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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CULTISM AND THE NIGERIAN PHENOMENON

By
Patrick Agbor Assibong

Abstract

The spate of almost daily despicable and weird front page headlines in Nigerian Newspapers and Magazines about the murderous, ruinous and catastrophic nocturnal activities of cultists in Nigerian educational institutions, has been a rather vivid and graphic reminder of the total decay in Nigeria's national psyche occasioned by many years of ravenous, violent and corrupt military dictatorships. This paper which is ruminations of a dyspeptic ex-student, examines the comparative global perspective of cultism juxtaposing it with the highly explosive, vexing and contentious character of cultism in Nigerian educational institutions highlighting the *raison d'être*, the *modus operandi*, the socio-politico-economic consequences of cult activities in the society and solutions to this uncanny behaviour. Although the paper took exceptions in the above contending issues and the fact that cultism is an ancient global phenomenon, it nevertheless inclines towards the perspective that cultism can be eradicated from Nigerian higher education institutions if the moral political will is developed to do so (*International Journal of Social Science and Public Policy* 2002:5(1) pp 175-190).

INTRODUCTION

Societies all over the world often fall victims to the monster they help to create. In the United States of America, the founder and members of Ku Klux Klan were not reprimanded from their nefarious activities until an important white lady and Negro sympathizer in Alabama was beheaded by the Ku Klux Klan. Due to the low intensity of mayhem unleashed on the students during the formative years of the pioneer secret cult in Nigeria, and the fact that in the early days, the names of members of secret cults in schools were not connected to important families in society and no principal University Officer was killed, successive governments maintained an almost conspiratorial silence over the years until "about 250 cultists, all dressed in black, carried out the bloody attack" (Shittu, 1999:p.1) which left four students of the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile-Ife dead and a Registrar killed by secret cult members, then the government and the entire society woke up from the benign neglect of the phenomenon – cultism.

Cultism which the Nigerian students are now literally "carrying on their heads" has a history and roots which predates and post-dates the Ibadan University College experiment of 1952.

The oriental mystery cults and religious mysteries of ancient Egypt, Rome and Greece with their attendant secret rites, initiations and revelations of ancient wisdom, are among the earliest secret

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cults. It is on record that the mysteries utilized the tools of secrecy to guard religious truths, other groups like the early Christians in Rome, were forced to adopt secrecy to survive or escape tyranny and suppression. Also "... Christianity ... is the largest Gnostic cult in Christendom" Martin (1996:279).

Other prominent early secret societies like the Freemasonry, Rosicrucian order, Ku Klux Klan (Chalmers, 1965), Knights of the Golden Circle, the Mafia or "La Costra Nostra", Black-Hand, the Black Panther Party, Camora, Illuminati, Union of Salvation, Sons of Liberty, Leopard society, Melanesians Meum, Anabaptists, Adamites and the Knight Templar to mention but a few, resorted to esoteric initiatory oaths and other variants of secrecy solely for economic self-protection and survival. Founders of modern cultism claim that theirs were formed for social and charitable purposes.

Whatever differences exists among cults in the world, there exist a common thread that binds secret societies together especially their ceremonials, certain characteristics in their structure and function. For example, all cult members belonging to a particular cult must have common goals and aspirations, initiation procedures are secret, which must be preserved with defaulters paying dearly for their "Crimes". Some Revolutionary, subversive and heretical secret societies are sometimes not known by non-members and the society at large. The recent Ugandan tragedy is a clear example of this typology where the public comes to know only after many lives were lost.

Similarly, others like the Ku Klux Klan enjoy the status of partial secrecy because if secret cults loose all elements of secrecy, they would become irrelevant in society hence their quest for total or partial secrecy over the years.

The initiation ceremonies are often designed to display a high emotional appeal with some phrases taken from some holy books, legends, and folklore. The whole exercise may take the form of a symbolic journey laced with many dangers on the way the completion of which makes you a "strongman". In the processes, objects like keys, crosses, axes, swords and daggers are freely used in order to enable the "new recruit" not fear using them later when he is ordered ("ODASED") to execute an opponent.

Secret cults are often organized hierarchically with the "Chief Dragon" or the "Capone" at its apogee with lesser morals at the receiving end and "HITMEN" incharge of implementing decisions of the group, hence all secret cults "have secrets within secrets" The quest to know all the secrets enables the converts to work harder by killing or maiming others to climb to the top.

Secrets remain unwritten and are transmitted via a sort of Master/Servant relationship so as to maintain order and tranquility in the organization.

In view of the fact that modern secret societies have all the trapping of gangs, and some of those societies had been disbanded hence the big question with the Nigerian experience is why is it difficult to suppress cultism in Nigerian educational institutions despite the huge sums of money allocated by the Federal Government to curb the menace? Why are new groups formed almost monthly? Are there any similarities in the mode of recruitment, "modus operandi" of groups, any economic, social or

honourific value attached to becoming a member? Does the idea of secrecy help both old and the intending members gain anything?

Can the comparative study of foreign and Nigerian secret cults help us to justify the Nigerian experience? Was its introduction by "the Ile-Ife group of six" necessary and inevitable?

Why can intending members not resist the temptation of joining secret cults when some old members are being killed? Are the methods used to achieve their goals similar?

Non-members of secret societies are interested to know whether they are any socio-politico-economic effects in the body-politic which can either build or ruin the Nigerian society.

The above and more questions would be answered in the paper which would be presented as follows:

The first part would try to establish the origin, framework of analysis and the clarification of concepts while the second part will treat the contribution of the primitive secret societies to our present understanding of the modern ones with their inbuilt intrigues and problems.

The third part will juxtapose the global perspective including that of other African countries with the Nigerian phenomenon with the view of identifying similarities, differences and/or any basis for the justification or rejection of the secret cult "projects" in our educational institutions.

The fourth part will attempt some prognoses for action which if properly assimilated by all concerned, would put an end to the veritable menace.

The fifth and last part would be the concluding portion.

Cultism: Origin

Like the origin of AIDs, that of cultism is fraught with byzantine complexities which become more complex as one tries to define the phenomenon. Ake (1972) reminded us to be careful of Western social scientist who are prepared to praise all what is European and condemn all that is African. He saw "social science as Imperialism" in a sense because African Universities serve as avenues to sell Western European values via their text books, hence one is not surprise when the origin was traced by European scholars- Lowie, (1948), Webster (1932), Schurtz (1902) and Abraham (1949) to Africa where certain animals like the Leopard are worshiped; for instance "the ... Leopard society in Sierra Leone or the *mau-mau* of Kenya were the secrecy relates primarily to the membership of the association which is known only to the superior officers of the society, are worshiped". This "primitive" attribution (by Africans) of life to a natural phenomenon like a Leopard, elephant, etc. and establishing a link between the soul of the animal and that of a man is what ethnographers refer to as "animatism".

Some dishonest intellectuals try to confuse the issues by pointing to the fact that most modern African countries depict animals on their coat of arms like the horse and eagle on the Nigerian Coat of Arms, the lion on that of the Cameroons etc. as evidence of African strong attachment to animal worship which was a prelude to modern cultism. This theory of "animatism" would have been bought by African academics if there were no animals and animal worship in Europe at the time the primitive

man controlled Africa. Besides, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* confirmed the universality of the origin of cultism thus: "Among the earliest secret societies of which historical evidence exists were the oriental mystery cults and the religious mysteries of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, which had secret rites, initiations ..." (Vol. 20, 1972:148).

Certainly, Mithraism, Pythagoreanism, Freemasonry and the Ku Klux Klan did not originate from Nigeria or any African country, hence the trial to dress cultism with African robes has been a wasted academic enterprise. What is plausible is the idea that cultism originated in all societies with the origin of man. This must have precipitated the emergence of the Adamites who moved freely naked in ancient times.

Definition of Cultism and Theoretical Framework

The intricate nature of the phenomenon "cultism" assumes an octopus mystique when we get involved in its definitional polemics. However, our work would be a little much easier if we try to clarify the central concepts in the paper which include: (i) cultism, (ii) comparative and (iii) analysis.

On cultism, Franzer, Marett and Lang (1981) have this to say "the totality of the religious institutions as are obtained, particularly, in pre-illiterate societies". To some social anthropologists, "cultism" is seen as a body of religious beliefs and practices —which include formal worship, an orthodox or false religion, great and sometimes excessive admiration of a person or idea — associated with a particular God Zeus or set of gods, constituting a specialized part of the religious institutions of a given society (Gould and Kolbs, 1964: pp.564 – 570). The second definition tried to broaden the definition of cultism by not restricting it to only religious institutions in pre-literate and primitive societies (suggesting Africa).

Some scholars included in their definitions of cultism "cultus" which applies to objects associated with pagan worship which gives rise to cults. Yet, others likened cultism to "Gongorism" which is a florid inverted and pendant style of writing invented by Luis de Ganogora around 1600.

Generally, the concept cult can apply to any large range of membership organisations or associations having the subsequent characteristics:

- (i) secret recruitment formalities
- (ii) secret initiation including other rituals like oaths and grips;
- (ii) disarticulated organizational structure;
- (iv) a small number of atomistic 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.

Nigerian campus secret cults refer to small groups of students in Nigerian institutions of higher learning who are secretly united by the common intend of helping themselves by any means including murder. This definition also includes those groups which use force to compel non-members to obey their will, including rape, stealing, robbery and armed robbery.

"Comparative" in the paper will pertain to an attempt to set together Nigerian and other cults including United States of America in order to ascertain how similar and different they are in terms of their recruitment pattern, rituals involved, structure and "modus operandi" while "Analysis" is the resolving or separating any phenomenon into its elements so as to discover the general principles or epistemological underpinning underlying individual phenomena.

The socialisation process which is the act or process of socialising during which new entrants into cult groups become aware of the benefits of cultism and their relationship with other cultists will serve as the theoretical framework for this study.

Methodology – Data Generation

The methodology employed in this paper is empirical. First the questionnaires were distributed after the spate of denunciations by cultists in three Nigerian Universities (the University of Calabar, Calabar, that of Uyo and the Delta State University Abraka). Secondly, a total of 360 cult members with one hundred and twenty cultist (including former cultists) were chosen at random from four different cult groups (30 from each group) in the above three Universities.

The respondents who chose to be anonymous gave answers to the subsequent questions:

- (a) Why did you join a cult group?
- (b) Were you experiencing a social or psychological problem before joining the cult group?
- (c) Were you forced to join the cult group by other cult members?
- (d) Is the recruitment and initiation process bizarre and secretive?
- (e) Does it involve the worship of the leader, an object or other senior cult members?
- (f) How much money did you pay as membership dues?
- (g) Do you think members of your cult group help you more than government officials?
- (h) Are there any concrete gains to members of cult groups? (Please list them)
- (i) What is the punishment for disobeying the "odas" or orders of the cult leader or the groups?
- (j) Are members supposed to kill non-members who double-cross or oppose them?
- (k) What are the reasons for the supreme price of death as sanction in your cult group?

Data Analysis and Results

The 360 questionnaires distributed at random to cult members in the three Universities above, (with each University having 120 respondents) were filled and returned since those who refused to denounce their membership were assured of confidentiality. The responses were tabulated as follows:

From the above data, it can be discerned that all the 120 respondents of each of the three Universities making a total of 360 respondents ((100%), indicated that they joined secret cult groups for economic reasons and for protection from bullies in their various institutions.

Only 33% of cultists (118) in the three Universities indicated that they joined cult groups out of frustration and neglect by their peer groups and course mates. This shows that social and psychological problems do not force students to join secret cults in the three Universities under review.

Figure 1: Reaction by Cultists to questions about membership, initiation, reasons for joining etc.

UNIVERSITY	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
1. UNICAL	100%	100%	33%	18%	100%	75%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
* Cult Group A	30	30	10	06	30	25	30 N15,000	30	30	D-20 O-10	30	30 1 Sab 4 Ocmkm
* Cult Group B	30	30	08	03	30	20	30 N10,000	30	30	D-19 O-11	30	1 Sab 2SGF 30 3DCMD 4 Ocmkm
* Cult Group C	30	30	11	05	30	23	30 N20,000	30	30	D-25 O-05	30	1 Sab 30 2SGF 4 Ocmkm
* Cult Group D	30	30	10	04	30	26	30 N25,000	30	30	D-23 O-07	30	1 Sab 30 3DCMD 4 Ocmkm
2. UNIUYO							30			D-22		30 1 Sab
* Cult Group A	30	30	07	08	30	22	N15,000	30	30	O-08	30	4 Ocmkm
* Cult Group B	30	30	09	06	30	24	30 N10,000	30	30	D-24 O-24	30	1 Sab 30 2SGF 4 Ocmkm
* Cult Group C	30	30	10	05	30	26	30 N20,000	30	30	D-20 O-10	30	1 Sab 30 2SGF 4 Ocmkm
* Cult Group D	30	30	11	03	30	21	30 N25,000	30	30	D-16 O-14	30	1 Sab 30 3DCMD 4 Ocmkm
3. DELTA STATE UNIV.							30			D-19		30 1 Sab
* Cult Group A	30	30	12	09	30	22	N15,000	30	30	O-11	30	4 Ocmkm
* Cult Group B	30	30	10	04	30	20	30 N10,000	30	30	D-23 O-07	30	1 Sab 30 2SGF 3 DCMP 4 Ocmkm
* Cult Group C	30	30	11	06	30	21	30 N20,000	30	30	D-25 O-05	30	1 Sab 30 2SGF 4 Ocmkm
* Cult Group D	30	30	09	07	30	20	30 N25,000	30	30	D-21 O-09	30	1 Sab 30 3DCMD 4 Ocmkm
TOTAL	360	360	118	066	360	270	360	360	360	360	360	360

Key: D = Death (punishment by death); O = Others (including fines in cash and ostracism);

Sab = Sabotage (including reporting cult members to police etc. (1); SGF = Seizing girl friend of member of non-member (2);

DCMP = Disgracing cult member publicly (3); OCMKM = Other cult member killing member (4)

In column "C" in figure 1 above, only 66 cultists, 18% of the total of 360 respondents indicated that they were forced to join cult groups by other cult members. Therefore the element of force in joining secret cult groups in the three Universities is negligible.

All the 360 respondents (100%) agreed that the recruitment and initiation rites are bizarre and secret while 270 cultists (75%) accepted worshiped as demi-Gods.

Column "F" shows that all members of the secret cult groups collected various and constant sums of money as membership dues ranging from N10,000 for secret cult Group "B", through N15,000 for Group "A", N20,000 for Group "C" to N25,000 for Group "D". This also suggest that the officials of these groups gain directly from these dues.

Three hundred and sixty (100%) of the cultists indicated that they gain more in terms of purchasing boarded vehicles, job opportunities, etc. from members of their groups and nothing substantive from government officials. Therefore, belonging to cult groups exposes them to the good things of life.

In column "I", all the 360 respondents (100%) indicated that there is actually punishment for all those who double cross cult members though there were variations in the typology i.e either death (71%) or other punishment like ostracism and suspension (29%). With 71% of cultists supporting the "Death Penalty" the three institutions were turned into blood baths.

All the 360 cultists (100%) indicated that eliminating non-members who oppose them is simple since there will be no retaliations from any student who does not belong to "a cult family" (Group A,B,C, or D above please see figure 1 for details especially column "I").

In the least column "k", the data is arranged into four sub columns i.e column 1 for saboteurs, column 2 for girls snatchers, 3 for those who disgrace cult members publicly and column 4 for a member of one cult group, killing a member of another cult group. This is beyond pardon. While members of cult group "A" do not tolerate sabotage and those who kill their members in the three Universities, those in group "B" take offence in all the "four unforgiveable crimes" (Sab, SGF, DCMP and OCMKM).

Cult members in group "C" kill only when they have been reported to the police; their girl friends snatched from them and when any of their registered members is killed by "hit men" from other groups.

Cult members in group "D" react only when they identify a saboteur, are publicly disgraced and their member is killed by a cult member from another group.

Cultism in Nigeria Educational Institutions: The Contribution of Primitive Cults

Apologists of cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria are ever ready to point accusing fingers to the prior existence of primitive secret societies like the wizards and warlocks of the "Ntenejar" and the "Mbatsav" of the Ejagham and Tiv people in Nigeria respectively whose members shared common secrets. Reference is also made to such secret societies of "criminals" (as perceived in Britain) or revolutionaries as the "Leopard Society" of Sierra Leone and the "Mau Mau" of Kenya which was used by Jomo Kenyatta to fight British colonialists.

In Cross River State, we have *Mgbe* or *Ekpe* society which the European scholars ignored and tagged as non-literate and subversive but which was later recognized by another European Latham (1973) as a "stabilizing force" in society and the legitimate traditional government of the people of the upper and lower Cross River State to this day.

In the old Benin Kingdom and the Arochukwu community of the Igbos, we had the "palace societies" of titled Chiefs and the "Ozu societies" respectively. Feasting clubs, Dramatic and recreational societies, religious fraternities, professional unions of Doctors, initiation schools and diviners which (Lowie, 1923:149) christens "Sodalities", "fellowships" or "fraternities" also existed to maintain the cultural and moral values of society and were secret to the extent that non-members did not know the secrets of members.

In far away North America, South East Asia and Malaya, associations of warriors existed like the Plains Indians, Animal Hunting societies and the Chinese tongs which were respected as mutual aid societies and not murderous gangs like Nigerian campus cult members brandishing barbaric and offensive weapons including black axes, swords, matchets and guns terrorising and killing friends and foes.

Similarly, our examples of Old Calabar including the Ejagham tribe, the Tiv people in the Middle Belt of Nigeria and the Igbos show that "primitive" secret cult societies were a variety of associations which had much in common especially the element of secrecy which usually exist in the minds of the more impressionable members. There is however, no evidence of ostrogothan primitivism which could have come nearer to what we now see daily in Nigerian Secondary Schools and Universities.

Where some European academics like Forde (1957), Butt-Thompson (1929), and Ottenberg and Ottenberg (1960) tried to accuse early African secret cult members of "cannibalism" and "Head-Hunting" other social Anthropologists like Ward (1925) and Stirling (1926) debunked these theories in the 1960s when new evidence came up as Thomas Kuhn and advised in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*.

The rituals during initiation ceremonies, which are normally carried out in secret and isolated places remain almost the same to this day. The uninitiated are not invited and are made to believe that once initiated, members communicate directly with a supernatural being, spirit or an ancestral ghost of the community. The would-be applicant is being told that the survival of the entire society rests on the support of the cult. This fallacy accounts for the geometric rise of cult activities in the country.

The leader is empowered to sanction erring members without questions and there is the quest for dancing in which the spirits invoke are represented by some of its leaders whose identity is concealed by masks.

Membership of secret cults – like in some parts of Kalabari and Ibibio where the *Sekiapu* and *Ekpo* societies hold sway – is restricted to adults who are of good character. Where there exist a dominant cult in a large area, they perform political functions and protect the interest of their members. In other words, some secret cults serve as the real power base of some political systems.

From the above exposition, we can conveniently assert that primitive secret cults the world over and particularly those in Africa enforced their authority by serving as the judicial tribunals for the settlement of disputes and for the arrest, trial and punishment of miscreants and criminals and not as murderers, robbers and rapists. Perhaps a comparative analysis of the obnoxious phenomenon "cultism" may help us to properly situate the Nigerian trajectory.

Cultism: A Comparative Perspective

As already explained, cultism has been with mankind since the stone age. All attempts to identify the first nation or community which started the first cult group and later the idea spread to other societies has failed woefully. In most societies in other countries and in Nigerian towns and villages, membership is restricted to adults and a few young people approaching adulthood and not to children under twenty-one years of age as it is obtainable to membership in campus cults. This lopsided recruitment pattern where young people are being exposed to certain secrets that would have been the exclusive preserve of adults accounts for the childish clashes among cultists in Nigerian Universities and secondary schools.

No adult for example would have decided to kill a colleague just because his colleague refused to greet him in a restaurant or refused to stand-up from a chair the murderer "believes is his" in a public place.

No adult in Europe or Africa would have stripped anybody naked just in order to show that his "cult family" is better than the other. No adult would have killed a friend just because the friend's father happens to be a "rich" man. No adult would have ran amok and start shooting during a beauty contest just because his "Sweet Heart" has been "robbed" of the Miss "UNIJOR" title. No adult would

Whereas, adults who belong to secret cults out of the University community are well behaved, the reverse is true of our over-zealous youths in Nigerian universities.

We have conceded by accepting that the pattern of recruitment and rituals performed during the initiation ceremonies are the same because they are laced with impossible obstacles and often consummated in secret, but what we cannot defend is the recruitment and initiation ceremonies of campus cultists who leave a trail of destruction and death after some of their initiations. These ceremonies have been converted by campus cult leaders as avenues to retaliate and punish adversaries real or imagined.

When in 1865 Retired General Nathan Bedford Forest together with six of his compatriots in the U.S. founded the Ku Klux Klan secret cult, their objective – albeit misguided – was to silence progressive Negroes and their sympathizers. This despicable immoral and racist project at least had the fundamental difference of colour which we can be tempted to see in Bedford's mind.

The Ibadan experiment though not inevitable could easily buy sympathizers all over Africa because the 1950s were years Nigeria became independent, the pyrate confraternity became irrelevant and should have been disbanded because the British imperialists who humiliated Nigerians had gone

and there were no imperialist for the cultists to vent their anger.

Just as the Ku Klux Klan in U.S. turned against the whites in Alabama (Randel, 1965) so did campus cults in Nigeria turned against Nigerians in the absence of foreign targets. This is a classic example of the warning that we should "not ride on a tiger" to get anything, because when it is hungry, it will devour the rider. Now the tiger has started eating not even the rider but its offspring and except it is eliminated or caged, it will soon start devouring people in the larger society.

On the other hand, the emergence of the Black Panther Party in Alabama in US (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967) was a logical outcome of the racist, wicked and murderous activities against the Blacks in the United States. The founder of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), General Forrest disbanded his "Invisible Empire" in 1869 when some of his over-zealous cultists turned against the white population dramatically. The U.S. Congress also followed suit to enact laws which suppressed the organization.

In Nigeria, no cult leader or cult "Hero" has summoned the courage to disband the mess he helped to institutionalize. Here lies the fundamental difference between cultism in Europe and that in Nigeria.

It was permissible for any Nigerian student to fight for the dignity of the black race in the '50s; it was equally permissible for branches to be opened in other universities at that time; it is permissible for citizens to join and even be founders of these associations: it is no longer permissible for a handful of lawless individuals to destabilise the body-politic and take all other law abiding students hostage.

It is true that society (all universities inclusive) has degenerated to a very low ebb with violence, (Abati, 1994), (Okeowo, 1994) and (Okon, 1994) drug abuse, arson, stealing, extortion, murder, examination malpractice and Advance Fee Fraud (419) deals all over Nigeria but should the educational institutions be the nursery ground of these vices? Are the youths no longer "the leaders of tomorrow?"

The Nigerian environment has gone rife with the collapse of family values, some lecturers victimizing students because of family quarrels, no hope of being employed on graduation because of the demand for many years of experience plus bribes before getting a job, ethnicity even in choosing players for football teams, some students secure admissions into universities through the "back-door" and with forged certificates, others collecting degree certificates without registering in universities, the craze or quest for material wealth, kleptocracy as seen during the long years of military rule, inadequate social amenities including health and educational infrastructures, unnecessary retrenchment of the parents of students, the general inflationary impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme, general injustice in the body-politic including rigging of elections, anulements, thuggery, kidnappings, the general administrative ineptitude of successive governments and the refusal of politicians to play the game of politics according to the rules of the game, incessant truncation of the smooth running of governments via coup d'états, societal support by supplying guns and other offensive weapons, defending the cultists (even in courts), support given by senior cultists now in government, the hypocrisy and inaction of governments over the years, general paralysis of the polity which Potholm (1979) christens "Political Decay", the tyrannical posture of some school

administrators who perceive any student unrest as being "masterminded by the enemies of the administration", inadequate religious and moral education and the low salaries of Nigerian workers including lecturers all help to exacerbate the already traumatised national psyche and the end product is "cultism" every where, to fill the gap left by bad governments and poor leadership.

Viewed critically, the above list of reasons why "cultism" has become part of the educational system in Nigeria is not enough reason why a well bred child should join this suicidal colossus. Afterall, one of the theories of Military intervention in the politics of LDCs is "when there is arson, hyper-inflation, crime and general lawlessness". Yet in some countries including Nigeria under General Sani Abacha, the above shortcomings were prevalent, yet, no successful coup was executed. Hence when we suffer deprivations, we should ^{not} allow ourselves to run riot as the system because if every citizen gives up, there will be nothing but chaos and anarchy in the country.

Perhaps this is where the Nigerian phenomenon has carved out a place for herself because Nigeria has been a country where the impossible happens. The British, Asian, and American governments do not bother themselves with the provision of social amenities any longer yet this has been our pre-occupation for years with no political and moral will to accomplish anything. The effect of this long years of conspiratorial silence by successive governments had only helped to project the cultists as saviours of the oppress students who are sure of employment on graduation only through their members already occupying strategic positions in government, the parastatals, industry, the multinationals and other related careers in research and teaching.

Cars are under-valued by cultists in top positions and sold to members at give-away prices of one thousand five hundred naira (N1,500.00) only. Whole estates are under-valued and dished out to members at low costs.

Here lies the ontological, cosmological and epistemological under pinning why our students even beg the "Capones" or "Dragons" (leaders) of secret cults to register as members. There is no risk without gain as the evidence presented under columns "a", "f", "g" and "h" in figure 1 clearly show. In fact this piece should be seen as the ruminations of a dyspeptic ex-student who has over the years studied the pathology, anatomy and taxonomy of cultism in Nigerian universities with the universities of Calabar, Uyo and Delta State as case studies.

Prognoses for Action

Before this article was written others Ogunbameru (1997), Owocye (1997), Elegbelcye (1997) and Adelola (1997) had suggested various remedies to the problematique of cultism in our educational institutions hence it would have been unnecessary to proffer any solutions if all our solutions in this paper had been covered by the above writers.

Besides, if I should take the stance of the National President of the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) presented on page 7 of the Weekend Vanguard of September 18, 1999 with the caption "Hold Government Responsible for the Dispute" where he opined that "it is not by dishing out N10 million to older universities and N5 million to the new generation universities that

will solve the problem" of cultism in our campuses. He went further to state that "those renouncing their membership of secret cults are fake. The real cultists have not come out", I would not have suggested any solutions to the phenomenon – cultism.

I make these few humble suggestions to government and all Nigerians with the hope that by the time "the real cultists ..." will "... come out" there will be a blue-print for the Federal Ministry of Education, Principal Officers/Heads of Tertiary Institutions in Nigerian Universities, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics; Principals of Federal and State Secondary Schools, Headmasters of Primary and Nursery Schools to fall-back to.

Apart from the conventional recommendations which include;

- (a) Tight security and general surveillance over identified cultists;
- (b) Effective disciplinary committees to sanction erring members of cults;
- (c) Joint programmes among Nigerian universities to check the readmission of a cult member once he has been indicated in any other school;
- (d) Registering cult associations, etc.

I wish to start my prognoses for action by revisiting the issue of drug abuse as the cause of students joining Secret Cults by stating here categorically that drugs are taken by cultists as a stimulant or catalyst for action like rape, arson, murder or robbery and not as a cause for joining campus cults. Secondly, once the authorities recognize any of the cults, renunciation or no renunciations, others which are not recognized/registered would become even more deadly on campus. It was through disenchantment with the parent body the sea-dogs that the Buccaneers were born, the KKK split from the Buccaneers the Vikings from the KKK, etc.

The true reason for cultism being popular among students is the dialectics of economic determinism where the society looks at the material well-being of an individual as the dominant factor of the *raison d'être*. And except parents are prepared to help de-emphasize the convoluted sense of reasoning where ~~the~~ money is the only language they themselves understand, the students will continue to join secret cults where they would be groomed to be thieves so as to get rich quick. Mrs. Alele Williams – a one time Vice Chancellor of the University of Benin – has this to say about students hunt for material things: The Buccaneers move with guns and are "... robbers on campus" (Newswatch, March 12, 1990, p. 16).

The parents of students should be properly paid so that parents can pay for the up-keep of their wards in tertiary institutions who buy one accommodation space in the hostel for twelve to fifteen thousand naira, have to feed, buy books and other ~~regarding~~ materials, photocopy books and other materials they cannot afford to buy, buy water for laundry, bathing and cooking, pay transport on and off campus, etc. bring the average cost of maintaining a student in any Nigerian University for one Semester to at least fifty thousand naira (N50,000.00). This figure is twice the yearly salary of most lecturers and other university staffs – since university staffs are poorly paid, they have no strength and moral courage to advise students not to kill for money since one attempt on robbery fetches them more money than the lecturers life-long pay. The students cannot be led by hungry lecturers and other

university staff. When these children notice that in the same university the children of those lucky Nigerians who are in GOOD JOBS like Mobil or other Oil Companies, the Central Bank, NNPC, the Customs and Excise, the Army especially top Military Personnel and Military Administrators living well and even "spraying others with money" during beauty contests, the tendency is for them to seek refuge in secret cults with a view of making others know too that they are also "important". As the "MILADS" (Military Administrators) son uses money to get the girls and cars they need, they also can be trained by their cult members to get the same goods and services via the violent use of black axes, swords, strangulating cords and guns.

Since some of the cults are elitists and the dues are high, the children of the rich apply for those with the highest dues for protection. While those poor ones go for the lower ones like the Black Hand and the Trojan Horse. Once a member of say the elitist Buccaneer of the Seadog, the once aggrieved student who has "no cult family" is now prepared to retaliate the wrongs he suffered when he was not a member or "comrade". Once this retaliation is successfully carried out by say the Pyrates of seadogs confraternity against say the Buccaneers, Vikings or the KKK (Nigerian equivalent of the Ku Klux Klan in U.S.A.), the members of the group so attacked must retaliate and the vicious cycle continues. Perhaps a quotation from one of our highly-rated Magazine (Newswatch) best exemplifies the situation in our universities:

A burst of gunfire rang through the hall ... commotion and groans of agony seized the air. On the floor, writing in pains and bathing in a pool of their own blood, were three students. The gunmen ... University of Nsukka, (UNN) ... struck their already bullet-ridden colleagues with sharp knives and axes. The Buccaneers said its midnight attack was a revenge against "acts of terrorism" by other underground campus cult called Pirates. It warned the Pyrates (also known as the National Association of Seadogs) ... to be ready to shed more blood and lives "anytime from now". (Newswatch March 12, 1990, p. 14), emphasis mine.

Children should be taught by their parents – even before they are admitted into nursery schools – that violence and retaliation does not pay neither is joining any cult in college a worthy reflection of their Christian or Moslem family backgrounds. This bring us to the idea of Secondary Schools. The same moral ^{institutions} ~~institutions~~ can be included in a revised curriculum for citizenship Education in Nigerian Tertiary ^{institutions} ~~institutions~~. All moral instructions in schools have deliberately avoided the issues of corruption, embezzlement and cultism as if they do not exist. Perhaps this calculated faux pas was a true reflection of the concept of system maintenance at a time when corruption and cultism was almost institutionalized. And since the present government is poised at re-orientating our mentalities/values towards accountability and transparency in government, all hands should be on deck to instil the right values on our children and the government should rusticate all the cultists who did not surrender on or before the three month's deadline given by the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces, Retired General Olusegun Obasanjo.

Parents should inform their wards that they will not ^{come} ~~come~~ to their aid once they are arrested for any cultist felony or misdemeanour and try to make sure they do not go to beg policemen to release

them. Once such an example is set by the parents, other children will not see cultism as rewarding.

Academic and non-academic staffs in Nigerian Universities should try to listen (with empty stomachs) to the students who may want to vent pent-up emotions instead of frustrating these efforts which may lead some of them to seek solace in cult activities.

The government should provide jobs to qualified graduates so that they can channel their manifest and potential energies in economically viable projects instead of allowing them to join other armed robbers in the larger society. The Nigerian society would be worst off if most graduates give theoretical backing to robbery and armed robbery operations in our society.

Recapitulation

The fact that cultism is a global phenomenon with similar or the same recruitment pattern, ritualistic initiations, having leaders ("capones", "dragons") who are literally worshipped and the subjects (Hitmen) are prepared to receive orders (ODAS) from their leaders without questions for fear of the oath they took during initiation and deadly reprisal if they fail, the fact that some like the "Mau Mau" fought for independence in Kenya, the Seadogs or Pyrates fought against British colonialism at the University College in Ibadan in the 1950s should not tempt us to approve the existence of the monster cultism in the Nigerian society including our educational institutions. What is bad, is bad! Hence the presidency and the legislatures should as a matter of urgency disban all secret cults in our campuses. If the law(s) come out in favour of rustication or prosecution of those die-hards who have refused to renounce their membership in cults, parents and all those concerned should take it in good faith because no responsible government can surrender the fate of millions of innocent students and staffs in the hands of irresponsible, despicable, murderous and immoral cliques (cult groups) in our tertiary institutions.

It is better to accept the rustication of a few unrepentant cultists today than to allow them to brain-wash other future students which may finally institutionalise a "participant culture" of cultism in Nigerian Institutions of higher learning. As opined earlier, the paper is Ruminations of a Dyspeptic Ex-student and Government/ Universities should take this a little bit more seriously.

It is the writer's conviction that once these incontrovertible facts are addressed without any modicum of hypocrisy on the part of all and sundry, the seemingly malignant and intractable monster – cultism – would finally be "caged" and our educational institutions would regain their peaceful and serene atmosphere of yesteryears.

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