CULTISM AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN VALUES AND SOCIETY

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Abstract
For the past few decades, the menace of cultism has remained a social grenade that has persistently plagued Nigeria particularly. Being a socio-cultural confraternity that started as a constructive violence against the excesses of colonialism, it has become utterly regrettable that regardless of its birth from a noble intention, it is presently a woe to life, cultural values and the future of Nigerian people and society. We are therefore confronted with the questions of the origin of cultism, its spread to the entire Nigerian society. How did secret cult start in Nigeria? Why do people join cultism? What is their mode of initiation? Why has it continued to thrive despite efforts at eradicating it? Does the complicity of the authority promote cult activities? How does it undermine African cultural values? With the prevalent cult activities, what does the future hold for Nigeria? This essay concerns itself with the above questions. The method of analysis and description is adopted in this discourse. The findings of this piece show that cultism is an age-long association across the globe. Membership cuts across all members of the society - the elites as well as the commoners. It is also found that secret cult constitutes a serious threat to the social fabrics and values of the African people at large. The author suggests that a conscientious and a sincere effort be made towards nipping this hydra-headed monster in the bud. This can be achieved if, without prejudice, members are severely punished as a deterrent to those who may nurse the intention of joining cults.
Keywords: Cultism, Violence, Nigeria Campus, African Value.

Introduction

What started in 1952, in the University College Ibadan, under the leadership of the Nobel Laureate winner, Prof. Wole Soyinka, as a Pan-African confraternity has today transmogrified into a monster feeding on those who fed it. In the early 50s, Wole Soyinka and a group of other college friends formed the pirate's confraternity as an umbrella body that would produce future African leaders who would be proud of their African heritage (Udoh & Ikezu, 2015). It was a part of the revolution that swept through Africa against colonialism during the 20th century. Its membership was open to all qualified male students irrespective of age and ethnicity. It remained a non-violent

movement for a period of about 20years, spreading from the mother institution to other institutions of higher learning (Udoh & Ikezu, 2015).
Due to disagreement among cult members there emerged a proliferation of cult groups in campuses leading to violent activities. Udoh and Ikezu (2015) noted that the military government of the 1970's adopted cult members into their intelligence units and used them to put stubborn student leaders, struggles and agitations under control. It was not until 1984 that the founder of cultism, Wole Soyinka dissociated himself from their nefarious and violent activities which are what has become a monster today in Nigeria. The violence associated with cultism is not unconnected to the tussle and struggle for supremacy among different cult groups.

In the bid to gather more intelligence and gainer muscle for their endless power tussle, membership into cult groups became open to all and sundry regardless of age and gender. The females are used as baits for the targets of attack. While they could stay in bars, they monitor the movement of their targets and give feedback to their 'Hit men' who carry out the violent attack on the victim(s). Some other young men and non-students are recruited so as to protect their territory both within and off campus. Most of these initiates are people from broken homes, who being faced by the harsh economic reality and lack of both social and financial security see a gleam of light and hope in the security cultists promise their members. An attack on one is an attack on all.

Such brutal and violent attack leaves us with the question: what does the value of life and human dignity matter? The incessant killing and maiming over insignificant issues and mere misunderstanding that could be resolved through dialogue is only reminiscent of the state of nature in which Hobbes described life to be nasty, brutish and short. Does life matter less to these secret cult members? The nefarious activities associated with cultism such as armed robbery, prostitution, gang-raping et al run incongruent to African values. What then becomes the future of a society where a majority of its youths are members of a secret cult that has no regards for the norms of the society? These are the concerns of this work.

The Concept of Cultism

The term cult has become very common in a social discourse in the present day Nigerian society. The word cult came from the Latin word "Cultus" meaning "worship". It has to do with homage paid to a divinity. Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996) defines cult as a small group or religious activities whose beliefs are typically secret, esoteric and individualistic. A cult is a society whose activities, members and modes of initiation is only known to its members either as a means of guarding some truths or protecting themselves from suppression, stigmatization or escaping the eyes of the law. This implies that cult activities are not always in tandem

with the laws guiding a given society. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (amended), in section 318, subsection 1 (a, b and c) defines cultism as any society, association, group or body of person's (whether required or not):

a) That uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols and which is formed to promote a course the purpose or part of the purpose of which is to foster the interest of its members and to aid one another under any circumstance without due regard, merit, or injustice to the detriment of the legitimate interest of those who are not members.
b) The membership of which is compatible with the function or dignity of any public office under this constitution and those members are sworn to observe oaths of secrecy.
c) The activities of which are not known to public at large, the names of whose members are kept secret and whose meeting and other activities are held in secret.

This connotes that the activities and everything that cultists engage in as regards to their ideology is basically secret and remain open to their members only. According to Eche (2019:112), "cult or secret cult is a group of people whose identity and activities, that is, the modus operandi is known only to the initiates." Often times during initiation, cult members swear oath of allegiance that binds them to maintain secrecy and protect and promote their clandestine activities even to the point of paying the supreme price. Ajayi et al (2010:155) defines cultism 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 secretly and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike." It is clear from this definition that the activities of cultists have trickle down effects that affect every member of the society. In order to ensure top secrecy of their membership, admission and activities, cult groups normally maintain nocturnal meetings.
Uweru (2010) sees cult as a small group of religious activities, whose beliefs are typically syncretic, esoteric and individualistic. Assibong (2002:178) conceives cult as any association or organization having the following characteristics:

I. secret recruitment formalities;
II. secret initiation including other rituals like oaths and grips;
III. disarticulated organizational structure;
IV. Small number of atomic and disorganized individuals who have been isolated and alienated from the society, an attack on any of their members conjures the wrath of the rest which is essentially anti-social.

It is deducible from the above that secret cult is an anti-social group of individuals with no formal organizational structure. Cultists are, according to Assibong (2002:178), united by the common intent of helping themselves by

any means including murder. This explains the use of brute force that is witnessed whenever there is a cult clash. Where they dim necessary, they apply naked force and violence in order to compel members and non-members alike to submission and obedience. From Omede's perspective, cult is "a group of people with a religious, philosophical or cultural identity sometimes viewed as a sect, often existing on the margins of society or exploitative toward its members" (Omede, 2016:65). Secret cult refers to a group of people whose activities are carried out at odd hours and location which are unknown to non-initiates. A cult is usually a clandestine organization (Ajila, 2005).

History of Cultism in Nigeria

The deliberate attempt to exalt European culture while demonizing Africa has led to dressing the origin of cultism with an Africa robe. Some European scholars have tried to trace the origin of cultism to African worship of animals – animism, which they considered a prelude to modern day cultism (Assibong, 2002). However, the history of animism is not peculiar to Africa. The origin of secret cults can be traced to the "mystery cults" and religious mystery of ancient Egypt, Rome and Greece with their attendant secret rites, initiations and revelation of ancient wisdom (Assibong, 2002:175). The tool of secrecy here is used to protect religious truths, to survive or escape tyranny and suppression (Assibong, 2002:176). Besides the mystery cults of Egypt, Rome and Greece, other early secret cults include the Freemasonry, la Costra Nostra (the Mafia), Illuminati, Union of Salvation, Camora and the Black Panther Party et al.

In Nigeria, the history of secret cult predates those championing the cause today. Some scholars have traced the origins of cultism in Nigeria to the Ogboni cult, Gelede society, Oro society, Agemo (all in south western Nigeria), mamma society (among the nupe) and Oboni society in Cross River State (Gboyega, 2005). Some scholars and members of these societies have insisted they were useful to the society as they assisted in the maintenance of law and order and arbitration of cases within their respective societies. The history of cultism in Nigeria Tertiary Institution is traceable to the formation of the Pirates Confraternity (Association of Seadogs) by the G7 in 1952 at the University College, Ibadan. The first cult group in Nigeria is co-founded by the 1986 Noble Laureate Prize Winner in Literature, Professor Wole Soyinka. Other members of the founding fathers are Nat Oyelola, Pius Olegbe, Frank Imouchuede, Ralph Opara and Muyiwa Awe. The Association of Seadogs has a symbol of a skull and a cross. It was aimed at abolishing convention, tribalism and elitism. Hence, membership was open to the "the cleanest, brightest and politically conscious" (Gboyega, 2005:41) male regardless of tribe or race (Udoh & Ikezu, 2015). It was intended at producing political leaders who are proud of their African heritage. The members of this cult

groups increased in number and popularity in the campus. While Udoh and Ikezu (2015) see the pirates' confraternity as a non-violent group, Gboyega (2005) contends that the logo (A skull and a cross) and the motto ("blood for blood; measure for measure and no friend no foe") suggest otherwise. The proliferation of tertiary institutions and increase in the number of cult members possibly led to disagreement that resulted in the emergence of protestant cult groups across tertiary, secondary and primary schools. The expulsion of Bolaji Carew and seven others in 1972 for failing to meet the expected standard of the Pirates Confraternity led to his formation of National Association of Sea Lords (NAS). By 1980's this association has spread to other tertiary institutions within Nigeria.

The 80's also witnessed the formation of black axe (the Neo-Black Movement of Africa) in University of Benin. In 1983, the supreme Eiye Confraternity (National Association of Airlord) broke off from Black Axe (Udoh and Ikezu, 2015). The Clansmen Confraternity (The Eternal Fraternal Order of the Legion Consortium) was formed by the students of university of Calabar while a former member of Buccaneers founded the Supreme Vikings Confraternity (the Norse Men), modeled towards the German's (Vikings) invasion of England in AD 787. Following the brutish and violent act that has characterized cultism, Wole Soyinka, in 1984, dissociated himself from their activities and recommended the abolition of the pirates confraternity in all institution of higher learning (Udoh and Ikezu, 2015; Ejike, 2015). Thomas (2002) believes that cult groups were non-violent until the military government of the 1980's decided to adopt cultist for use against perceived opposition from student's union and staff (Udoh and Ikezu, 2015). The emergence of the family confraternity (The Mafia) in Abia State University led to the use of Voodoo for examination malpractice leading to the expulsion of some students for "Cultism". This remarkably birthed the shift of cult activities from the campus to off campus (Ejike, 2015). In Enugu State University of Science and Technology, the Brotherhood of the Blood (also known as two-two or Black Beret) was founded.

In 1990's, there was a litany of cult groups formed. Some of these cult groups include: Second Son of Satan (SSS), Sonmen, Jurists, Executioners, Trojan Horse, Temple of Eden, Mgba Mgba Brothers, White Bishops, Black Scorpion, Red Sea Horse, et al (Udoh & Ikezu, 2015; Ejike, 2015). The fight for territorial control and supremacy within and outside the campus led to the creation of creek wings of the cult groups. The Clansmen Confraternity and Supreme Vikings Confraternity created Deebam and Icelanders as their creek wings respectively. In response to the male dominated cults groups, there was a creation of female cult groups such as Black Brazier (Black Bra), the Viqueens, Daughters of Jezebel, the Damsels (Udoh & Ikezu, 2015; Ejike, 2015), Amazons, Dames, Black Angels, Caribbean Queens, et al (Gboyega,

2005). In Nigerian schools today, there are about 53 different secret cult groups (Ekeanyanwu & Igbinoba, 2007). This is indeed worrisome.

Recruitment and Initiation

In Nigerian tertiary institutions, every new academic session begins with cultists scouting for new members. While they go about convincing the freshmen with the fake promise of security and easy pass in their examinations, they usually target students from a wealthy family who can muster the financial muscle needed for their barbaric attacks as well as getting their members released when arrested; children of university staff, children of military and police personnel and students with a dreaded physique (Gboyega, 2005; Ajila, 2005; Rotimi, 2005). The initiation process naturally follows after the prospective new members are thoroughly screened. Initiation into secret cult groups is typically secretive and cultic. Usually, this is carried out in the dead of the night and inside a cemetery or other places that their noisy activities won't be easily noticeable to the general public. The oath of secrecy is administered to the new members with their eyes closed as incantations are chanted. This is followed by testing their manliness. Initiation involves a test of the entrants' level of endurance. New members are subjected to different kinds of pain and drilling. They are severely beaten and are expected to endure the pain obediently. Ajila (2005), notes that the ritual test and drills may include stripping naked, jumping over a fiery fire and receiving about hundred strokes of the cane. For some cult groups, all members present must give the recruits a certain number of strokes. Some wealthy individuals are sometimes given the privilege of paying a certain amount of money in place of the test and drills. The ability to absorb the pain is requisite to joining the cult.

On a painful and regrettable note, some prospective cult members never made it out of the initiation ground. And as bonded by their oath of secrecy, such unfortunate members are secretly buried in the bush without the knowledge of others. Prospective female cult members are made to dress provocatively, move in group of four to five to avoid sexual harassment. They must be able to take alcohol of all brands and smoke cigarettes, hemp etc. During their initiation, they are to undergo sexual drills. They are subjected to about six rounds of sex in quick succession (Rotimi, 2005; Adefokun & Audu, 2014). In some cult groups, every male members at the initiation ground who wishes to, is entitled to having sex with the entrant. Some do not make it alive, some die during this sex marathon. These female cult members, Ejike (2015) notes, are later turned into prostitution syndicates.

To consummate their initiation, the bodies of the new intakes are lacerated and their blood mixed with concoctions. This mixture of concoctions and

blood is served to all members. To test their 'rigidity' and bravery male recruits are given the task of embarking on a robbery operation at a designated place chosen by the 'Capone'. They may be given other tasks such as raping a popular girl on campus or a female member of the university staff whereas female members may be made to fight fellow girls or strong boys on campus (Rotimi, 2005). At the end of their initiation, the 'book of O.T' (orientation) which contains their coded language and means of communication is handed over to the new members.

Reasons for Joining Cult

Man, as he is, is oftentimes inconsiderate and selfish in his intentions hence he subverts all lawful means of addressing his grievances. There are a lot of reasons young people, especially, join secret cult groups; many of those reasons point towards one's bloated ego and selfishness. According to Ajila (2005), students join cult for security reasons, the exponential increase in secret cult activities and membership is a result of psychological and social insecurity. The fake promises of security made to young students, who seem lost, alienated and isolated is a driving force for cultism in tertiary institutions primary and post-primary schools. Peer group influence also accounts for why people join cultism (Fayokun, 2012; Udoh & Ikezu, 2015; Igomu & Ugwoke, 2018; Bakare, 2021). According to Fayokun (2012), while in their adolescence age, young people try to gain a degree of independence from their parents leading to much more dependence on and approval of their peer group. Consequently, they tend to be influenced more by their peer group than by their parents. Due to the impressionable nature of adolescents, they go extra miles to belong and be accepted by their age mates (Bakare, 2021).

The findings of Udoh and Ikezu (2015) and Ejike (2015), shows that corruption in the society is a cause of cultism. Corruption in high and low places is a cancer that has permeated every sphere of the nation with all its deleterious effects. It has further deepened the economic woes of the populace, forcing many to engage in clandestine activities and groups in order to meet up with their respective financial obligations. Beg (20) affirms that the rise in cultism is the youths response to corruption-induced poverty pervading the country. Harsh economic situation in the country, essentially the effects of corruption encourages cultism (Udoh & Ikezu, 2015). Fayokun (2012) holds that more people join cults because of the pervasive and corrupting influence of the society.

According to Ogidefa (2008), cited in Nnajieto and Ahamefuna (2015), the reasons students join cult groups include: search for responsibility, search for satisfaction of one's aspiration and needs, search for security and search for social identity. Ejike (2015) enumerated why students join cults as follows:

crave for supremacy, search for responsibility, protection, inferiority complex, economic gain, frustration, love for female students, peer group influence and revenge bid. Omede (2016) sees the proliferation of cult as a product of poor partnership, insufficient moral, values and religious education and extravagant lifestyles of some Nigerians at the glare of the poor masses. Ajayi et al (2010) identified the causes of cultism as: influence of peer group, parental background and societal decadence, erosion of education standards and militarization of the Nigerian polity. Students also join cults because those who are caught in cult and cult-related activities are not severely punished (Udoh & Ikezu, 2015). Other causes of cultism are "changing values in the society, increased freedom and laziness and increased money in the hands of the students" (Salubayi & Umaru, 2017:46). In the view of Ibrahim (20), moral decadence, poor parenting, freedom, corruption in tertiary institutions, poor funding and hostel accommodation are all causes of cultism in Nigerian campus.

More so, cultism has continued to gain momentum because of social and economic deprivation. According to Nnam (2014:175), "people choose to join cult as an expression of displeasure and dissatisfaction with the prevailing social order and political arrangements in their environment." Also, children whose parents are themselves cultist are more prone to joining cults (Fasakin & Ayeni, 2021). They further listed poverty, economic hardship, quest for popularity, political power tussle and some legal factors as causes of cultism. Some cultists who are caught in the act are either not charged to court or are freed without following due process. Nche (2020) lists youth unwillingness to work, politics and lack of political will, deprivation, youth unemployment and poor family background as causes of cultism.

Reasons for Persistence of Cultism

Despite efforts by the government, university body, individuals etc, to root out cultism in Nigeria, it has, like cancer, continued to grow the more in number and brute force and violence. The continued persistence of cultism is an indication of the fact that there are hands behind the scene fanning its ambers. We shall below explore some of the reasons for the prevalence of cultism, ridiculing every effort at eradicating it. Some of the factors include:

Militarization of the Polity: Since the first military coup of 1966, the culture of violence was introduced into the Nigerian polity (Gboyega, 2005). It has remained violence after violence with all sorts of state sponsored terrorism. It is to be noted that the military government of the 80s adopted cultists into their intelligence units so as to subdue student's unions and stubborn university staff. The military regime had a field day using brute force and

violence against both real and imaginary opposition (Rotimi, 2005). During the military regime of Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida of 1986, a journalist, Dele Giwa, was killed through a letter bomb. Abacha's regime also used lethal force against perceived opponents leading to the death of Alfred Rewane, Kudirat Abiola, Saro Wiwa and eight others (Rotimi, 2005). The report of Oputa Panel set by the succeeding democratic government of Olusegun Obasanjo revealed that there was state sponsored terrorism in the past military regimes.

Political Power Struggle: Being that political office is the shortest means of amassing wealth in Nigeria, competition for political office remains a do or die affair. Hence politicians join cults and resort to the use of violence against stubborn opponents. Cases of thuggery and assassination are common in Nigeria's history. In 1992, the Chairman of Oredo Local Government in Edo State was assassinated. A member of Abia State House of Assembly, Lawrence Nwako was also assassinated the same year. Uweru (2010) noted that the return to democracy in 1999 was characterized by cultism and thuggery. The most recent of such attempts are the attacks on Gov. Ortom of Benue State and Prof. Charles Soludo, a gubernatorial candidate of Anambra State. The influence of political stalwarts and some respected and influential persons in the society has also made it a herculean task to end cultism (Oyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2015).

Institutional Support: Gboyega (2005) reports that cultists enjoy patronage from members of the university staff who are cultists or one time cultists. Being that prominent Nigerian citizens founded the first cult group, it won't be surprising to see cult members who have found their ways into university administration. Some Vice Chancellors and university administrators patronize cultists as they are used as a watchdog for aggressive student's union leaders (Gboyega, 2005; Oyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2015).

Lack of Legal Action and Retribution: The judicial system has abysmally failed in their duty as regards the prosecution of cultists. Justice and retribution is not served to culprits of cult and cult-related activities. Udoh and Ikezu (2015) reported that young people keep joining cults because offenders are not punished according to decree no 47 of 1989. Even when there is overwhelming evidence to nail culprits, they end up walking away shoulder high, freely and with impunity (Oyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2015). Some are not charged to court while those who are charged end up being released without due process especially those who have connection. Without appropriate retribution, cultism will continue to thrive and cultists perpetrate more violence.

Other factors fueling cultism and its destructive activities are: ethnic militia, religious clashes, poor parenting (Rotimi, 2005), malpractice in the admission

process, government's lip service to cultism, ban on student's union (Gboyega, 2005).

Some Incidents of Cultism in Nigeria

Violent ridden incidents of cultism are a common feature of the Nigerian society, especially in tertiary institutions and its environs. Many pages of Nigerian newspapers, journal articles and books have been dedicated to the social menace of cultism. Rotimi (2005) recorded the following cult activities in Nigeria:

- ★ The killing of University of Nigeria Nsukka student over the 'snatching' of a cult leader's girlfriend in 1985.
- ★ At the University of Port Harcourt, a student was beheaded in a cult feud in 1991.
- ★ The murder of a Principal Assistant Registrar and his wife at Delta State University, Abraka.
- ★ The brutal murder of five students at the male hostel of Obafemi Awolowo University on 10th July, 1999.
- ★ A 300 level student of economics was shot and slaughtered at the Dalimore area of Ado-Ekiti on 5th August, 2002.
- ★ The murder of two students (in their sleep) at the University of Jos.

According to Okwu (2006), cited by Ejike (2015), about 5000 students and lecturers have died in cult and cult-related clashes as at September 2003. At the University of Benin, Ejike (2015) reported the killing of Yomi Edeki and Vincent Uloho on February 4 and March 9, 2004 respectively. Ajayi et al (2010) reported the death of Kehinde Dosumu, Omotayo Suraju and Olalekan Ajao of Kwara State Polytechnic in October, 2003; the killing of Ashifat Olatunji Saheed at The Polytechnic Ibadan; Gbenga Joseph of anti-cult, Kwara State Command and Bolaji Toniwa of Lagos State University in March, June and September 2005 respectively.

Alumona and Amusan (2019), reported some recent cult activities across Nigeria. According to their report, 9 cult members were arrested with weapons at Umunede, Delta State on April 12, 2018; the killing of 8 person's following the death of a lecturer in a cult clash in March 2017; a cult group was stopped from initiating 46 secondary school students by the police in Izzi, Ebonyi State on July 14, 2015; 63 cult members were arrested by the police during initiation on June 14, 2014 at Eket, Akwa Ibom State. Eze (2018) also reported the killing of 16 persons and the arrest of 35 suspects within two weeks of cult clashes in Awka. On April 14, 2021, Premium Times reported the arrest of 6 person's during initiation at Amikwo, Awka. Onu (2021) further reported the killing of three at Umubele and Okpuno area of Awka. Very sadly too, on Sunday, April 18, 2021, Anthony Onwudinjo, a staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, was shot multiple times, at Ifite, Awka, in the presence of his mother on the day the Catholics celebrated Mothering Sunday. The surge

in the battle for supremacy among cult groups has led to the return of Bakassi Boys who have killed six suspects (Okafor, 2021).

Cultism and African Values

Value is the ultimate guide of behavioural conduct in any social context. It acts as a regulator of human conducts within any social setting. Negligence of societal values leading to moral depravity robs the society of its very essence. It is therefore worrisome how the menace of cultism has ignominiously undermined core African cultural values without which the African will be lost in any discourse. Cultism and its related nefarious activities have grossly undermined the following African values:

Life: Across all African society, life is prized above all other values. Life is a precious gift that the Supreme Being alone can give to anyone. It is a serious offence against the gods or ancestors (Ani or Ala in Igbo worldview) to take another's life. Spilling of human blood is highly prohibited with a serious social sanction against violators. However, the violence and brutality characterizing cult activities have led to the loss of numerous lives and properties. As stated earlier, Okwu (2006), cited in Ejike (2015), about 5000 students and lecturers have died from cult and cult-related activities as at September 2003. Cultists have, with impunity, cut several lives short with the level of brutality that can only be compared to Hobbesian state of nature where life was brutish, nasty and short. Clandestine activities of cultists have led to the loss of uncountable lives (Daniel, et al, 2020).

Sexuality/Sex Life: In African traditional society, it is a sin for a young girl to lose her virginity to anyone other than her husband. The greatest worry of African mothers was their daughters getting pregnant while unmarried. In contrast to this essential value of remaining chaste until marriage, female cultists are used as prostitution syndicates (Ejike, 2015) for politicians and other wealthy individuals. Cases of rape are also common around campuses and off campuses. The study of Ezema, et al (2017:259) reveals that "student cultists bully junior students, student cultists intimidate teachers, they rape female students, they engage in incessant fighting, they plan and execute riots in schools, and they easily break school rules." Sexual escapades of cultists contributes to the spike in unwanted pregnancies that end up being terminated. This is a contravention of traditional values of the African.

Respect for Elders and Constituted Authority: Elders in African society are generally revered and their counsel taken seriously. This is not unconnected to the African belief that the elders are closer to the ancestors and are filled with wisdom accumulated over their years of real-life experiences. Everyone looks forward to getting old as that is also a criterion

for joining the ancestors after death. On the contrary, cultists have no regard for neither the elders nor other constituted authorities. They see themselves as the Nietzschean superman, imbibing brutality and utter negligence of the authorities, the elders and existing values. Some elders and other office holders have fallen victims of cult violence.

Hard Work: For Africans, the only way to success is through hard work. Hard workers in African society normally attract admirable songs while laziness attracts reproach. Cultists on the other hand choose the easy way. In Nigerian campuses, teaching staff are oftentimes compelled at gunpoint to award unmerited marks to secret cult members. Some lecturers have been murdered in cold-blood for failing a cultist in an examination. In fact, some students join cult groups on the promise of easily passing their exams. Cheating and examination malpractice is also one of the common features of cultism.

Stealing: It is, in Africa, a taboo for one to steal. Stealing attracts serious social sanctions depending on what was stolen. Regrettably, new cult members are most times commissioned, as part of their initiation process, to rob a designated location or business. Cultists engage in forceful dispossession of people's hard earned money or property, petty stealing, pilfering and full scale armed robbery.

Honesty: In contrast to African value for honesty, cultism engenders lying and cheating. It has been observed that cultist have a penchant for lying. This appears to be a way of protecting their true identity which is not meant to be known to non-members.

The exponential increase in moral decadence in Nigeria has become very alarming. Asiyai (20) laments that the glaring absence of moral values constitutes the plethora of problems bedeviling contemporary Nigeria. Ikeke (2020:7) suggests that "What is needed in Nigeria more than ever before is a moral re-orientation and rearmament that value the human dignity of every human being, rich and poor."

Cultism and the Future of African Society

What is the future of a society rid with violence, brutal killings and maiming, destruction of properties, vandalism, rape, sexual promiscuity, laziness et al? With the rise in violent cult activities, we can say without mincing words that the future of African society is grossly jeopardized. The high rate of moral bankruptcy among cult members is a threat to the social and corporate existence of any society. Everything goes when the youths who are the future hope of the society throw the guiding principles of actions to the dogs. A society characterized by endless power tussle and battle for supremacy only engenders Darwinian survival of the fittest. This is unsavory and unbefitting

of an entity that wishes for a great future. Without regard for the dignity of the human person and life, the African society lacks a future.

Also, the goal of a sustainable development in Africa will forever remain utopian with the constant violent and destructive cult activities. There is, in Africa, an acute dearth of infrastructure; sadly enough, the available ones are from time to time run aground. This culture of violence will only continue to stagnate Africa's development. For a sustainable development to be attained there must be a strict observance of moral principles guiding the society. Also, the culture of non-violence must be cultivated and advanced. These are requisite for development that Africans are in dire need of. More so, the activities of cultists, violence and acts of terrorism scare away foreign investors. It de-markets Africa in the global market thereby watering the ground for a more deepened poverty. No wise investor considers a violent ridden environment for his investment; hence Africa will remain poor unless there is sustainable peace. Insecurity which cultism breeds is a preparatory ground for extreme poverty.

Conclusion

It has become evident that an organization born out of good intentions can become degenerate if its activities remain unchecked. The origin of secret cult in Nigeria was a brainchild of noble intents - producing leaders who would be proud of their African heritage, putting an end to elitism and chivalry. However, time, the custodian of history has shown that corruption is inherent in man due to human weaknesses. The Nigerian society today is made unsafe by the activities of some mischievous element that sees themselves as the lords, the kings and queens while every other person is a "Jew man." This group has metamorphosed into a dreadful monster threatening human existence. Their gruesome activities, ranging from initiation to brutal attacks have left many in miserable situations. Both within and outside campuses, the menace of cultism remains daunting, undermining every effort at eradicating it. What used to be peculiar to higher institutions has permeated primary and post-primary schools.

Sadly enough, this has downplayed important African values that bind the society together. Cultists have no regard for values - they have zero regard for human life and human dignity, nor for constituted authorities and the elders, hard work and honesty. These values, to say the least, are the foundation upon which any progressive society builds. It is therefore of a fact to say that the future of Africa is bleak for as long as the majority of her teaming youth keep

enrolling into secret cults and involving in different scales of clandestine activities.

Recommendations

There are a number of ways in which cultism can be curbed. However, such efforts must be sincere and honest. Every hand must be on deck if we must ensure a secret-cult-free society. In order to get rid of cultism in Nigeria, there is a pressing need for moral and value re-orientation of the teaming youths. The youths, believed to be the future hope of any community, must be properly oriented on the norms guiding peaceful human interactions that guarantee the wellbeing of every member of the community. Parents, as a matter of necessity, must rise to the occasion, to their responsibility of properly raising children within the acceptable norms of the community. Moral education must be included in the curriculum of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Moral instructions for primary and secondary schools must be taken seriously. School authorities at all levels must ensure that the decree 47 is implemented whenever anyone involved in cultism is caught. Students caught in cult activities must be rusticated from school. In the same vein, there should be a thorough investigation of school staff so that those who have ties with cults will face disciplinary actions. Punishing erring staff will send a strong message to the students. Both government and NGOs are enjoined to carry out massive anti-cult campaign. The government should employ the media in the campaign against cultism. This can be done stressing the negative effects of secret cults. Also, the justice system should administer justice timely without minding whose ox is gored. It is evident that cultism thrive because there is no consistency with retributive justice which should serve as a deterrent to prospective cult members.

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