

Secret Cult and Cultism: A Menace in Nigerian Institutions and the Society

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Abstract

The Negative impact of Secret Societies or Cultism in the present day society has been neglected and not over emphasized. This article therefore expose, criticize, and analyse the menace of cultism and secret society in Nigeria by linking the effect, problems, on both members, non-members, the economy and government. The article recommends that the government, parents, the society and religious bodies have positive roles to play towards fight against cultism and their activities through massive campaign, billboard broadcast and institution of a program or course in Nigeria Institutions, which modules will be formulated in such a way to expose this cult group and their negative effect to the society. Institutionalization of Anti-Cult Squad and Local Vigilante outfit arm and working with the Nigeria Police Personnel within the host communities will also stop the activities of these secret cults.

Introduction

Secret society or secret cult as the name implies has been a well fundamental challenge in the present day society to the citizens, institutions, and the government at large. Their negative impact in the present day society has been frequently elaborated in previous researches. In Nigerian institution, streets and host communities of these secret societies, they have always experienced steady unrest of the reported cases of these secret cult activities. Destruction of life, injury infliction on innocent citizens or on cult members, destruction of properties within host communities have always left horrible experience in the society today. According to Okwu (2006), as until September 2003, 5,000 students and lecturers have died on Nigerian campuses because of cult related violent clashes.

The recent destructive cult activities on campuses are overwhelming, irritating and distasteful. Lives of promising young men and women have been cut short by the bloody hands of murderous gangs on campuses (Ajayi, Haastrup & Osalusi, 2010). 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. 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, secret cult or cultism can be regarded as a secret organization or union of people with similar agenda whose membership, admission, initiation patterns and medium of conduct or operation are done in secret with such activities having bad effect on their members and non-members.

Secret Cult

Secret cult is a socially constructed phenomenon; its definition is relative to time and place, and it depends on who is defining or stating the problem (Nnam, 2014). Azoba (1999), defines cults as groups or organisations characterised by the use of secret initiations or other rituals, oaths, grips (or hand-claps) or signs of recognition between members, stating that the existence, motives, membership, activities, plans and rituals of such societies are usually kept secret and not revealed to non-members.

According to Nnam (2014), traditionally, two major perspectives have emerged to account for the intricacies of secret cults in human society: theological and sociological/ anthropological. Within the purview of theology, cult is an open or secret religious body or socio-religious movement with an extreme ideological dogma. This type of cult can be found among ‘houses or churches of idols’, viz: Traditional Worshippers, Christian denominations, Muslims, and the like. The recent orgy of violence and killing spree by the ‘Boko Haram’ (Western education is evil) Islamic cult, the Okija Shrine sacrificial victims; the burning alive and encouraging of church members to commit suicide by Pastor Kings who is now on death row, and many more cases of religious cult motivated killings in Nigeria are some notable examples of theological cult menace in Nigeria. The doctrines of most religious cults are wreathed in metaphysics, mysticism, telepathy, esoteric, magical powers of influence, exorcism, hypnosis, channelling and necromancy (Nnam, 2014).

Arguably, secret cult is a major contemporary social problem plaguing the Nigerian educational system, and has virtually permeated the entire structure of the society. In our different schools, homes, places of work and worship, and neighbourhoods, secret cults and cultists dominate (Nnam, 2014).

Cultism – A Historical Background

Secret cults or secret societies are organizations in which the members are usually bound by an oath of secrecy (Eneh, 2008). They often require elaborate form of initiation and ritual, use of symbols, passwords and handshakes as a means of recognition among members (Encarta, 2005a).

The incidence of secret cults dates back to the ancient Greece, when the Pythagoreans combined philosophy and politics. *Mysteries*, with unknown origin and purpose, were secret rites and ceremonies known and practiced only by people who had been duly initiated (Eneh, 2008). In the 12th century, some Muslim sects were founded as secret societies, notably the Assassins in Persia (now Iran) in the Middle East and parts of Asia. Unorthodox groups practice secrecy to avoid persecution and for economic protection (Encarta, 2005a and b). Some secret cults were formed in the 17th and 18th centuries for scientific inquiry or political subversion. The Rosicrucian order (AMORC) mixed science and mysticism. Others became important centres of political dissent. The Sons of Liberty was created in the American colonies to resist British oppression.

The revolutionary secret societies, such as the Carbonari in Italy, the Fenians in Ireland, and supporters of nihilism in Russia were important political forces. Other secret cults, notably the Mafia in Sicily, were established to organize criminal activities and to protect their members (Encarta, 2005a).

Secret cults are common among peoples in Melanesia, parts of Africa, and Native American tribes of North America, particularly the Pueblo and the Plains people (Eneh, 2008). There is a long history of secret societies in China, perhaps partly because of strong state suppression of any openly heterodox movement. Secret cults were active in almost every major rebellion or dynastic struggle. Some secret societies in Japan were important in fostering militarism. The Japanese *yakuza* are among the most pervasive or criminal brotherhoods in any developed society (Encarta, 2005a).

Some secret societies, such as the Knights of the Golden Circle and the Ku Klux Klan, were created in the United States of America (U.S.A.) in the 19th and 20th centuries for protection, terrorism, philanthropy and mutual benefits of members. The fraternal element is traditionally predominant in the U.S.A. Secret organizations are an important feature in university life (Encarta, 2005a).

According to Nnam(2014), indeed, African anthropomorphism (core traditional African religion which centres on the beliefs that God can manifest in human and animal forms, gods and goddesses; and that totemic animals and objects possess the same feelings and qualities as human beings), which is premised on secret societies, was and remains commonplace in contemporary Nigeria. Although a remarkable number of these traditional secret societies are gradually losing their potency and efficacy owing to western culture and civilisation (Christianity precisely), some of them still exist and are even regarded with awe and fear. Some of these confraternities in Nigeria are the 'Ogboni' secret cult among the Yoruba, 'Ekpe' secret cult among the Efik, and 'Ogo' secret cult among the Afikpo-Igbo. These traditional secret societies influenced the social structure and political economy of Nigeria in one way or another and at one point in history. For instance, the first art of writing (named Nsibidi) in Nigeria was developed by the 'Ekpe' secret society, even though historically, Egypt was the first in the world to invent the art of writing (named hieroglyphics). The 'Ogo' secret cult is a veritable agent of socialisation, social control and catalyst for community development. Members of the 'Ogboni' secret cult had the wherewithal to run the Yoruba pre-colonial government; even colonial administrators consorted with them in a bid to perpetuate their Indirect Rule policies up to the early phase of Nigerian independence (Nnam., 2014). Supporting this viewpoint, Awe (2003), Amaele (2008), and Amaele (2013) reiterate that the social exploits and political manipulations of 'Ogboni' confraternity in the old Oyo Empire are evergreen. Until recently, this secret society enthroned and dethroned traditional rulers and influenced political appointments and opportunities in Nigeria

History of Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions and the Society

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 (Ajayi, Haastrup&Osalusi, 2010). 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 (Ajayi, Haastrup&Osalus, 2010).

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 Poro and Mende societies in Sierra Leone and the Oviaosese in Ogoni land. Today, cult groups in tertiary institutions are violent; they 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, TunjiTubi, DaignImokhuede, Pius Olegbe and OluAgunloye) formed the Seadogs confraternity (a.k.aPirates). 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, Eiye 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 and Daughters of Jezebel among others (Adewale, 2005).

Negative Impact of Secret Society in Nigeria

In spite of the efforts to eliminate cultism in higher institutions of learning, cult activities have been on the increase in the country. Reports of murderous and other gruesome activities of the campus cultists are burgeoning (Eneh, 2008). According to Akor (1994), one of the earliest reported secret cult violence occurred at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1985 when a noncult 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 PortHarcourt 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). The Head of Department of Geology of the Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) was murdered by cultists in his office in 2002. Rather than abate, campus cultism is growing as the number of educational institutions grows, It has been described as a feeder for political thuggery (Eneh, 2008).

The Commissioner for Lands in Enugu State was murdered and then cut to pieces, put in the boot of his car, which was then set ablaze, and the burning vehicle pushed into a ditch where

the mangled body of the Honourable Commissioner was burnt to ashes in a part of the Enugu city. Over 100 students were killed in cult wars in Enugu State alone between 1999 and 2006. The government was allegedly reported as financing the three major cults operating in the State, namely the Pirate Confraternity, Black Axe and Two-Two. On January 2, 2005, the Dean of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was shot in his campus residence by hired assassins suspected to be cultists. In August of the same year, 50 students from various universities across the country were arrested in Ajali, Anambra State, while trying to initiate new members into their cult. On Sunday, the 1st day of July 2007, several people were killed by rampaging cultists, who took to the streets of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, shooting sporadically. On a spot at No. 1 Ojike Street alone, they hacked three men, including a 30-year old man (*Newsbearer*, 2006; *Weekly Details*, 2006 and Onoyume, 2007).

Nnam (2014) reported That Federal Military Government of Nigeria and Northern rulers used some cult member to execute the 1966 pogrom and other pre and post Nigeria-Biafra war atrocities against the people of old South-eastern Nigeria (core Igbo and Delta-Igbo speaking people of Southern Nigeria). Issa (2012) substantiates this claim when he contends that by the mid-1980s some of the secret cultists had been co-opted by disgruntled elements in the intelligence and security services serving the military government and were used as foils to the left-wing student unions, which, along with university teachers, were among the only remaining bastions of opposition to military rule.

Onoh (2006) lists the politically motivated murders by the government-paid thugs and hired assassins suspected to be campus cultists between 1999 and 2006. Ajani and Igbikiowubo (2006) reported that prior to the 2003 general elections in Nigeria; a new dimension was introduced into electioneering mobilization. Whereas members of the Nigerian public were used to thugs engaging in different forms of malfeasance, what took place on the election days was crude and shocking. The thugs were not only given a token on the eve of the elections, but were armed with automatic weapons of various categories, earlier imported and stashed specifically for securing election victory. On the election days, many voters could not venture out of their homes. The bigger and more destructive dimension to this gangland style mobilization came after the elections. The already charged thugs, with arms in town, but no visible jobs in sight, simply transform largely into criminal elements.

On this note, cultism has shown too much negative effect on both members and non-members and causing unrest in the community. It leads to loss of human work force and this has a negative effect on the economy of the nation. Sometimes market are being stop to enable ease investigation and arrest of this cultist, in the cause of this investigation police officers are lost during gun dual by them and the cultist.

Control of Cultism or Secret Society

Several laws have been constituted against this cult groups in order to stop them from operating; this has led to drastic reduction in their membership and has led to the extinction of some. 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 ((Ajayi, Haastrup & Osalusi, 2010). Osaigbovo (2000) recommended that through seminars, workshops, symposium, posters, handbills and public lectures, cultism may be effectively combated. Jamiu (2008) posited that the school authorities must intensify armed patrol and surveillance on campuses.(Ajayi, Haastrup &

Osalusi, 2010) recommended that parents should desist from being members of secret cults and also prevent their children from joining bad groups as moral education should be re-introduced in all spheres of our lives and the decadent society should be spiritually reawakened. Nnam (2014) recommended that government, alongside the school authorities and relevant civil society groups, should organize correction-oriented sessions for students in various institutions of learning in Nigeria, beginning from the nursery schools through to the tertiary. They should be exposed to the dangers of secret cult membership and insulate them from the preying eyes of cult members. If there is any programme that can reduce secret cult menace to the barest minimum, it is unconditional amnesty with effective aftercare and follow-up services for ex-cult members.

From the above, there is fundamental need for the government to constitute an anti-cult from the civilian individuals in the society and in the various institutions. They can be formed from ex-cultist, graduated student and undergraduate to fight against cultism and their activities in our contemporary society. Local armed vigilante working in agreement with the Nigerian police can also be constituted in host communities to combat cultism and crime constituted by these cult groups.

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the exposition of this study, it has been seen that cultism or secret society is a major problem or challenge that has been into existence from the mid-1990s causing moral decadence and economy melt down to the present day society. The Secret society or cult group has been cultivated and grown to cause violence towards archiving their basic goal such as stealing, intimidation of lectures for grade, Rape and fight for election victory for their sponsors as thug.

Moreover, if the parents have to leave frivolities and teach their wards the need and importance of moral standard maintenance, this will help to stop the youth patronizing this secret society.

Finally, for Government, leaders of the Nigeria institutions and lecturers should formulate a course that should base on educating the student on need to shun cultism. Erecting Billboard advert showing the dangers of cultism will also go a long way in stopping people from joining these secret cults. When these steps are taken, it will inculcate into youth and the public the goal and the reason why these cults should be eradicated. It is very necessary that our religious bodies, Church, Mosque, etc and the society at large move a campaign against Secret Societies and Cultism found in the society.

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