



## CAUSES AND PANACEA TO PROBLEM OF CULTISM IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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### Abstract:

The Nigerian education system is bedeviled with a myriad of malaise, hampering effective teaching and pleasant learning, chief among which is cultism. The overall effect of cultism leaves much to be desired in the education system, as education is an instrument par excellence for achieving national development. The trust of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the crushing effect of cultism, on the Nigerian education system. The paper traces antecedents of cultism; its pervasiveness at particular level(s) of the education system; causes of cultism; as well as panacea to the cankerworm, with a view to salvaging the Nigerian education system and making it the bastion of development, as affirmed by the National Policy on Education, which considers education as an instrument par excellence for national development. Among other things, the paper proffers panacea in form of recommendations which include mass re-orientation against violence in Nigerian schools, emphasising moral and religious teaching; provision of welfare/recreational facilities in-school(s); as well as enacting and enforcing stricter laws, among other measures.

**Keywords:** cultism; menace; panacea and national development

### 1. Introduction

The Nigerian education system is plagued by a myriad of problems, of them all, apparently one of the most disturbing, which is assuming more alarming dimension by the day, is that of cultism. In the past, especially at the early stage of Nigeria's independence, cultism used to be a phenomenon safely confined to limited number of the elderly members of the larger society. However, in recent times, cultism seems to be a pervasive influence across diverse strata of society. There seems to be no limit in

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terms of age, gender, socio-economic background, educational attainment or other criteria, as this social malfeasance manifests at all levels of the society in different hues. Omebe and Omebe (2015) were of the opinion that the problem of secret cults has assumed crisis situation in the Nigerian education sector. The spread of cult activities to secondary schools, and sadly, some primary schools in the country has made cultism more worrisome than ever. Onyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015) asserts that *“the greatest and most embarrassing problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is the renewal of the menace and aggressiveness of cult activities”*.

Palpable fear and worry are understatement of emotions shared by parents and guardians of children at different levels of the education system, especially higher institution, as a result of wanton killing and mayhem unleashed by cults on the society. Equally disturbing is the high economic cost associated with mindless destruction of property such as commission of arson to press home the supremacy of rival cult group(s) attempting to portray a level of lawlessness that creates the impression of their being above the law of the land, to the general public. Cultism constitutes a major social menace which hampers peace and harmony in Nigeria tertiary institutions (Mediyanose, 2016). Oju (1991) also attests to the crisis dimension of cultism in Nigerian higher institutions by asserting that above all other problems, the greatest debate of the Nigerian University system is that of cult violence.

Resurgence of cultism, in spite of relentless effort to eradicate it, makes it imperative to investigate this perennial plague of the education system. Frantic effort has been made through various approaches, towards ending the social malaise, without much success. As stringent as measures were applied to discourage cultism, so did upsurge of cultism and related violence across Nigerian education institutions rise to a higher crescendo (Mediyanose, 2016; Opaluwah, 2000 and Yusuf, 2006). Therefore, this paper delves into the causes, prevalence, effects and solutions to the problem of cultism in the Nigerian education system.

## **2. Conceptualization of Cult and Cultism**

It is necessary to have a clear perception of what constitutes cult and cultism. Many authors have examined the ideas extensively, leading to some generalization about what constitutes a cult and cultism itself. There is need to clarify the relationship between cult and cultism, which have been defined by many researchers. A cult is perceived as a group which shows a high form of commitment or devotion to a particular cause or principle, while making its activities and participants to appear esoteric in the eyes of the uninitiated (Arele, 2006). Cults, their membership and activities, as described above, are often shrouded in secrecy and as such, they are also often referred to as secret cults. Onyechere (1998) simply defines cult as a group of people who share and propagate peculiar beliefs only to members. This suggests that activities of a cult are esoteric; non-members are not granted access to information about a cult as well as unique ideology of such groups.

Others have defined cults from the religious point of view. For instance, it is perceived as a unique, temporarily fashionable system of worship or belief (Ukpong, 2003). This explains why different cults differ in terms of their rules, norms, insignia, and other attributes, which are hidden from the uninitiated. Ogunbameru (2004) to consider secret cults as not only organizations whose modus operandi are clandestine, but such activities are carried out at odd hours of the day while also clashing with convention or widely accepted ways of life. Igodo (2002) perceives a cult as an assemblage of people who share unconventional ideas and beliefs and engage in secret eccentric behaviour.

Cultism on the other hand is closely related to activities of a cult. It is a system of religious beliefs and practices or ideology which often has to do with rituals (Denga, 1991). Such activities are also screened from the prying eyes of the public or the uninitiated and are often inimical to its members and non-members alike. In consonance with this view, Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi (2010) concludes that "cultism can be defined as a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities, as well as their mode of operations are done in secret and kept in secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike.

### **3. Brief History of Secret Cults in Nigerian Educational System**

Before the advent of secret cults in Nigerian educational institutions, they existed as organs of traditional society to maintain law and order and ensure high degree of moral rectitude. Major tribes such as the Yoruba, Efik, Delta and Edos had such cults like Ogboni, Ekpe, Ekine and Owegbe respectively. (Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi, 2010). This view was corroborated by Itedjere (2006), in whose opinion such cults were not a novel invention although their deviation from positive roles prescribed by the society was a new development, (Itedjere, 2006). In the past, secret cults in traditional societies helped in the administration of such societies and in instilling discipline in the populace so that law and order were maintained to ensure peace, harmony and progress.

The establishment of cults in Nigerian educational institutions could be traced to the registration of pyrates confraternity by Professor Wole Soyinka in the University College Ibadan in the early 50s, as a harmless organisation with the sole aim of abolishing convention and combating tribalism and elitism with chivalry (Opaluwah, 2000). At the time, the intention of its founding fathers was not to inflict pain on society through wanton killing of people and destruction of property. Rather it aimed at serving as an innocuous arrowhead, to propagate nationalist interests through purposeful and coordinated activities of level headed and highly cerebral individuals who were cult members, and who jostled for positions of leadership at the time. (Udoh and Ikezu, 2015).

However, with time around early 1970s, splinter groups who were ex-communicated from the pirates. Due to issues not unconnected to deviation from norms and standards, registered their new groups as the National Association of Seadogs

(NAS) also known as the Buccaneers. Thereafter rapid fight for superiority and assertion of independence and freedom to associate, fueled the inordinate desire of different ambitious individuals to lead cults formed by them, with a view to wielding significant influence.

Proliferation of cults took a sickening and alarming dimension in the early 80s, when school administrations and military regimes used cults in gathering intelligence and destabilizing their institutions, to the detriment of academic staff who, at the time agitated for improved conditions of service. Poor economic situation of the country at that time paved way for easy exploitation of cult leaders as willing tools in the hands of school administrations and military regimes. Consequently, cults were armed and empowered to tackle rival cults as well as members of staff and students deemed to be recalcitrant. An easy fall out of the foregoing scenario was endless battle for supremacy by various secret cults which fought aggressively for supremacy, leaving destruction of lives and property in the wake of their nefarious activities (Nzimiro, 1999; Ugwulebo, 1999; and Akpabio, 2003)

The situation at present is such that a plethora of secret cults have invaded the Nigerian education system. After the Buccaneers broke away from the pirates, there has been a rapid spawning of cults due to the desire to be free of controlling authority by some members. The situation at present is such that a plethora of secret cults have invaded the Nigerian education system. Although, there is no consensus on the exact number of secret cults that now manifest in the Nigerian education system, various authors have come up with names of at least 50 existing secret cults whose nefarious activities have been recorded in Nigerian schools or the larger society.

According to Nnam (2014), Omebe and Omebe (2015), Mediayanose (2016), Ekeayanwu and Igbinoba (2007), Umeh, 2001 and Onodarho (1999), some examples of such cults include: Black Beret; Black Ofals; Black Brothers; Black Axe; Black Scorpion; Black Scorpion; Black Sword; Blanchers; the Termites; Egbe Dudu; Fangs; Angels; Big 20; Buccaneers; Eiye; Dreaded Friends of Friends, Green Berets; Gentleman's club; Eagle club; Mgbamgba Brothers; Nite Hawk, Red Fishes; Scavengers; Nite Rovers; Airswords; Magic Lords; Marphites; Mafiaso; Thomas Sankara Boys; Temple of Eden; Sons of the Night, Scorpions; the Fame; Trojan Horse; Black Cobra; Black Cat; Blood Suckers; Vikings; Osiri; Ogboni; Fliers; Bloodline; Maplates; mafia; musketeers; Black Ladies Club; Ninjas; Amazons; Black Nationalists, White Angels, Daughters of Jezebel, Bra-Bra; Charlie's Angles; Bulky Sisters; the Amazons; Cappa Vendetto; Baby one Breast Confraternity, Black Bra; Bulky sisters; Royal Queen; Burking Faso; Queen of the Coast; Ku Wux Plan; Eiyes and so on.

### **3.1 Manifestation of Cultism at Different Levels of the Education System**

Cultism and activities of cults are more prevalent in the tertiary institutions such as Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities, although occasionally, the pervasive influence of cults gradually infiltrate other tiers of the education system, especially the secondary school level, where the attendant violence, torture, harassment

and intimidation associated with cultism have since found its way in Nigeria (Adewale, 2005).

The influence of cults and cultism has also permeated the entire society, meaning that it has found its way into social groups and organizations, establishments and even religious organizations. Little wonder why cults have been reported to manifest in Nigerian primary schools (Abayomi and Nnabugwu, 2012). In the views of Ossai (2007), secondary schools in Nigeria have their fair share of cultism. In fact, Enoch (2003), Mbayur (2011) and Orukpe (1998) affirm that secondary schools are fast becoming breeding grounds for cults.

### 3.2 Causes of Cultism in Nigerian Educational Institutions

The emergence of cults on the Nigerian educational landscape, as alarming as it is, burgeoned as a result of several factors affecting the fabrics of the Nigerian society. Authors' views are divergent on these factors. Paulley (2014), Fageyinbo (2004), Wokacha and Okujugu (1999), Onyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015), Medaiyanose (2016), Nnajieto and Ahamefula (2015) and a host of others adduced causes of cultism in Nigerian educational institutions. These causes include but are not limited to the following:

1. **Need for Protection:** Some meek students are lured or bullied into cults as a result of their anxiety not to be attacked or harassed by members of secret cults or other aggressive individuals.
2. **Economic/Financial Benefits:** Some individuals see cultism as a veritable avenue for making money through unwholesome activities such as prostitution, blackmail, examination racketeering and other unscrupulous activities.
3. **Exerting Authority or Supremacy:** Individuals patronize cults in order to be able to flaunt their power or influence to other members of their school community.
4. **Broken Family:** Some cultists embrace cultism as an outlet from their traumatic home experiences, especially where there is lack of harmony.
5. **Drug Abuse:** Some students dabble into cultism as a result of overpowering influence of drugs which they get easily from cults and they could not bail out later, having been sworn to oaths of allegiance to the cult.
6. **Lack of Guidance or Direction:** Some members of secret cults are usually muscled or lured into joining cults due to inadequate guidance by adults.
7. **Indoctrination and Deceit:** Usually new cult recruits are indoctrinated about bloated ideals of the group and benefits accruable from it.
8. **Influence of Politicians and School Administration:** Assurance of connection to powerful people in schools and politicians from larger society is a motivating factor for some eventual members of cults.
9. **Academic Excellence:** Promise of success in school work through cheating and other unconventional means provide attractive prospect for some cult members.
10. **Peer Influence:** Some students join cult groups because their friends also belong to such cults. This is accentuated by adolescence.



11. **Need to Exert Vengeance:** Some students join cults to seek revenge for wrongs committed against them.
12. **Deplorable School Facilities:** Many schools lack adequate school facilities, for studying and recreation. Cult members are distracted in finding a past time.
13. **Clampdown on Unionism:** Sometimes when school administrations and government disallow or limit student unionism, students fight back through cults.
14. **Parental Influence:** Some cult members are encouraged or initiated by their parents, who were themselves cult members.

#### 4. Effects of Cultism

Oju (1991) opines that the greatest crisis besetting the Nigerian education system, especially the University system, is that of cult violence. The brutish attacks unleashed by cults indiscriminately, at the slightest provocation in universities across the nation leaves much to be desired. As a result of attacks and counter attacks that are motivated by cults, the educational system has gradually become a theatre of war, rather than a serene atmosphere that is otherwise required for effective and pleasant transmission and reception of learning experiences, respectively. It is therefore pertinent to outline some ills associated with cultism as they manifest in the education system.

Researchers have been explicit in cataloguing woes of the educational system as a result of cultism. For instance, Ossai (2001) asserts that secondary school education in Nigeria has been besieged and destroyed by secret cults which openly cheat at examinations while brazenly threatening teachers and students alike with their dangerous arsenal of weapons like daggers, axes and knives.

Ivagher, Onyeanisi and Agugu (2016), Nnam (2014), Mediayanose (2016), Omebe and Omebe (2015), Birabil and Okanezi (2017), Udoh and Ikezu (2015), Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi (2010), Onyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015) explicitly stated some of the adverse effects of cultism to the education system which includes but are not limited to:

1. **Wanton Destruction of Lives of Stakeholders in the Education Sector:** Cultists unleash mayhem on teachers, students and members of school managements, to the extent that some have been killed or permanently maimed through violent acts such as shooting, stabbing, acid baths and other dangerous attacks. Such attacks destabilize the educational system by creating palpable fear in the hearts of its stakeholders.
2. **Heinous crimes like armed robbery, rape, kidnapping black mailing Prostitution:** Cult members engage in robbery and other dangerous crime to terrorise their victims and usually to make money needed to sustain their expensive lifestyles, procure arms, buy protection from corrupt law enforcement agents, pay hospital bills when attacked and pay for legal fees when their members are arrested for crimes.

3. **Examination Malpractice:** Cultism invariably leads to examination malpractice as cult members, who do not study hard, attempt to compromise evaluation procedures through the use of inducement, sheer aggression or blackmail. This ultimately attenuates standards and quality assurance in the Nigerian education system.
4. **Poor Academic Performance:** The reign of terror unleashed by cults in educational institutions inhibits learning by creating fear and tension in the school environment. Learning is known to thrive best in an atmosphere devoid of elements of threat, therefore, it takes its toll on academic performance of students. Cultists also fail to study hard while attacking rivals or their victims or worse still while attempting to evade attack.
5. **Destruction of Property:** Cults are known to destroy the property of their victims or school, to draw attention to their grievances. Houses, vehicles, stationery, and other facilities belonging to educational institutions have been razed or utterly damaged by cults. The economic implications recession, is best imaged.
6. **Disruption of School Calendar:** School managements have been compelled to shut down their institutions, sometimes for a long time, as a result of mindless destruction of lives and property due to cultism. This elongates or disrupts the school calendar.

## 5. Conclusion

There is urgent need to stem the tide of cult related violence, that is ravaging the Nigerian education system. Although, cultism appears to have defied all efforts to curtail it in the past, while instead it has permeated all spheres of life in the larger society. Concerted effort, by all stakeholders such as churches, mosques, law enforcement agents, as well as other members of the larger society, is required to put a stop to the corrosive effect of cultism on education in Nigeria.

### 5.1 Recommendations / Panacea to Cultism in Nigerian Education System

Although the cankerworm of cultism has eaten very deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian education system. Mitigation of the ruinous effects of cultism could be attained if concerted effort is exerted by stakeholders in the education system. Relevant measures that would help to eradicate cultism in Nigerian schools include:

1. Parents should provide adequate guidance to their children on the inherent dangers of cultism.
2. Parents should also endeavor to provide the basic needs of their children to prevent them from falling prey to inducement by cults, through which they can be lured to join secret cults.
3. Mosques and churches should intensify efforts to discourage their members, especially the adolescents, from joining cults.

4. Government should ensure adequate provision of necessary facilities in educational institutions. This should be coupled with provision of recreational facilities in schools.
5. Government should refrain from deploying “divide and rule” tactics, which plays cult groups against student unions in Nigerian institutions in a bid to stifle agitation for improved conditions and services in Nigerian education institutions.
6. Government, through the legislature and judiciary, should ensure enactment and enforcement of new laws that prescribes more stringent measures against commission of cult related crimes.
7. Law enforcement agencies should be adequately equipped and up and doing, in curbing the menace of cults without prejudice to anybody. Perversion of justice is an incentive for cultism and if law enforcement agents fail to arrest and prosecute cultists, proliferation of the malaise would be inevitable.
8. School administrations should create enabling environment for peaceful dialog, with students unions, and avoid underhand tactics to muzzle legitimate agitation for improved services by students.
9. School administrations should be seen to discipline errant students without fear or favour, to serve as deterrent to others.

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