

Blood in Ivory Towers: A Study of Cultism in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT: In 1952, Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, Ralph Okpara, Pius Oleghe, Ikpehare Aig- Imoukhuede, Nataniel Oyelola, Olumuyiwa Awe, and Ben Egbuche (collectively known as the Magnificent 7) in the University College, Ibadan, formed the '*National Association of Sea Dogs*' also known as '*Pyrate Confraternity*' to protect interests, rekindle chivalry and solidify camaraderie. Their foci were specifically spelt out to include "*fighting moribund convention, destroy tribalism and revive chivalry.*" In recent times, the renowned peaceful group with underpinnings of nationalism, patriotism and justice has splintered into deadly fraternities that specialize in carnage, bloodbath, brigandage, and perpetuation of all forms of criminalities on our campuses. The *Black Axe*, the *Buccaneers*, the *Vikings Pirates*, *Eiye Confraternity*, *Black Eye*, *Dragons*, *Black Berets*, and female gangs like the *Barracudas*, *Daughters of Jezebel*, *Black Brassieres* and others monger violence on our universities. The focus of this paper shall be to identify the causes and effects of campus cultism, and to recommend solutions.

Key words: fraternities, bloodbath, criminalized philosophies, violence, cult groups, cultism, insecurity.

1. INTRODUCTION

From here to Xanadu; but how did we get here? It is horrifying to note that violence and murderous brigandage had been commodified in Nigeria in recent times, and that the cult phenomenon had become suddenly magnified in our universities. The cult-related crimes, blood-letting and wanton destructions on our campuses were refractory and undeniably problematic. It reached an uncontrollable proportion most especially, in the South-west, South-south and the Middle belt/North-Central regions, to the extent that securing admission into universities was like willfully signing a death warrant. Insecurity had become a second nature to Nigeria amidst incursions, killings, kidnappings and bombardments by dreaded groups like the Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani Herdsmen, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and other splinter groups that aimed to forcefully yank control from the central government and had made pockets of regions within the nation ungovernable. Amidst this confusion, cult groups in the ivory towers operated with impunity, further worsening the security situation:

"From the campuses of Nigerian universities like Lagos, Nsukka, Ekpoma, Ibadan, Benin, Jos, Ile-Ife, Abuja, Port-Harcourt, Makurdi and Otukpo...cultism have claimed several lives and properties worth millions of naira."

These macabre forces who midwived "*...the vicious circle of satanic brutality and sworn concealment*" in our universities are prevalent in these regions, not only because of a stronger cultural affinity with cultism in the wider community, but also as:

"...a throwback from the social upheavals that were associated with the civil war of the late 1960s when violence, as a means of survival, took centre-stage and civilised, orderly behaviour was jettisoned." A cult which has been defined as

"A secret organization shrouded in secrecy, undisclosed information by members and blood oath-taking..." (Adejumobi, 2005) is the result of societal implosion, which consequently, heralded a regime of terror in our universities. The terminology has assumed multifarious dimensions, conditioned by norms, societal beliefs and practices. In his paper, Ushe Mike Ushe identified five types of cults namely religious cult (i.e. cult groups who were basically splinters or breakaway subsets of major religions), like Mormons, Jehovah Witness, Hare Krishna and others, political cults with extreme ideological base (e.g. Neo-Nazi groups), the psychotherapy cults like Scientology, Yoga and Eckankar, commercial cults whose preoccupation is to protect commercial interests like the G7 or marketers associations in local domains, and lastly, the horrendous crime/drug cults that survive through the philosophy of preservation by elimination. The notorious Italian mafia groups and students cults would fall into this category (Ushe Mike Ushe, 2019).

We shall be examining this bricolage in social, political and psychological contexts. A fourth context, the sociobiological perspective positing the supremacy of the nature-nature concepts as they influence participation in cultic activities (Ogunbameru, 2004) would effectively be broached under the context of social psychology. Cultism in Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions had remained consistent over the years in constituting threats to human rights and fundamental freedoms of students and staff, and has no doubt, become a Cyclopean challenge to ethics and norms set out by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), as proclaimed by the United Nations. It is a disjuncture to peaceful co-existence on our campuses, and a terrible malfeasance which had spilled over to secondary and primary institutions, and had even become a property of the street. In this work, we shall set out to highlight gaps and make recommendations which might help to stem the tide.

2. JUSTIFICATION

Background of the Problem

Insecurity and the criminalization of HEIs in Nigeria had been a great cause for concern. Over the years, negative impulses had taken over the citadels of learning, as news of corrosive practices emanated from the places that should blaze the trail and provide direction. It is disconsolate to note that despite the sterling performances of diasporic Nigerians in areas of teaching, and research outside the shores, news of decadence keep rolling out unceasingly from our universities as op-ed in foreign print media. The incessant mayhem caused by cult activities further dent our image in the educational sector, hence, the reasoning that the breakthroughs in the diaspora are achieved *not because of* our educational system in Nigeria, but rather, *in spite of* our educational system in Nigeria. This validates our stand that Nigerians are a breed predisposed to excellence, and that given favorable environment, they would excel and break glass ceilings. Campus secret cults, which is a sad appendage of corruption and a reflection of putrescence in the larger society should be tackled decisively so as to launder the image of our HEIs in the global space and derive the full dividends of higher education.

Review of Literature

A corpus of literature abound on the challenges posed by the cult phenomenon in our universities. Scholars like B.I. Popoola and K.A. Alao (2006), O.A. Ogunbameru (2004), Prince Ololube *et al* (2013) V.C Udoh *et al* (2015) and Isaac Ajayi *et al* (2010) dwelt on the general concept of cultism and cultic activities in our HEIs, proffering solutions to the challenge. However, to date, there is no gainsaying the fact that the problem remains refractory, and appeared to have defied ad-hoc measures such that were proffered as recommendations by most writers. This is because of the in-depth nature of the challenge, which oftentimes go silent when tackled head on by various management, only to re-surface when least expected. It has become expedient to think of solving the problem in terms of proffering long-term solutions, massive overhauling of processes, and re-orientation of value matrices. In this wise, the challenge could be surmounted in the long run.

Methodology

The design used in this work is a qualitative research design that used document analyses to probe historical antecedents, and question assumptions like the one ascribing the origin of cultism to the pre-independent campus activities of Professor Wole Soyinka *et al.* We believe that the phenomenon of cult predates the Nobel Laureate and only reared its ugly head with the general recrudescence of violence, insecurity, deficit of qualitative leadership, and a monumental degradation of value-matrices caving in to western influence. A descriptive survey is conducted to validate our statement of the study that cultism in our universities has transcended the level of juvenile misdemeanors, to that of a synergized, monumental outlaw process, heavily rooted in the sociopolitical milieu. Our analyses enable us to interpret information and to reach a conclusion that the defective microcosm could only be righted when the macro-counterpart, i.e. the society, is put in a reset mode and re-adjusted accordingly. Our sources remain relevant textbooks, researched publications, reports and the Internet.

3. CAUSES

Although causes of cultism and cultic participation are known to be inexhaustive depending on individual reasoning and caprices, it has been established that they may be realized in the following contexts:

Social Context

In mainstream discourse, it is the consensus that accessing education enhances individual and group well-being. These are widely endorsed postulates that remind us of the important stage education occupies in human history. The idea that education is a force for good takes its cue from the belief that education has the capacity to reduce violence. American psychologist, B.F. Skinner, in his theory of operant conditioning, emphasized that learning is provoked by crude conditioning stimuli hinging on reward and threat, i.e. the effects that punishments could have on a person's behaviour towards learning, when a certain form of violence is administered. What easily comes to mind with this is the practice of corporal punishment in schools. In many cultural settings and most especially in Nigeria, canning in primary and secondary schools is not inappropriate. The target of canning in most instances is to achieve educational excellence with pliable young students, thus sublimating a proportional form of violence. Arguments abound that posit that the collapse or reduction of canning in our primary and secondary schools had contributed to students engaging in higher forms of violence in our universities. Cultism has therefore, been suggested as the direct outcome of such negligence at lower levels of education. Such beliefs are reinforced by cultural and religious paradigms, e.g. '*spare the rod and spoil the child.*' However, violence in Nigerian universities took a crooked turn as a result of multiple social, factors namely:

Peer Group Influence

Peer groups are important agents of socialization. They tend to be different from other agents like family or school because of the sense of freedom or liberalization from adult control. The influence of peer group is virile not only because of similar age gaps, but also because at this stage of their lives, children usually are impressionable, and would go the extra mile to belong and be accepted by their age mates. Most children were caught unguarded and found themselves in cult groups basically as a result of the impulse to socially belong and be accepted by their age grades. In a situation where cultism is fast becoming *de rigueur*, it takes a child with strong will and solid background to resist peer group pressures and remain unequivocal in their resolve to stay focused.;

Parental Background

This is also important in determining reasons for the ubiquitous *faux pas* among the youths in our universities. Someone with a morally feeble home background where ethics of good conducts are not implanted in the moral components would find it difficult to resist pressures to join bad gangs when given unbridled freedom. Such youths easily fall for the bandwagon;

Moral Decadence

In recent times, traditional value matrixes have succumbed to foreign ethics and peccadillos. The fabric of our society that were carefully woven around good conducts, diligence, good names and self-respect have been assailed from all sides by Westernism and Americanism which, in most cases, are direct opposites of our values that used to be reinforced and processed through practices like rites of passage, mores and norms. As a result, values like hive mindset had given way to individualism, and youths feel more at home with their peers and with social media, than with their parents, because they speak the same new-age language that promotes discord, violence and celluloid fantasies;

Digital Irresponsibility and Popular Culture

While it is true that technology has come to advance the society and enhance functionality, it is also true that vapid, imbecile and atrocious contents abound on the social media. Contents that ravage quality time and disorient level-headed youths like pornography, and popular culture in films, music and more, glamorize criminalities, drug abuse and cyber fraud. These are appendages of cultism that upgrade crime to the level of violence, brigandage, cult-wars and obliteration of human lives for flimsy excuses;

Crestfallen Educational Standards

It is no breaking news that educational standards in this part of the world had witnessed a monumental fall in standards courtesy of many factors that we cannot begin to mention. In recent times, emphasis had not been to get properly educated, but rather to get certificated for education, and to achieve this by all means possible. As a result, most universities are populated with youths who have no business being there in the first place, because they do not believe in the ideals of proper education. They just want the certificates for prestige, or to meet the minimum standards to enable them contest for political posts. Comparing the present state of education, one would note that in the 60's through to the 80's and shortly after, the standards of our universities matched the global standards as groundbreaking academics and technocrats were mass-produced and acknowledged on the world map (Bakare, K.A., 2021).

Not so today. Hence, quite naturally, our universities, which used to be beacons of best practice, had suddenly become habitations for desperados and die-hard cultists;

Cultic Vice-Chancellors and Staff Members

It has been alleged that in an effort to escape penalties for their nefarious activities, cult groups had attracted many members of staff and Vice-Chancellors to their folds. These highly-placed officers would always ensure that they escape sanctions and protect culprits when the need arises. In turn, the cultists maim, silence or neutralize oppositions that may arise against the Vice-Chancellors from among the students' populace;

Lack of Recreational Facilities/Programmes

Most universities, except the first-generation universities, are devoid of recreational facilities. The universities who have these facilities do not often put them to good use. No adequate sport programmes to keep the youths engaged. As a result, what you have are on-the-field-speaking-in-tongues sessions of séance exercises, or other off-the-field forms of extremism. A diversion of bottled-up energy by criminal elements to criminal activities also takes place;

Political Contexts

Emile Durkheim (Emile Durkheim, 1895) believed that deviance is normal:

"a society without deviance is impossible..." basically because the *"collective conscience"* is not strong enough to resist breaking of rules, as society reacts negatively to rules breaking, defines deviance, and deviants. However, a situation where personages invent deviants so as to be able to make use of them for selfish purposes, or where policies made consciously or unconsciously breed deviance, is another side of deviance and cultism in our universities. Instances like these are invented, courtesy of the underlisted factors:

Godfatherism

Outside influences from undesirable VIPs have had a multiplier effect on the proliferation and sustenance of cultism and cultic activities in our campuses. It is unfortunate to note that influential people in the society who should be promoting peace on campuses were culpable of doing otherwise, and had enkindled, rekindled and fanned the embers of cultism in our universities. As rightly noted, these people who are mainly political office holders and seekers are in the habit of recruiting the services of cult members to hijack ballot boxes and perpetrate electoral malpractice in order to force their ways to political offices. They provide guns, machetes, hard drugs and dangerous weapons to cult brigands and encourage them to cause mayhem at electoral polling booths, with a view to hijacking mandates and forcing themselves on the electorates. Our skewed political culture had encouraged these practices in a society where *'might is right,'* and where politicians go unquestioned for inappropriate actions (N.P. Olorube, C.N. Agbor & O.A. Uriah, 2013). The proliferation of universities in recent times, coupled with increased students' enrolment without a commensurate infrastructural and municipal needs, caused a deepening of academic standards, as academic cultures were broken to smithereens. The government also consistently sent wrong signals to the campuses, venerating patronage over merit, by politicizing appointments of principal officers. With this, the culture of gerrymandering and impunity became *'the new normal'* (Bakare, K.A. 2021).

Apprehended cultists were left off-the-hook as a result of their obnoxious connexions at the corridors of power. There seemed to be a lacuna either in the invocation of the penal code or in the administration of justice to cult victims. Apprehended cultists, more often than not, are left off the hook, and cases are either dismissed or got trapped perpetually in legalistic quagmires. These are not sending right signals to the populace, and could only be interpreted as an unassailable enthronement of impunity by the legal framework, and a direct attack on the Third Estate. It is to be noted that these power-mongering snollygosters always preserved their siblings and sent them to schools outside the shores of Nigeria, while they gaslight the children of other people into engaging in cultism, using them to rig elections;

Military Gangsterism

A mutiny, led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu on 15th January, 1966 opened the country up to the floodgate of military coups in our political history. The civil war of 1966 to 1969 further widened the gap between the populace and democratic enfranchisement. In all, dictatorship prevailed for a period of twenty-nine years out of sixty-one years of independence from Britain. The implication of dictatorship had always been to foist misrule, brigandage and impunity on the psyches of the populace, especially the youth who happened to fall into the impressionable class. A young man who is presented with no other option outside gangster politics would find other options inferior to the dictatorial template, and would likely imbibe violence, brigandage, and impunity as a way of life. These features are infrastructures of cultism. In such circumstances, proliferation of weapons festered, in a situation where control of inflow of such weapons into the country is zilch. This is not to say that with democracy and democratic dispensation, the situation has ameliorated. Rather, the situation has remained because what we practice in this clime could adequately qualify as democratic ersatz, what we call *'black market democracy'*. (Bakare, K.A. 2021) Our ubieties, our national campuses, are being infiltrated directly by the actions of these politicians who have refused to play by the rules, and have replicated outside scenarios in our campuses. With the previous assertion that violence is being commodified by the ruling class who are godfathers, it has become impossible for the phenomenon of cultism to evaporate because it is still relevant to the political class even under the *'democratic dispensation.'*

Radical Activism in Students' Union Politics

The razzmatazz, the funfair, the intimidating posters that attend campaigns for Students Union elections these days would make one wonder where all the money come from. As students especially in public universities, one would think that frugal practices should be the norm and that efforts and energies should be directed more towards learning than towards contesting an election. From indications, the money and general funding of campaigns could only come from outside moneybags who have interests in campus politics. Such people

would naturally aim to hijack control having spent much to enthrone vassals on campuses, and to perpetuate interests. When campaigns are floated inside campuses with obvious outside sponsorships and with much desperation, such campaigns would almost always seek to entrench radical actors as Students Union officials who would do the biddings of their sponsors. Power prostitution, power profiteering, political one-upmanship and brigandage are being transposed to campuses without hindrances, as the outside cultic financiers seek to register their presence on campus in furtherance of their quest for power;

Insecurity

Proliferation of small arms in Nigeria had acted as foddors for insecurity. According to the United Nations, illicit small arms and light weapons have peaked to about 350 million in Nigeria, hence, about 70% of the 500 million of illicit arms in wide circulation in the West African region are to be found in Nigeria. These are indices of instability and high insecurity. With the daily confrontations and aggressions from splintered tribal and terrorist groups who are either calling for fossilization of the national identity or the enthronement of extremist, pseudo-religious ideologies, cultism is presented with the right appurtenances to fester. Weapons, hard drugs, emasculated security outfits, fear and angst; are all indices of an ailing nation in need of urgent revamping to fight cultism, blood-letting and thuggery.

Psychological Context

Long before W.E.B. DuBois wrote his exploratory book on the moral and intellectual constitution of the black man in America, seeking to probe the 'soul' of a race (1895), another writer, Sigmund Freud, had written convincingly on psychoanalysis and the subconscious. Their groundbreaking efforts point towards one direction; that man is a composition of the physical and the experiential, a nexus of the body and the soul. In psychology and psychoanalysis, what you see is in most cases influenced by what you do not see, i.e. the conscious and the subconscious. It is in this context that writers like O.A. Ogunbameru (2004) and others believed that cultism and cultic activities could be interpreted from the subconscious to the conscious. The biopsychological approach argues that behaviour of the individual is as a result of genetics and physiology. Thus, thoughts, feelings and behavioral patterns are all hinged to biological constitution of the individual. The nervous system, the brain, attitudes and other physiological components are genetically predisposed. This perspective attempts to describe attitudes and decisions from a biological viewpoint. Becoming and swearing allegiance to antisocial cult groups could be triggered by the following instances;

Broken Homes/Ties

Times without number, it has been established that broken home phenomenon contribute in no small measure to the decision by teens to join cult groups. Broken homes are usually devoid of the psychological build-up required by growing juveniles, and in order to fill the vacant space, and in the quest to find a parental figure for rounded upbringing, the unwary teens fall into the trap of recruiting cultists who are seductive in their drive for membership on various campuses;

Perfectionism

The brimming and unrelenting zeal of the youth usually peak when the individual in teenage years always seek for perfection. Perfectionism becomes a mantra and a hunger which the teen constantly seeks to satiate, hence, in search of the ideal figure, the unwary teen joins the folds of similar folks who seek to actualize life a little bit more, and '*live above his peers.*'

The '*Superman ego*' sticks, as self-assured teens believe that they could attain any height by striving to be different from others. Established cultists teach members that they are superior to non-initiates, and that they could be transformed to '*supernumerary beings*' by being vicious. This sets them apart from their '*inferior and mundane*' peers;

Existential Crises

For overtly expressive teens, life at times, is vacuous, and needs new and outlandish experiments. Cultism to them, readily provides such experiments, helping them to find purpose in life. The purpose which might be triggered by filial desiccation or lack of love and lack of sense of belonging, find comfortable zones in cult groups, whose members are overly loving and dedicated to the ties of kinship which they cement through oath-taking. A member is devoted to caring for other members in every circumstances however odd; and this is made irreversible through blood-oaths. This is called '*love-bombing*' (Saul McLeod, 2015). The uncompromising care also extend to teens who are experiencing angst and want protective shelter from a bold, superior figure, or want someone to take care of them and guard them through a '*predatory*' world;

Social Identity, Emotional Distress and Spiritual Emptiness

Ogidefa (2012) emphasized among others, that the search for social identity engendered by the feeling of psychic emptiness impel teens to join cult groups with a view o feeling empowered and gain fear and respect through the administration of superior violence. The quest for power and machismo make teens seek the fastest means through violence. Also, the fact that most members have become emotionally distressed as a result of bitter experiences have been known to have contributed to joining the antisocial groups to seek for opportunities to hit the society or the student populace below the belts by way of vengeance. Lack of moral ethics and hive mindset taught by religious institutions due to parental neglect may also contribute to the psycho-social gaps being experienced by teens who take the decision to join and partake in cultism in an effort to fill empty spaces.

Cultural Context

We mentioned earlier, our opposition to the historicized cliché that cultism in Nigerian universities started with Wole Soyinka and his G7 cohorts. In history of Nigerian cultures, it was copiously recorded that cult groups existed in the larger societies in various tribes across the country. The Ogboni Confraternity, Oro cult, and Agemo Cult in the South-West, the Ekpe, Poro and Ekine in the South-South, the Girinya cult in the North-Central regions, to mention a few, are notable for their cultic activities. Despite their esoteric, spiritual clouts, they still maintain strong exoteric connexions with their tribal groups. In most instances, they deploy their powers to exercise checks and balances on power equations in their different territories. It is therefore, a misnomer to insinuate that the modern-day antisocial splinters are offshoots of these old established cultic orders. Like most writers noted, the cult nomenclature was never stigmatized at any point in history, and was not stigmatized with the Soyinka *et al*, because their activities were open and accessible; and because they were social, not antisocial. Though one may argue that the oath-taking, blood covenant and other ancillary rituals identified with the practices of the contemporary cult groups took their templates directly from the occultic and ritual practices of the old counterparts, it should however be said that these ritual practices were deployed for the spiritual upliftment of their societies, i.e. to appease deities for peace, harmony and other complements. It is not recorded in history that these precursory groups used their activities to hurt or atrophy their communities in such manner that these present groups are doing. The fear, angst, and terrorism complexes of these earlier groups were mostly used to advance the cause of the societies by exercising control, keep powers in check or at most, dominate and preserve prestige and prejudices for a section of their societies, not going on killing spree on account a flimsy excuses.

However, one may not be able to exonerate Wole Soyinka and the G7 completely, when it comes to the issue of stigmatized nomenclatures. The Buccaneers, the Pirates, the Vikings and other marine nomenclatures bore with them history of deviance, pillages and murderous exploits on the high seas. To introduce similar nomenclatures into a peaceful university setting for commendable purposes smirks of contextomy, as they seem to be valorizing criminalities. If the crime was not amplified at inception, this new generation of cultists definitely amplified their crimes unapologetically, by killing and maiming perceived adversaries on our campuses. The morbid practices of the marine-based groups on the high seas are being daily recreated in our universities.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Ethical Re-armament

As we have seen, the defeat of ethics and traditional morality and the ills that emerged therefrom had been at the base of bad practices, carnage and other juvenile immoralities. Cultism has no doubt, remained an expression of such ethical deficits, and an attack on human cohesion recreated through violence. In his seminal book, Frank Buchman (1975) bemoaned the loss of Pollyannaism and positivity in the modern society, and contended that in order to achieve enviable records in statecraft and attain to a new social order, high morality in public and private life remained the only solution. Moral revisionism is therefore, deployed to cancel out moral relativism, which re-defines morality in terms of social, cultural or historical contextual interpretations, and downplays the universal moral standards relevant across all contexts. The need to re-orientate our values and recreate our socio-cultural space which have been badly damaged by cross-cultural contact is germane for ethical revamping. It is therefore, necessary to commence conscious attempt to reclaim our values through awareness, cultural re-awakening, and preservation of moral heritage, in order to restore glory lost due to technological dystopias, brainwashing and cultural devaluation;

Perverted Ontology

As rightly observed by Frantz Fanon, (1963) colonial mercantilism adulterated our traditional values and matrices, and replaced them with petrified backgrounds. It is sad to know that we are being daily alienated from good deeds and practices taught through norms and mores, and that as it stands, we have become a bundle of split personalities. Our values, practices and world views are being daily perverted and replaced with brummagem practices in the name of civilization. Generally, our youth generation has failed to filter the good from the bad, and sublimate good foreign values over bad ones. Rather, what we have is the primacy of deviance. Since we have found ourselves in this situation, the most we could do as a people is, to teach values that affirms our relevance across all contexts, while discrediting malfeasance in all contexts, in each household. In this way, the new generation shall gradually come to renaissance;

Parental Guidance

One of the effective ways to tackle cultism in our universities is for parents and guardians *in loco parentis* to wake up to their responsibilities and bridge the lacuna that perfunctory parenting could bring. It is sad to note that most parents show little or no interest in the activities of their wards once they secured admission into the universities, thus, leaving them at the mercy of predators who seduce them to criminalities. The impressionable impulses of teens could not condone gaps, as most of them could not be trusted with unfettered freedom. They fall preys to corrosive influences of cultism, cyber-fraud, prostitution, and other ills. Hence, with weakened structures from the home fronts, and with persistent drive, joining the bandwagon becomes easy. Intimate rapport with wards and showing interest in their activities pull them back from the dangers of unfettered freedom;

Spiritual Refueling

Our curriculum in secondary schools presents us with opportunities to get 'educated' without necessarily getting 'acculturated' to the values and doctrinaires of religions, especially that of the two major religions in our clime, i.e. Islam and Christianity. The curriculum is modelled or taught in such ways that expose the learners to accepting the doctrines without necessarily adopting the values, hence, the skewed framework has been geared towards using the contents for examination purposes. The messages do not hit home, and as a result, spiritual desiccation sets in. The criminalization of our values continues unabated outside the classrooms, where notable practitioners of both religions continue to act irresponsibly, and provide bad examples. In this condition where dissonance between teachings and practice is vast, and where there is little or no correlation between content and practice, youths might find it difficult to resist the allure of cultism and other vices. It is incumbent on the spiritual leaders and religious organization to link meaning to content, and make substance out of the exalted messages of the holy books, in order to impact positively on the youths and the society at large;

Good Governance

Good governance boasts of welfarism for the populace and the teeming youth, who pursued university education to carve a solid future for themselves and probably bail their families and the society out of penury and ignorance. But where there is no longer a 'big picture' where the future promises bright times ahead, it might become difficult to convince the teens brimming with energy, to stay focused and not derail. Though it is often said that there is no excuse for engaging in criminalities, it should be noted that individuals are not the same, and that longanimity levels differ from persons to persons. In an impatient society with skewed values and a political class that brazenly promote and abet thievery, jaundiced minds are created, hence, the young people in the universities become cyber fraudsters and join cult groups as status symbols. Since government has abdicated its primary responsibility of ensuring welfare and security to its populace, superintending over a collapsed structure, primordial sentiments take over. Cultism is a direct result of such sentiments. Thus, reconceptualizing politics and changing the present political *kimono*, remains a viable means to dissuade youths from following the antisocial paths;

Herd Immunity Approach

This medical parlance could as well be used in this context to convey the meaning that students could collectively 'vaccinate' one another against cultism by adopting new paradigms of positive academic practice, and by discouraging and exposing negativity on their campuses. They are supremely placed to have information and fish out the bad eggs among them, if the collective will is stoked and deployed positively in this direction. They know the cultists among them and could easily expose them to the hierarchy for appropriate sanctions, and destabilize them before they get too dreadful. In concert with the appropriate authorities, students have the capabilities to sweep the campuses clean and rid them of cultists. As a crowd, they can achieve great feats;

Institutional Spirit

The idea of institutional character which influences and motivates students admitted to every university towards imbibing established tradition and institutional particularity seems to be disappearing, as a result of general instability and descent in structured programmes. Students proudly adopt and identify with particularistic cultures that connect them to the 'great tradition' of their universities, which teach positive values. With the decline, institutional spirit is affected, as there was a reduction in the tradition and practices that attach them to the universities, and serve as rallying points for all students. There is need for universities to revive institutional spirits in students with a view to promoting acquiescence with positive and motivating traditions that used to be part of the fabrics. Also, aggressive publicity should be given to discredit negative practices like cultism and other crimes through billboards and graffiti placed in conspicuous spots on campuses. Students should be introduced into some committees of the central system so that the decisions taken at some of the levels would not be alien to them, especially on issues that affect them directly. The important place occupied by Guidance Counsellors in the school system cannot be controverted. Their services should be made readily available for students who might need them. It is necessary to give them active part to play in defusing tensions, and in ensuring that they provide succor and solutions to students' concerns that could boomerang if left unattended.

5. CONCLUSION

Cultism has no doubt, become a humongous challenge in our universities. We noted in this work, that the phenomenon had festered as a result of cultural, socio-economic and existential challenges of the nation. We also noted that hinging the origin of this violent version of cultism on the mid 50s campus activities of Soyinka *et al* would be a misrepresentation of facts, as this type of cultism had shown felicity to social, political, economic and cultural integration in our societies. It is a reflection of the changes, orientations and signs of the times. The carnage, bloodbath and devious incinerations of lives and properties exhibited the peak of decay our societies have reached structurally, morally, and culturally since independence. The propensities of our youths towards this diablerie which is unprecedented are reflections of acceptability and marketability of violence in political circles. Youths sign the Faustian pact because their services were required by the political

godfathers at the substratum, who ensure that they operate with impunity. The phenomenon, which used to be confined within the walls of our universities, have trickled down to primary and secondary institutions, thus becoming layered. In recent times, even those who have never seen the four walls of a school now become acclaimed cultists. Street-cultism is the culmination of a problem that was not tackled from inception, and was allowed to percolate the entire society.

We have been able to interrogate the phenomenon of cultism on our campuses, emphasizing the causes of the problem and the devastation it has exacted on the nation's universities and the nation-state. We have underlined the fact that the pestilence, if not checked, would not only ruin the education sector, but would further affect the entire society, and that sincere measures needed to be taken to stem the tide.

6. Epilogue

Like a clip from a western, the barrage of gunshots that greeted the dawn on July 10, 1999 in Obafemi Awolowo University hostel attack remained a torment in the psyche of many people living some kilometers away from the sites of murder even today. The madness lasted for a long time, ceasing and picking up intermittently in crescendos. By the end of the carnage, five young students were left drenched in spattered brainstems and in a pool of blood. To imagine that young people were capable of such monstrous violence is disheartening, and much needed to be done if the future of the nation should be secured.

To the memory of all the departed souls shuttered midstream by cultists.

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