

CULTISM AND INSECURITIES IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: CONSEQUENCES OF VALUE DISORIENTATION

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Abstract

The security situation in the country at large and Nigerian universities in particular is nothing to write home about. In our national dailies, radio, televisions and social media, there is hardly any passing day without news of killings, kidnappings, rape ritual murders, arson, banditry, Boko Haram attacks and so on. Lots of factors have been presented as root cause of this ugly situation and one of them is the existence of cult activities in Nigerian institutions of higher learning borne out of value disorientation. This paper examines the meaning, origin or background, and features of various cult groups in the Nigerian institutions. It goes farther to highlight the relationship between value disorientation and worsening security situation in the tertiary institutions in the country through cult activities. The adverse effects of cult activities on individual students, educational institutions and the society in general were also discussed. The paper concludes with the roles of stakeholders in curbing value disorientation and cultism which will eventually bring about the highly desired improvement in the security situation in tertiary institutions in the country.

Keywords: Cult, Insecurity, Tertiary institutions, Value disorientation

Introduction

Insecurity in Nigerian tertiary institutions has become a recurring phenomenon that threatens the well being of its citizens (Cable News, 2022). The situation has become so alarming that it has lead to disruption of academic activities and death of many students. Generally, insecurity has eaten into the fabrics of the nation as a whole. Samuel (2022) affirms that currently in Nigeria, insecurity has become something of grave concern to all well meaning Nigerians most of whom continue to wonder how the country arrived at such a dastardly situation where no one is safe anymore. From the East to the West and from the North to South, the situation is beyond description. The West of the country is plagued with armed robbery, kidnapping, domestic crime, extra-judicial killings, herder-farmer conflicts, ritual killing, banditry etc. The East is a haven for ritual killings, secessionist agitation, kidnapping, herder-farmer clashes- and attacks by unknown gunmen. The South is not left out as it is also threatened by militancy in addition to the crimes witnessed in other parts of the country, while the North is ravaged with Islamic State of West Africa (ISWAP), illegal mining, ethno-religious killings, banditry and others. Some of the killings are also politically motivated. These political leaders engage the services of hoodlums to maim or eliminate their political enemies. They also use them to carry and destroy ballot boxes and to disrupt election processes in areas where they think they will not win.

In recent times, secret cult activities in Nigerian educational institutions have assumed an alarming proportion. This has become a great menace and threat to the well being of innocent students of tertiary institutions in particular and the education system in general Mfonobong (2023) postulated that the real essence of these secret cults has been a big contention and thus their existence and activities have become a matter of serious concern both to the government and the society at large. Information concerning the nature and the modus - operandi of secret cults on our campuses are revealed through sources like television, radio, newspaper, magazines, police reports and confessional statements from cult members. Secret cultism in its entire ramification is bad. Our higher institutions supposed to be citadels of learning where students are trained both in character and learning, but the reverse now seems to be the case as academic activities are often disrupted due to activities of these cult groups. From the look of things, the cult menace is growing from an epidemic to cankerworm, eating deep into the fabrics of our society, the education system being the most plagued. No wonder Iwuamadi and Ajeka (2012) are of the opinion that the cultists have taken possession of our campuses and laid siege on the larger society, we are in deep trouble and unless immediate drastic and equally harsh actions are taken urgently there may be no hiding place for all. The imminent effects are that properties are destroyed, lives are lost, lecturers are intimidated, female students are raped and even more. The sum total of the scenario is that cultists have graduated from brutality and armed robbery to satanic terrorism, demonic gangsterism, senseless fundamentalism and mindless murderers. They are living beyond sanity. The result of all these, is frequent closure of tertiary institutions which consequently contributes to the fall in standard of education.

The most unfortunate thing about cult activities is that, it is not only limited to institutions of higher learning but it is, gradually spreading to our secondary schools in recent times. This trend should be of great concern to innocent students, authorities of institutions of learning, parents and the government. To support this assertion, Olaoye, (1996) explained that in Nigeria, it is not only in the tertiary institutions such as polytechnics, universities and colleges of education that secret cult activities have reared the ugly head. Media reports have it that secondary school children have been caught carrying out rituals under the supervisions of older cult members.

This ugly situation could be attributed to value disorientation. Values can be described as those things an individual, institutions or organizations value. In other words, it can be seen as what are considered important by an individual, an organization or society. Examples include courage, honesty, freedom, innovation etc. Values can be spiritual, moral, social, intellectual, economic and political. When these values are no longer respected or misplaced, it can lead to a lot of problems. In some societies such as Nigeria, there seem to be an erosion or distortion in the value system. This could be referred to as value disorientation. Disoriented, according to dictionary.com, means confused and unstable. When a person is disoriented, he may not know his location, identity, time or date. It's often accompanied with confusion, or being unable to think with the normal level of clarity and having disrupted attention. Therefore value disorientation means to cause confusion by removing or obscuring something that has guided a person, institution, or organization (George, 2023). This may include distortion or alienation from customs, moral standards or principles that guide the existence and actions of an individual or society or when people are reoriented into values that are contrary to the one that already governs the person.

Since this phenomenon in our institutions of learning has taken a dangerous dimension, there is the urgent need for school authorities, parents, and government to device means of reorienting the youth who majorly constitute the population of tertiary educational institutions into acceptable spiritual, moral, social, intellectual, economic and political values.

The Relationship between Value Disorientation Cult Activities and Insecurity

Meriam Webster defined insecurity as the state of being open to danger or threat and lack of protection while cultism is defined by Inyang (2017) as practices of activities that are associated with secrete cults. Secret cults are organizations whose membership and modes of operation are considered to be unconventional and known to the members only. Secrete cult members pledge allegiance to the cult, devoting themselves under oaths to support and carry out the activities of the group without objection. The big question is how does value disorientation lead to cult activities and insecurity? The answer is not far-fetched. We are in the era of Information Communication Technology (ICT) which has made the world a global village. The offshoot from this is explosion of social media platforms such as face book, twitter or X as it is currently called, WhatsApp, YouTube, and so on. A lot of things go on in these social platforms too numerous to mention here. Through these platforms youths communicate with people from all works of life and in the process exchange ideas, Apart from these platforms, a lot programs aired on the television these days come from different cultural backgrounds. A lot of their contents are filled with violence and moral decadence which seem to contravene already established values. This leads the youths to be involved in many unwholesome practices such as cultism. Cult conflicts and misunderstanding occurs randomly in many Nigerian-tertiary institutions. Many young people now take solace in cult gangsterism instead of devoting their energy to positive enterprise. They are usually armed with machetes, clubs, axes, and other dangerous weapons including guns ravaging places where innocent people gather for recreation such as night clubs, gardens, and bars. These miscreants take delight in unleashing mayhem and terror on members of the public thereby disrupting social order. Nnodum and Ochogba (2018) added that today several heinous activities are carried out by cult groups and these activities are against the norms and values of the society where they operate.

According to Nextier report (2022), multiple gang actions and reprisal attacks often lead to chaos, disequilibrium of the environment thereby creating theatre of violence which leads to death of gang members. In a 2021 report, Nextier recorded 49 (forty nine) cult violence that

led to 99 (ninety-nine) deaths. In addition, the database recorded 50 incidents leading to 124 casualties between January and May 2022 in states-such as Akwa Ibom, Delta, Ondo, Rivers and Anambra. Apart from killing and disturbing other people, the cult groups engage in cult wars against each other from time to time during which lives and properties are destroyed. In some areas, it leads to imposition of curfew which disrupts economic activities thereby imposing suffering and hardship on citizens. The most agonizing part is that sometimes, they threaten their fellow students out of school and even disrupt academic activities.

Trends in the growth of Cult Activities in Nigeria

Cult is a group or sect whose practices or beliefs are separated from generally acceptable values and creeds while a cultist is one who is a slave to a cult. A cult according to Oxford Learner's Dictionary is a small group of people with extreme religious beliefs and who are not part of any established religion. Republic of Nigeria see secret society as any association, group or body or persons (whether registered or not) that uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols which is formed to promote a cause. The purpose or part of the purpose of which is to foster the interest of its members and to aid one another under any circumstances without due regard to merit, fair play or justice to the detriment of the legitimate interest of those who are not members. The membership of cults is incompatible with the functions or dignity of any public office under the constitution. Their members are sworn to observe oaths of secrecy, their activities are not known to the public at large, the names of members are kept secret and their meetings and other activities are held in secret. Generally speaking, cult is a group whose activities are shrouded in secrecy and which could use unconventional and unacceptable means in dispensing its activities, which are mostly esoteric and individualistic. From all the definitions we can see that the cultists act irrationally, emotionally and without recourse to rational reasoning and restraint.

According to Ehase (2007), the beginning of cult activities in Nigerian Universities dates back to the year 1952. Then in the University of Ibadan when the Nobel Laureate Professor Wole Shoyinka and a few of his friends called the 'G7' decided to set up a social club, which they christened the Pirates confraternity. Their aim was to abolish convention behaviour as it was during the colonial period by fighting, non-violently, but intellectually and effectively against the impositions of foreign convention and promote the spirit of chivalry (by finding a lasting solution to the spirit of tribalism and elitism). Indeed history has it that the Pirates confraternity is some of the brightest, cleanest, and most politically conscious among the students. But soon what started as a social club turned into a cult involved in the massacre of students. Continuing he wondered just how the cult spread to the other universities in the country or how, according to a Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) report, 33 cult groups sprang up from the social club, remains, a mystery to many. Writing in support of the above report, Vanguard Newspaper (1999) traced the origin of cult activities in Nigerian universities in its reports that a seeming harmless club Pirates (pyrates) confraternity - formed by Wole Soyinka and others in the University College, Ibadan in 1953 has balkanized into some 40 secret cults on university campuses today. The most dreaded and notorious ones being the 'Buccaneers', the 'Black Axe', 'Black Eye', 'Black Arts', Vikings, the Eiei confraternity and the all female cults Daughters of Jezebel, Black bra etc. They have degenerated to societies of horror, blood- sucking, death and destruction that have over awed everybody.

Predisposition for Joining Cult Groups

Studies have revealed that there are several factors responsible for student joining secret cults. Among these factors are: Heritage from parents, influence by peer groups, curiosity, influence of foreign films, crime novels, poor administration of institutions, insecurity, search for an identity and others.

1. **Heritage from Parents:** Some parents are members of secret societies like Ogboni, Ibile, ROF, Lodge or Amore. When the children of such people get to campus, they too register as members of secret cults in order to have a taste of what their parents are experiencing. Onugha, (1996) explained that secret societies in Nigerian educational institutions draw their strength from corresponding organisation in the adult world. These students' societies are in touch with their influential alumni who give them moral and material support as and when necessary.
2. **Influence by Peer Groups:** Another major factor that encourages students to be members of secret cults is peer group. Students who innocently keep the company of secret cult members stand the chance of being easily lured into cultism. This is so, because there is tendency for friends to influence friends either consciously or unconsciously as the saying goes evil association corrupts good manners.
3. **Influence of Foreign Films and Crime Novels:** Students exposures to foreign films and novels that are violent in nature sometimes contribute to students becoming members of secret cult. Some of the war and mafia films shown in movies have negative effects on students. At times the methods of operation of secret cults are copied through these means. Olaoye (1996) opines that influence of alien violent culture and practices typified in films of the mafia shown on public video centres, televisions and home video contribute to the planning, formation and operation of cults on campuses. It should be noted that mafia has a sophisticated organization structure and strong capabilities.
4. **Curiosity:** Some group of students become members of secret cult out of curiosity, they want to know what secret cult is all about - its membership, mode of operation and the features so that they could have first hand information of what cultism entails. But unfortunately, very few later quits while many find it difficult to quit.
5. **Insecurity on Campuses:** This is one of the factors that lure students into cults. Some students feel insecure on campus in the hands of secret cult members and probably lecturers. This group of people sees secret cults as the only alternative that could guarantee their protection. When in cults, they have the belief that they cannot be easily touched by other secret cult members, the school authority or be victimized by lecturers.
6. **Poor Administration of Institution:** Secret cults may thrive in an environment that is not conducive for learning. When authorities of institutions are unable to manage crisis effectively or accommodate critics like student unionism, provide essential services like electricity, water, adequate classrooms, hostel accommodation there is the tendency for students to come together under the cover of cultism, to challenge the authority and cause confusion in the institution.
7. **Search for Identity:** Some students join secret cults so as to identify themselves with a particular group and feel that they belong. To buttress this argument, Onugha,

(1996) maintained that, quite a number of students join secret societies because they are in search of an identity, they cannot stand on their own and so look for a group they can identify with. The most feared group is usually the obvious choice and this is invariably a secret society,

Effects of Secret Cult Activities on the Security of Tertiary Institutions

The multiplier effects of cultism in Nigerian higher institutions are overwhelming such as violence, terrorism, vandalism, students' unrest, banditry, attacks by cultists, threats, extortions, abuse of drugs, illegal use of ammunitions by students, kidnapping, nocturnal ritualistic practices, students' demonstrations and restiveness. They could be felt on the individual, on the educational institution and society at large.

Effects on Individuals: Membership in a cult group usually lead to loss of self-identity. In an ideal situation, tertiary education is expected to produce an all round developed personality but unfortunately cult members made this impossible because their personal identity are now submerged under group identity. They now take up the features of their cult group. Other effects include;

- i. Moral Decadence
- ii. Poor Academic Performance

Effects on Educational Institutions

- i. Fall in Standard of Education
- ii. Crisis and Confusion on Campus
- iii. School rules and Regulations are bent in favour of Cultists
- v. Distortion in the school calendar

Effects on the Society:

- i. Increase in crime rate.
- ii. Indiscipline and corruption.
- iii. Loss of lives during cult Activities
- iv. Poverty

Roles of Stakeholders in Curbing Cult Activities in Campuses

Cult activities affect various spheres of human existence. From the look of things, cult menace is growing from an epidemic to a canker worm eating deep into the fabrics of our society, the educational system being the worst plagued. A serious illness therefore deserves very serious treatment. All hands should now be on deck towards finding lasting solution to the menace.

Role of Parents: The prayer of every parent is for the children to succeed him or her and be more prosperous in life. Control of cultism must begin at the roots - the home front as the saying goes Charity begins at home.

There are parents who become rich through dubious means. Many of them are indisciplined, uncultured and ungodly. They make their ill-gotten wealth carelessly available to their children. Consequently many of their children have been recorded as being the worst in the society as noted earlier. They are either the leaders of the decadent groups or the financiers of the lawless cultists who terrorize other law-abiding students and teachers. It is therefore suggested that parents should not give their children access to too much money.

Other roles parents should play in curbing campus cults should include to be role models to their children, their style of living should not be ostentatious but rather moderate and should equally ensure that they acquire their wealth through honest means.

Parents and guardians should take greater interest in the affairs of their children to direct them well and guard against unwholesome companionship. Most importantly, parents should not belong to secret societies and should not engage in any activity that will encourage their children to join cults.

The Role of Students: The physical move to identify with any cult that seemed compatible to an individual for any reason at all is a matter of the mind. Students should therefore resolve not to join any cult no matter the situation; rather they should take their studies seriously. They should avoid having people of dubious or questionable characters as friends because an adage says an evil communication corrupts good manners, Students should desist from reading crime novels, watching war films and pornographic magazines but rather devote most of their leisure times to meaningful activities.

The Role of Government: We can only solve this problem if government is fully ready to deal with any cultist irrespective of his/her parents status. Cases abound when cultists have been apprehended and handed over to the security agents only to be seen on campus a few days later,

There is the house of Representative Secret Cult and Secret Society prohibition Bill, 2001 which stipulates a jail term of five years or a fine of N250,000 or both to the offenders, but the nagging question is how many cultists have been prosecuted or jailed? Apart from the law federal government has promulgated to punish offenders, she should still intensify efforts in sponsoring seminars, conferences and workshops to identify the causes of cultism on our campuses and the appropriate steps to be taken to eradicate it completely.

Governments should also encourage courts of law to stop granting bails to students suspected for cult activities because such students will find their ways back to the institutions.

The Role of School Authorities: As a stakeholder in the fight against cult activities, the school authority has parts to play in curbing cult activities in campus. It is observed that the university authorities always had the list of cult members but have persistently refused to take any action against them because of their selfish interest. In order to curb cult activities in the universities, there should be adequate hostel accommodation within the campuses for students. The idea of students being scattered all over the neighbouring towns and villages does not augur well for the kind of security needed in the university setting.

Other ways of curbing cultism include;

- Consistent and organized mass action against, cultists. Such action should be either preemptive or defensive.

- Public enlightenment programmes such as talk shows, rallies, symposia will also be useful in exposing the evils of cult activities.
- Recreational facilities, better infrastructure and a conducive academic environment will ease social tension and promote the psychological training of students.

The Role of Society: Nigerian society should have a re-think on the culture of 'might is right' which cult activities strive to emulate. It is unfortunate that today's culture of permissiveness has deprived our youth the knowledge of determining right from wrong. The society attaches a lot of interest, honour and dignity to wealth no matter how it was acquired hence the proliferation and bastardization of chieftaincy titles and honorary degrees.

The Role of the Church: The church should be the source of dissemination of morale to all and sundry. It has very important part to play in the moral upbringing of the youths. Majority of Nigerian youths are Christians who belong to one Christian denomination or another. The church leaders should among other things create activities that engage the youths in meaningful religious activities such as youth week, youth rally, quiz competitions, youth conferences, seminars and so on.

Church leaders should be visiting universities to organize crusades and talks by resource persons, Campus fellowships should be encouraged so long as it does not interfere with students study periods. It is observed that Church leaders have left their primary role of leading people to the Kingdom of God and diverted their attention to preaching topics that will lead to acquisition of wealth. Worst still, they have gone ahead to confer titles to rich members, and offer them sitting positions in the choicest part of the church. All these impact negatively on the psyche of the youths.

Mass orientation campaign should be put in place for new students against joining cults, sticker, t-shirts, banners, and pamphlets should be used as avenues for sensitization and discouragement of new students against cult activities. (They should effectively stress the negative aspects of joining a cult.

The Need for Value Reorientation

Value reorientation means restoration or a change of attitude towards a number of things that have been identified as wrong actions or wrong attitudes. There is need to reorient the youths and inculcate the right and acceptable values. Now, we are living in an age where people don't have the right values or ethics. Family, society, and educational institutions can play a great role in inculcating values to the new generation George (2023) identified such stakeholder as

- Parents
- Educational institutions and
- Other members of the society

Role, of Family in Inculcating Values: The family is the oldest and the most influential agent of socialization and it goes from cradle to grave. The father, mother, siblings, and grandparents are the immediate agents of socialization. Children pick up behavioural traits from all those who are in their immediate environment. Values are imbibed by children by observing what parents do (and not just what parents say). The power of the family is

strongest during infancy and toddler years. During the teenage, the influence of peer group and media usually overshadows the power of the family.

Role of Educational Institutions in inculcating values: Educational institutions are important agencies in the process of socialization and inculcating values. Students spend much time in the school and therefore, students learn not only from the official curriculum but also from the social curriculum of peer groups which is referred to as hidden curriculum. In school they learn about punctuality and discipline. Furthermore, they are also engaged in value education. Values education is an explicit attempt to teach about values. There are five basic approaches to values education: inculcation, moral development, analysis, action learning, and values clarification.

Role of Society in inculcating values: When we talk of society here, we refer to different individuals, institutions and organization which could be called elements of the society. They play vital role in inculcating value in people. They include: friends, neighbours, media, films, religion, leaders, and government.

Ways of Encouraging those who Denounced Cult Membership

- Cult members should be encouraged to denounce their membership. Students who eventually denounced cult activities should be encouraged to re-direct their- energy towards positive and intellectual activities rather frivolities.
- Cult 'denouncees' live with perpetual uncertainty for fear of possible execution by their fellow members. This is so because their fellow members wouldn't like them to live to expose other members and their secrets. Therefore denouncees should be given adequate security.
- Another way of encouraging them is through prayer sessions. Christian fellowships should adopt such persons as their members pray for them always and feed them adequately with the encouraging words from the Bible. There should be follow-up visits by Christians until security and confidence is restored in them.
- Encouragement may also be given in terms of mouth watering gift money, books and other materials that will aid them in life. They could be awarded scholarship to cover the rest of the duration in the institutions. These laudable gestures may encourage others to denounce cult activities.

Conclusion

Tertiary institutions are set up to train individuals to be morally sound and productive to themselves, their immediate families and the society at large. But unfortunately it has been observed that secret cult members have invaded the campus and made the hitherto citadels of learning uncomfortable for academic activities. Cultists engage in activities that are not only detrimental to themselves but to the innocent students, the school authority and to the society at large. Curbing these cult groups in our campuses should be the primary concern and responsibility of everyone - individuals, students, school authorities, parents, society and the government.

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