Ukegbu et al., 2014). Similarly, Wikipedia English dictionary defines a cult as “a group of people with religious, philosophical or cultural identity sometimes viewed as a sect, often existing on the margins of society or exploitative towards its members”. According to Ogunsol (2005), cultism is a way of thinking oriented towards devotion and allegiance”. A secret cult is, therefore, a group of persons committed to a cause and whose activities are characterised by rituals, diabolism, and secrecy.

The roots of cultism in the Nigerian education system could be traced to the wider society where cults like Ogboni confraternity were so popular in the 1970s that their members were drawn or cut across the who-is-who in the society (as at then). The members of these

clandestine groups went on “evangelism to catch new and vibrant young members who will replace them, ensure continuity and prevent the cult from becoming extinct”.

It is, therefore, not surprising that their destination was the tertiary institutions of higher learning where there is a concentration of young people who will be ready to experiment with new ideologies, philosophies and all kinds of religious abracadabra. This infiltration started from the universities, down to the polytechnics and monotechnics and into the various colleges of education. The colleges of education and advanced teacher’s training colleges were their last port of call because these are special institutions where teachers are trained with a high level of morality, core values of cleanliness within and without and sound ethical responsibilities, helping in slowing down the pace of its spread. However, it is important to note that as soon as cultism gained entrance into colleges of education, it had a leeway into secondary and primary schools. Hence, Okocha (2008) confirms that “cultism has infiltrated in full force in the educational system, even in primary and secondary schools”. Full-scale clandestine cultism emerged on the campuses in the 1980s and reached a crescendo in the 1990s and 2000s. As if to give it a backbone, Ukegbu et al. (2014) posit that cultism is one of the vices confronting Nigerian educational institutions today. The activities of these secret cults have sent hundreds of students to early graves. Unfortunately, these secret cults have spread to the nation’s secondary schools. They have signs and symbols that may not make any meaning to outsiders, but they are used to identify members both on campus and outside of it.

## **ORIGIN OF CULTISM IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

Cultism is quite new in Nigerian tertiary educational institutions. Cultism or secret cult originated from the ancient Egyptians who practised witchcraft, magic and occultism and used these practices to acquire hostile powers. The witches and wizards, magicians and occult men and women belonged to groups, and these groups kept their modus operandi top secret.

In Nigeria, before the advent of the white man, individuals seeking protection, power, and security for their immediate families and communities came together to perform rituals and knit themselves together in wicked covenant to be their brother’s keepers and secure their communities. Soon, they began to see themselves as most powerful and, therefore, special and began to act as such. Those who were attracted by the powers, brotherly love and wealth

of these people were made to belong only after rigorous initiation, where the secrets and activities of the group were taught and imbibed and must be adhered to religiously.

Hence, in South-West Nigeria, there was the Ogboni society; in South-South Nigeria, the Ekpe secret society; and in South-East Nigeria, the Mmanwu (Ayaka) night masquerade.

These cult groups gave their members an economic, social and psychological sense of protection to the admiration of others. It was they who began to initiate their children at early stages and became patrons to campus cults.

However, the immediate and direct influence of cultism in Nigerian Universities was the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which was founded on 24th December 1765 in Pulaski, Tennessee, as a terrorist group to re-establish white dominion and supremacy by force, violence and outright murder of blacks and those who supported the abolition of slavery.

Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities read and were inspired by the operations and clandestine activities of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States of America and formed their cults to fight colonialism and agitate for independence for Nigeria. It was upon this background that the first secret cult, the Sea Dogs Confraternity (Pirates), was formed at the then University College, now the University of Ibadan, by seven students, namely Wole Soyinka, Pius Olegbe, Olumuyiwa Awe, Aig Imoukhuede, Ralph Opara, Olu Agunloye, and Tunji Tubi. It is important to note that the motive for the formation of this secret cult was for good, and essentially, their activities were aimed at rendering services to the less privileged, such as donating blood to hospitals and donating gifts to motherless babies and orphanage homes etc. (Ukegbu et al., 2014).

### **FACTS ABOUT CAMPUS CULTS AND CULTISM**

1. All these cults, regardless of their names, usually recruit members from among freshmen on campus through subtle evangelism, urging, invitation, and/or coercion.
2. The cult members also recruit through deceit, lies and the pretext of holding night parties outside the campus.
3. Members move around with an air of superiority complex and speak with plenty of braggadocio.

4. Their formal admission is characterised by initiation, induction and/or indoctrination where torture, terror, flogging, cutting of flesh and brutal incisions are made on the bodies of seekers who are lured or those who presented themselves for admission.
5. Drinking alcohol and smoking Indian hemp and cocaine, etc, are all ways of being masculine and Superman. The drugs are meant to put them in a state of euphoria.
6. Strange language, esoteric language, and coded terminologies are freely used to identify and communicate with members.
7. Clandestine and nocturnal meetings and activities in awkward places like thick forests, cemeteries, river-sides and uncompleted buildings.
8. Weird and awe-inspiring dressing styles to frighten non-members.
9. Physical intimidation of fellow students, lecturers and management staff. All these are for sex, high grades and exemption from punishment, respectively.
10. Sexual perversion and rape of female students, both members and non-members alike.
11. Expensive lifestyle that usually pushes them into stealing, robbery, thuggery, threatening members of the Student Union government and asking for money or there will be no peace on campus.
12. Struggle for supremacy between factions, which often turns to gun-battle, leading times to bloodletting between members of different groups.

“The operations of the cults are kept as secrets. This is because they engage in numerous inter and intra-cult wars and disturbances. Members kill fellow students and lecturers who stand in their way. Its deadly operations have resulted in the loss of lives and property and premature deaths in tertiary educational institutions. Their inter- and intra-cult ‘wars’ and disturbances have distorted educational activities during examinations and even prevented lectures from being held. They perpetrate indiscipline, crisis, corruption and killings in educational institutions, making the environment unconducive for academic work (Ofojebe in Igboabuchi, Ilorah and Azubuike ed, 2010).

## **TYPES OF CULTS IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

Scholars and early researchers have identified the following cult groups in Nigerian educational Institutions. The names are, therefore, drawn from the works of Ukegbu et al. (2014) and Ogidefa (2008).

**The Female cult groups include the following;**

1. Daughters of Jezebel
2. Supreme Daughters of Medusa
3. White Angels
4. Dirty Virgins
5. Fine Girls
6. Black Angels
7. Black Pants
8. Royal Queens
9. The Amazons
10. Dirty Brassiere
11. River Angels
12. The Sharons
13. Daughters of Eve
14. Black Queens etc.

**The Male cult groups include the following;**

1. The Sea Dogs Confraternity (Aka Pirates)
2. The Buccaneers Association of Nigeria
3. The Mafia Confraternity /Maphites
4. The National Association of Air Lords (Eiye)
5. The Vikings Fraternity
6. The Neo Black Movement or Black Axe Confraternity
7. The War Lords (Brotherhood of Don).
8. Black Stars
9. Klansmen Konfraternity (KK)
10. The Mgba Brothers
11. The Red Devils
12. Red Berets
13. Black Beret or Two Two
14. Green Berets
15. The Scorpions
16. The Black Cats
17. The Trojans Horse

Moreover, the following secret cults have been identified in the Nigerian secondary schools.

- a. The Armadas
- b. Cowboys
- c. Black Scorpions
- d. Game Boys
- e. Scar Boys
- f. Aso Rock

**WHY STUDENTS JOIN CULTS IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

There are many reasons why students join secret cults in their various campuses. Some of the reasons appear very trivial but important to the student in question. This researcher will try to examine them, albeit briefly.

1. **The Psychological need for ego massage:** Most cultists join for no other reason than the psychological need to pad up their sick and weak ego. They feel so inadequate, incomplete and inferior. They, therefore, join cults for reasons of braggadocio.
2. **Peer Influence:** It is a truism that one's success or failure in colleges and Universities starts from the types of friends one keeps. If, for instance, your classmate, study mate, and/or roommate is seen and regarded as a star or big boy in class, such a peer will certainly influence his friends to join such clandestine groups. Others will certainly join because they look up to their star boy for direction and guidance.
3. **Like father, like son syndrome:** Some students come from backgrounds where their parents and/or parent surrogates practice 419, Yahoo Plus, kidnapping, armed robbery, etc.; where significant persons in their lives were or are still members of nocturnal groups and secret societies. They will carry these learned practices into their university lives and see their membership in the cult.
4. **Effects of Broken Home:** Broken home is a phenomenon where things fall apart between husband and wife to the extent that the centre cannot hold. In this case, the children are used as weapons of warfare against one another to the extent that the only thing they (children) understand and practice well is mischief, violence and trouble. With this type of background, they become perfect materials for recruitment into cults to gain the protection their parents could not give them, and of course, retaliate on other students whose homes are intact.
5. **Deception:** It is also true that some young people in the universities join cult groups unknown to them until it is too late. This is because it starts with their coursemates and/or roommates inviting them to birthday parties outside the inner perimeters of the school. Cars and buses are often provided to convey them to the 'party' venue, which will eventually be an initiation or induction venue inside the thick forest, burial ground and/or abandoned property outside the campus.
6. **To obtain good grades:** Many lazy students wrongly believe that by joining secret cults on campus, their groups will always intimidate lecturers into passing them with good grades. They also think that since the brotherhood of their cult is supreme. The intelligent ones will help the dull ones to pass their examinations. Thus, they will pass very well by merely being members of such cults.

## **THE ROLES OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING IN ERADICATING CULTISM IN TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION**

Guidance and counselling as a discipline and, indeed, as a professional helping service are used to help troubled persons overcome their troubles and make wise decisions in the future. It is upon this background that guidance is defined as a cluster of formalised educational services designed by the school to assist students in achieving self-knowledge and self-understanding, which is necessary for them to attain the fullest self-development and self-realisation of their potential. In other words, the counsellor has a role in eradicating cultism. Wherever they are employed, the counsellor can play the following roles:

- a. Use their training and expertise in discussing and interacting with young people to use their listening skills to listen to the students' plights, frustrations, and disappointments and “talk” them out of cultism.
- b. Guidance counsellors can also use their knowledge of behaviour modification techniques to modify students' unwanted behaviour and replace it with desirable behaviour.
- c. They can show films on peer influence, the repercussions of cultism, and other antisocial behaviours. The counsellors should also display anti-cult posters, which will give information at a glance.
- d. Moreover, the names of suspected cults operating secretly on the campus should be published, and students should be warned to keep away from such groups.
- e. Courses in peace education, behaviour modification, interpersonal relationships, and alternative dispute resolution will be taught to all students not as electives but as core courses to all students in higher institutions, irrespective of areas of specialisation.

Finally, whatever reason that makes students join cult groups in the various institutions of higher learning must be condemned in its entirety. This is because the joining of secret cults on campuses is like an evil wind that blows no one any good. The student cultist may lose their life, drop out of school or graduate with poor results, while the university and campuses are made very uncondusive for learning.

The quiet and serene environment will become a place of fear, suspicion, tension, rumours of war, and a theatre of insecurity. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to wipe it away from campuses and institutions of higher learning. (Igboabuchi Ilorah & Azubuike 2010).



## **STRATEGIES TO ERADICATE CULTISM IN TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA**

Eradicating cultism in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria appears to be an impossible mission. However, the anti-cult week symposium held at the University of Lagos came up with a communiqué which includes, among others, the setting up of a National Inter-Fraternity Council (NIFC) (Chikwem, 2006) made up of Representatives from the university, polytechnics and colleges of education communities and Federal Ministry of education if the institution is owned by the federal government or state ministry of education if the institution is state-owned. This writer should identify and amplify their term of reference. They include:

- a. To identify all fraternities in Nigeria's tertiary institutions and prepare a comprehensive register of representatives of all fraternities. By way of explanation, this researcher believes that the Inter-Fraternity Council should be enlarged by adding the representatives of security agents and representatives of the host community. Their duties shall be to identify all fraternities on campuses, their structure, their organigramme and their manifestoes.
- b. To set up NIFC at the campuses and state level to fight cultism and monitor the activities of confraternities. Besides, the Council must continuously monitor the various groups to ensure that their activities do not deviate from what is stated in their manifestos. Moreover, their activities must be in tandem with the scriptures and the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- c. To develop an appropriate framework for minimising and dealing with inter-fraternity conflicts and formulate a programme to enhance inter-fraternity harmony. Here, the Council should interact and interface with their leaders and the dramatis personae of the fraternities to minimise their likely conflict areas. For instance, the council should stop all their nocturnal meetings. This is because night and, of course, darkness does not bear anything good. Through subtle urging and mature reasoning, the fraternity should stop holding meetings at night and in outlandish venues. Instead, all their meetings should be held in the daytime and essentially using halls and classrooms as their venues.
- d. Develop a framework to monitor and report on each fraternity's composite academic performance and recommend appropriate rewards for academic excellence. This implies that prizes, both cash and gifts, should be instituted for healthy academic competition amongst and between the fraternities. Those members who excel in genuine academic

high performance should be well rewarded to motivate others who are not doing well to back up, while those who did well are also encouraged to keep it up.

- e. To develop programmes to disarm all fraternities and surrender their weapons to NIFC or the appropriate authorities using an amnesty technique. The point being made here is that the security agents who are members of the council should use their training and expertise to fish out all the arms of members of such fraternities and using carrot and stick strategy, that is, applying force and arm-twisting and at the same time using the technique of persuasion to cause the arms carrying members to surrender their weapons to NIFC who will in turn surrender same to the law enforcement agencies. The conditions are that all such arms so surrendered will be received under a subsisting amnesty, and nobody or member should be arrested or punished for carrying arms. As a final comment, the major discovery that the careful reader can discern in going through these discussions is that a lot of work has gone into finding ways and means of eradicating cultism in colleges and universities. However, what remains is for the government to give it a legal framework and provide the willpower to implement the policies adhering strictly to the letters of the legal provisions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper focused on the strategies to eradicate cultism in Tertiary and educational institutions in Nigeria. Cultism is the membership to a cult group and actively identifying with them and engaging in their activities. The cult members are considered dreadful antagonists and threats to the peaceful existence of any society. The practice where cultism is allowed to flourish in higher institutions with lip-service attempts at flushing them can never achieve its purpose. Moreover, a situation where individual students who are caught are summarily expelled is like bruising the head of the serpent without further effort to kill it. It is, therefore, strongly suggested that all the points raised at the University of Lagos Anti-Cult Week symposium be quickly given legal and policy frameworks. The government will take a step further by implementing the letters on all the issues raised at that symposium in the interest of peace and tranquillity on campuses all over Nigeria.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the desire for peace and a conducive atmosphere in Nigeria institutions of higher learning, the following suggestions are hereby put forward:

1. The federal and state governments should organise seminars, workshops, conferences, and awareness campaigns to condemn cultism in its entirety.
2. The Federal government should immediately establish a National Inter-Fraternity Council (NIFC) made up of representatives from the Ministry of Education, the university community, law enforcement agencies, the host community of the affected higher institution, and the church with a mandate to eradicate cultism in colleges and universities.
3. Governments at all levels should formulate a policy to eradicate cultism, give it legal backing, and see to its successful implementation on campuses.
4. No student caught being a member of a secret cult should be spared, no matter how well-connected or how highly placed his/her relations are in society. He must be severely punished according to the law to serve as a deterrent to others.
5. Governments should be more proactive in creating employment opportunities at all levels. This is because it is now known that these secret cult members are thieves promising young undergraduates high grades and, on graduation, job opportunities in blue-chip companies, multinational companies, contracts and overseas connections. It is therefore believed that if a job is guaranteed upon graduation, students/undergraduates will undoubtedly face their studies. This is because they could see the light at the end of the tunnel.
6. General amnesty should be offered to all campus cult members to disarm them and replace their clandestine activities with rewarding social programmes such as scholarships, competitions, rewards for excellence, etc.
7. Students will be assigned to a mentor who is appointed by the institution's management. Both mentors and their mentors must meet at least two times every semester for lectures on the best way forward.

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