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A PRAGRAMMATIC APPROACH TOWARDS ERADICATION OF SECRET CULTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

PAPER

PRESENTED AT THE 35TH REGULAR MEETING OF CONFERENCE OF REGISTRARS OF POLYTECHNICS AND COLLEGES OF TECHNOLOGY (COREG) 27TH & 28TH JUNE 2001

BY

DR. (MRS) G.T.U. CHIAHA
REGISTRAR
FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC NEKEDE, OWERRI
INTRODUCTION:

Secret cults' problem is one of the most challenging crisis facing tertiary institutions in recent years. Like AIDS secret cults seem to have defied all management strategies. Campus cult which grew like a mustard seed in the minds of some innocent and unassuming University of Ibadan undergraduates in the late 1940s for the purpose of curbing social ills, have in the recent past developed into a hydra-headed monster and has become the worst social ill ever in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. “Everything we did then was healthy, firm hardness and above board” recounted Muyiwa Awe, one of the founders of the Confraternity of Pyrates.

Secret cults' activities in our various campuses have resulted in destruction of property, robbery, rape, certificate forgery, arson, drunkenness, drug addition and even in the spread of AIDS and other venereal diseases. In fact campus cult has turned our tertiary institutions into battlegrounds for different campus cults using dangerous weapons, which in normal circumstances should never have found their ways in the citadels of learning.

Even though history has it that secret cults started a long time before the Nigerian Civil War, it is obvious that the civil war and the postwar situation fueled this evil. After the civil war, many young boys conscripted into the army had nothing to do since there were very few jobs and most people had lost their property, money and had nothing with which to feed their children. Added to that, destroyed houses had to be built, fees and hospital bulls had to be paid etc. Worst still, the then government changed the existing
currency and many people could not change their currency due to the time limit given to do so. A lot of cash turned into waste papers. All these resulted in undue sufferings.

In schools especially high institutions, resources were as scarce as it was outside the school system. There were no books, seats in the classrooms, no blackboard and in some cases no buildings. Students studied under very harsh conditions. The spirit of survival which hailed the youth from the war fronts followed them after the war as a result of military rule. Kukah (1999) in his book see attach. As a result many people started searching for means of survival which included forming groups, clubs and organizations to help one another. Post war era and subsequent military rules also contributed considerably to the restiveness in the civil society and in the academic due to pretenses unleashed by the military rule with its resultant straggle for space, security and new identity formative Kukah - 1999. Since cult members always had easy ways of getting what they wanted it seemed very attractive to youths especially university undergraduates of the time, who had already been exposed to the brashness of the war front to join secret cults in order to survive, in tertiary institutions.

The situation became worse with the unplanned takeover of schools by the government in some states of the country. The deterioration of teaching and learning facilities coupled with the lukewarm attitude of the then government of the state of affairs of teachers in tertiary institutions in terms of remuneration and other conditions of service provided a fertile ground for secret cults in these institutions.

As the situation became unbearable, the Federal Government under the democratic leadership of the President Olusegun
Obasanjo administration, took a deceive step, charging all chief executives in tertiary institutions to wipe out secret cults in their various campuses or loose their jobs. This singular act of government as rightly observed by the Rector of Federal Polytechnic Oko, Dr. U Nzewi (2000) as one of the easy sincere and positive efforts made by a Commander-In-Chief of the Federal Public of Nigeria to salvage this country from the clutches and gangs of the monster called secret cults. With this directive, tertiary institutions were set in motion; each trying to use all measures at its disposal not only to eradicate secret cults but also to prevent infiltration of it into its campus. Nevertheless, this might be an impossible task if careful are not taken to understand the situation and the approaches towards eradication of secret cults in our campus. This is probably why Adekoya 1998, argued that “all efforts to rid our higher intuitions of the menace of cult will continue to be futile unless there is a clear grasp of the issues involved. It is therefore very necessary and timely for us to discuss this topic, which deals with the pragmatic approaches towards eradication of secret cults in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

However, before going into the pragmatic approaches let us firstly find out the major features of cultists and their activities. This will enable us understand how they operate so as that it will be less problematic in dealing with eradication issues.
IDENTIFICATION AND TYPES OF CULT GROUPS

From origin, it is believed that cultists' main aim is to seek togetherness for power and protection. They make use of force in most of their activities. The early Egyptian Magicians who it is believed started secret cults did so in search for power and protection. To this end they employed the use of cultic means and rituals (SEDRACT 2000). The University of Ibadan Pyrates did the same even though they claimed their objective was noble.

Today many cult groups exist in our institutions of higher learning. The Pyrates Confraternity (Sea Dogs) started in 1952 at the University of Ibadan. Their colour is white and red. Okereke (2000) observed that they have a particular way they greet themselves in style with crossed bones as logo. Buccaneers Association of Nigeria (See Lords), which broke out from the Pyrates due to struggle for leadership are always challenging the Pyrates claiming that "A Dog had a master and the master is the Lord". They were founded – 1970 at University of Benin. They are very violent ruthless and merciless just like the Sea Dogs. Their symbol is a skull and two parallel opposite bones. (SEDRACT 2000). The Vikings (National Association of Adventures) another splinter, but powerful group also broke off from the Buccaneers. They started at University of Port Harcourt in 1982 (their colour is Black and Red). Others keep emerging from the above three whose membership is restrictive. Studies show that there are 44 cult groups in various tertiary institutions in Nigeria as provided in Table I.

According to SECDRAT 2000, they are grouped into five different categories.
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Classical Confraternity: These stated in the early 80's and formed the base for others such as pyrites and Buccaneers. These two exist in all campuses of higher learning in Nigeria.

The God-Father Secret cults: These are simply promise to protect their members from school authorities, lecturers and other students. They include Malcon X and Phonix, which are mostly found in the south west campuses such as University of Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU).

Mafia Cults: These are mostly drug peddlers in tertiary institutions. They include Egbe Dudu cult, Klu Klux, Klair, Mafia lords and are mostly found in South west campuses such as OAU. Nevertheless, the Klu, Klux Klair are found in all campuses.

Terrorists Cults: They operate with violence. They include the Black/axe, Vikings, Buccaneers and Black Ladies cult. They are in all campuses but the black ladies are mostly seen in University of Nigeria Nsukka and University of Benin.

Female cults: Females are not left out in this evil act. They include the Amazons. Black Brassier, Charlies Angles Female cults usually were as spies and sex-mates for their male counterparts.

It should be noted that where a particular cult exist in a university the same are likely to operate in other tertiary institution in the locality. This is probably why SECDRAT 2000 warned that where ever a cult group operate in a given university the same group is likely to operate in another tertiary institution in that locality.

From the names of these cult groups there is no gain saying that they are evil and devilish. Name such Pirates, Baccarats,
Vikings are known terrible robbers: Black Axe, Black scorpion, Fays, Hepos, Nite Hawk, Nike Rovers, Sea Bogs, Scavengers, Bats, Black Cat, also syrupy their evil also seem to identify what they do.

**PRAGMATIC APPROACHES**

Pragmatism simply means being practical. Pragmatic approach implies practical, visible and possible means of eradicating this cankerworm.

- It is devoid of bureaucratic bottleneck,
- It involves seriousness of purpose,
- The pragmatic approaches adopted by this paper are:
  - a. Situational Approach
  - b. Functional Approach
- The above approaches have no distinct boundaries. They are more or less interconnected. For the purpose of this paper they will be handled separately.

**a. SITUATIONAL APPROACH**

Situation approach implies a close study of the circumstances surrounding the issue under reference. In this case it involves a study of the prevailing circumstances in the campuses and in the state in which the campus are sited. The situation in a ‘Sharia’ state for instance might be different from an institution sited in Lagos or Abuja. It will also be very different from that of a Christian dominated state like Owerri.

It further takes into consideration the relationship between the students and management. It is easier to apply cult eradication strategies where there is an understanding between the student’s body and Management. Applying force for instance in an already
tense atmosphere might not yield the desired result. In such cases, use of persuasion might do better than use of force.

This approach also considers the type of cult group(s) dominant in that institution. For instance, the letter written by Pyrates Confraternity to its members drawing its original objectives to current members did not help other cult groups in renouncing their membership as much as it affected members of the Pyrates confraternity at the Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri cult members renunciation in 1999.

The most interesting development about campus cult in recent times is that the bond of secrecy seen to be braking. Before this date, individuals would be too afraid to discuss campus cults openly as it is done today and go home free, how much more putting something down in prints. Apparently the massacre of OAU (Obafemi Awolowo University) students in cold blood by members of secret cults coupled with their earlier harassment and maiming of innocent students all over the country seem to be the last straw in the back of secrecy in cult activities. Ever since many have renounced their membership, others have written and the whole country is now talking about it.

The situation has afforded us a golden opportunity today to discuss this paper freely. This implies that NO SECRET IS FOREVER. Secrecy is only for a while and so will secret cults in our tertiary institutions sooner or later the issue of secret cults will be a thing of the past where and when these pragmatic approaches are employed.

FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

Functional approach according to his paper could be described as a radical approach - radical in the sense that it
involves a total overview and overhaul of the tertiary education system in Nigeria.

**Producing graduates Worthy Students Character and Learning**

If one considers the situation in this country it would be discovered that the age brackets of students in tertiary institutions are 16 to 25. This is the age when students believe they are adults and should no longer controlled by adults. Having gained ‘freedom’ from their parents and from their teachers in the secondary school system that has more control over them, into a tertiary institution. Where there is little or no control on student’s behaviours, these young lads become vulnerable to secret cults. Others who are cult members already before gaining admission into tertiary institutions see the higher institution as a more fertile ground for operation.

During convocation ceremonies, Registrars usually indicate that those to be awarded, degrees, diplomas or certificates have been found WORTHY both in CHARACTER and LEARNING. One may like to ask, where character comes in, in the education of students in tertiary institutions. Learning can easily be ascertained. All that is done in tertiary institutions seem to be tailor onwards academic learning.

For instance, admission requirements are basically academic with nothing on character. The demand is on number of credits or above in WAEC/GCE/NECO etc. Nothing is demanded of on behaviour. These days no one asks of even letters of recommendation/attestation of good behaviour from recognized people in the society for the new intakes. Nowadays, institutions admit JAMB numbers and not persons, since they do not even see the people they admit. There are several reports that fixed in the JAMB forms of some female students admitted in our institutions.
are male pictures and vice versa. This impels that institutions admissions seem to be faulty and such may breed secret cults. Thank to the current screening JAMB screening cert which gives opportunity for the uneasily to come in wanted face to face with candidates seeking for admission, in addition contents of various course offered in tertiary institutions are basically academic and tailored towards learning and not character formation. Also course assessment is done and consequently no student gets a prize for good character or behaviour as the best-behaved student whereas prize are awarded to best students in various academic programmes and course.

Again programmes are accredited as it meets basic academic and professional standards and nothing is mentioned about the character of the department concerned in terms of staff and student' behaviours.

A close look at the objectives of higher education indicates that government is paying little or no attention to character and moral education. Could we then rightly say that we have found our graduates worthy in character and learning. Until we start from the objectives of tertiary institutions indicating that character is as important as learning, the stage is not yet set for the eradication of cult our institution. For instance Decree No [1985] spells out the purposes of Higher Education but did not deem it necessary to include specifically moral and character training as part of the purpose of education our tertiary institution. Functional Approach implies a result yielding method, which requires institutions to be more practical and serious oriented. No lip service is paid to the issue.

CHIAMA
It requires institutions of higher learning to recognize the age brackets of the students and to take advantage of same. Students should be kept busy all the time. Institutions should endeavor to start lectures as soon as sessions start. A situation where lectures start months or weeks after resumption gives room to the new students [Jambites] to fall prey to cult groups. As the adage "goes an idle mind is a devil's workshop". Registration should be allowed to go with lectures. Special periods should not be left for registration.

Matriculation can come in between lectures. Lectures should take off with the beginning of sessions. Since the undergraduates these days are still young the so called freedom in our example should be applied with caution. There should be more close supervision and discipline of the. Also accommodation arrangements should be completed before calling students back to school. A situation where students are made to roam the campus for weeks waiting for rooms to be allocated to them gives room for cults to offer assistance to on-suspecting students seeking for accommodation and later to be lured into becoming members of cult groups.

Students should be made to pay all necessary fees before resumption to enable all hostel arrangements to be made. It is also essential that results are released in good time to enable other hostel arrangements to be made, but where this is not possible, it is still essential that students shall be all hostel accommodation as they await their results. The Students Affairs Division or Officer in charge of hostels should obtain the names of those who want accommodation before they leave for holidays.

Lecturers should prepare their lectures in good time. They should be made to be serious with their work and attend lectures
regularly. Students should not be left idle for along time. Lecturers should prepare their lectures in good time. They should be made to be serious with their work and attend lectures regularly. Students should not be idle for along time. Lecturers should give more practical work to students, such as term papers instead of the usual hand-out syndrome of today which makes students lay and idle, students should be encouraged to take and make their own notes. Handouts, if vital should come at the end of the course to serve as a sought or revision and to enrich notes already made by students. Students should also be encouraged to use the library to add to the handout and notes'already taken during lecturers.

Students should also be involved in serious recreational activities, excursions and sports. In short, no room should be given to idleness. They should be so fully engaged that they treasure their free periods, which they should use to rest. It is the believe of this approach that if students are kept very, very busy, there will be no room for cult activities

**Character Development Programmes**

Functional approach requires that some character development courses be built into our curricular. As such a well-developed course outline should be integrated into Humanities course in the school of General Studies, thereby making Humanities a Compulsory course for all students.

A qualified person probably an ordained religious should head the department of Humanities and must be a member of the academic Board.

Also all course contents should be reviewed to include aspects of character formation necessary for the graduates. This is to say that all courses should include the moral of such a course, for instance,
engineering course should include the morals/ethics of engineering, while law medicine etc should carry the same for their projection

**Screening of Staff and Students Before Appointment/Admissions Rep**

This approach also involves a serious look into the basic qualifications of staff. If actually tertiary institutions in Nigeria want to wipe out secret cults, it has to screen its staff to ensure that they, especially the lectures are cult free. As a staff auditing are done occasionally to ensure that no ghost staff exists, so also staff screening should be done. They approach requires occasional screening of staff by qualified officers probably the state security service (SSS) and each staff cleared of any association or involvement with secret cults before he could be paired that month. New staff should also be asked to get clearance from the SSS before appointment. In addition, all new students should be cleared before they can matriculate and the exercise repeated before they graduate. In this case, institutions will be free of secret cults. Students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, have started the latter since last session. It is too early to access its result, but it is believed that in the next few years, the result will be significant.

Form the attestation form (APP. 1), it could be seen that students swear an oath to be of good behaviour and not to participate in any cult activities during their course of study in the school. This enables the Polytechnic to take disciplinary action on any student found to be involved in any cult activity. On submission, it is checked to see that the passport and signature in the declaration form is same with that in the registration forms.
Use of Law Enforcement Agents

Functional approach also involves the use of force to eradicate secret cults. Since cult members are usually dangerous, the use of force is essential. Institutions should employ the use of state severity against in fishing out members of different cult groups and dealing with them accordingly. The Nigerian Police Force always complain of not having an enabling law empowering them to convict cult members and so these 'bad boys' are usually released after a while. This does not argue will for institution because they always come back as wounded lions to revenge and perform more harms.

It is essential that institutions employ SSS as staff to help them handle these cultists. Also the use of student's security squad can be used. Institutions should use students who are Policemen and Soldiers or any of the armed forces as members of this squad. Since students know themselves better, the student squad will be very useful in this regard.

MULTI DIMENSIONAL APPROACH:

This involves the combined activities of government, the institution and the family in eradication of secret cults.

Use of the law

Though government has made pronouncements on secret cults, it has no blueprint on same; this makes it difficult for institutions and other organizations to make secret cults an offence that attracts expulsion or serious disciplinary action which might include non-admission into the institutions. It is usually difficult to label one a member of cult even when all the signs are there. Let us take instances where sister institutions require the Registrar of another to clear a particular exND student of secret cults before
gaining admission in that institution. This usually a risky task. Such student are usually asked to obtain clearance from the SSS. This is because unlike academic records, secret cults is difficult to check unless where a student was convicted or where there are records to show.

Although the Approved 2000 anti-corruption law of the federal republic of Nigeria has nothing on secret cults, the criminal code Act section 64[a] is quit specific that it is unlawful to belong to unlawful or secret society. The criminal code went further to list activities such as unlawful assembles/rioting, rape, purchase, sale and use of drugs, forgery, exam malpractices as offences punishable by law. It is essential for government to articulate these cult-related offences, publish them as offences and the punishment which indicated. Such a publication should be sent to all tertiary institutions to be made available to the Humanities Department for teaching to all students. In other words, there is a need to create serious awareness on the evils and due punishment to cult members and most importantly, government should be seen giving these punishments to those found guilty.

Family Role
The family includes nuclear, extended families and religious denominations; all should help in eradicating secret cults. Parents should make special efforts in ensuring that their children are not member of cults. Cultists could be identified by their made of dressing parents should watch out. They really dress formally since they believe formal dressing is for the few men. They were regged cloth office duty with both and base ball caps. Often they do not luckin their shorts. He is often lucky and observes in his largege. He does not case whom he huats and do not usual apologies. He is
usually late and irregular to class and when he comes he stays at
the back. Parents should watch out for any charge in their child
behaviour and new friends. Parent should occasionally examine the
bodies of their children, including university undergraduates to
find out if there are strange marks/signs on their bodies. They
should watch out for signs of misbehavior or abnormal signs and
check them immediately to see that their children do not join cults.
Parents should make efforts to know the friends or their children.

It might sound unrealistic but it is most rewarding for higher
institutions to form a Parent Teacher association. It could be
Parents forum just as it is done in the University of Lagos and
Lagos State University. The Parents forum should be organized
every section or every semester to discuss with the institution
authorities and Parents, the welfare of students. In such forum,
ways and means of eradicating secret cults could discussed and
shared so that as institutions carry out their duties, parents can
perform their accordingly.

In addition, religious and social groups have a very important role
to play. They should preach against this and punish those
members found belonging to secret cults.

Conclusion

Conclusively, since secret cults have reached a stage when it could
be discussed openly, there should be no going back. The roles of
government, family and institutions should not be over-
emphasized. Efforts should be made to give a permanent blow to
secret cults in tertiary institutions by applying the aforementioned
approaches.
RECOMMENDATIONS:
This paper recommends that:

1. Pragmatic approach should be adopted and implemented as a practical way of eradicating secret cults in tertiary institutions.

2. All students and staff including Principal Officers of higher institutions should be cleared or certified of non involvement in any secret cult activities before admission and employment respectively.

3. All serving staff and current students in higher institutions should be screened to ascertain those involved or those who are members of secret cults.

4. Interview of candidates with JAMB admission letters by individual institutions should be done before final admission by individual institutions.

5. Inculcation of morals/ethics of all subjects into courses taught in tertiary institutions should be implemented.

6. Moral education should be introduced into Humanities or General Studies course in tertiary institutions and should be made compulsory.

7. State Securities Services [SSS] staff and Psychologists should be engaged to assist in eradication of secret cults and rehabilitation of ex-cultists in tertiary institutions.
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