

The Comet

Education

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Cultists on the prowl

Emboldened by the N10million handed out by the government, higher schools, especially the universities, set up committees for the eradication of cultism on their campuses. Most of them made renunciation of cultism by students media events. But six years after, the cultists are back on the prowl, killing, maiming and terrorising students, teachers, administrators and host communities.



By Kayode Olanrewaju, Odunayo Daramola (Ado-Ekiti); Ernest Nwokolo (Ijebu-Ode); Abayomi Daramola (Ondo) and John Mayaki (Benin).

on the renunciation of cultism.

The resurgence of cultism is blamed on the inability of the government and school administrators to curb the vice.

Three years after the government gave each higher institution N10 million to fight the scourge, over 200 students were killed in cult-related attacks on various campuses across the nation.

At the Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, no fewer than 33 students were killed in the orgy of cultism. Also at the University of Ilorin (UNILORIN), it was the same tale of woe that year. About 10 students were critically injured while some lost their lives in cult attack on the institution's mini-campus.

On August 1, that year, two students of the university were hacked down during an invasion by cultists after a similar attack barely a month earlier.

Sunday Agbokeye, a Higher Diploma Accounting student at the Department of Accountancy, Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State had his five fingers chopped off by cult members.

At the Lagos State University (LASU), Ojo, the situation was not different. Twenty-five year old Tunde Salau, the then president of the Students Union Government (SUG) and final year Economics student was killed by cultists while writing his final paper in 2002 at the Faculty of Management Science.

In 2004, a Part IV student in the Economics Department was shot dead right on campus. In December of that year, a final year student in the Department of Business Administration identified as "Sky" was cut down in broad day-light by 12 suspected cultists on the campus.

Also, 24-year old Peter Phippen Adaba, a student in the Department of English, was kidnapped and killed by suspected cultists, his eyes plucked, his fingers chopped off and a chunk of flesh from his chest sliced away.

The Lagos State Polytechnic (LASPOTEC), Ikorodu, Lagos, had its own bitter taste of cultism when a lecturer was attacked and inflicted with serious injuries on his head. It took the intervention of the management who footed the bill for carrying out surgical operation on him to save him.

Some students who spoke on condition of anonymity in 2004 said then that the nation was yet to witness the worst of cultism in schools.

The orgy of cultism which, caught the Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU), Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State last month, where about five students and a lecturer, Mr James Oluseun Oyadola, at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts lost their lives in cult attacks threw the institution into panic and anxiety.

The body of Oyedola, who was declared missing after the clash at Abusi-Edumare, Ijebu-Igbo campus of the university on June 23, was found four days later in a bush by a search team. At the end of the clash, a 200-Level Philosophy student, Mr Hassan O. Akeem, was found dead. Barely two weeks

to that attack, a lecturer in the Department of English, Mr Olawale Olaoluwa Oyedele, 46, died in mysterious circumstances.

The "terrorism attack" was traced to a retaliatory attack by rival cult groups - Eiye Fraternity, the Buccaneers and the Black Axe, whose members stormed the 23-year old institution in reprisal attacks.

To the members of the university community, the attack was shocking, a dangerous trend and a calculated attempt to cow the entire university environment.

Since the attack, students, parents and the university live in fear that some other cult groups, might want to avenge the death of their members.

June, the sixth month of the year, is somehow synonymous with cultism in the school.

In the past four years, various cult groups have chosen the month to unleash terror on the campuses, especially during examination or when exams are at hand.

In June 2003, two rival cult groups struck, killing a student. On June 2 and 3, 2004, cultists cashed on the conflicts between the Oru chapter of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) over higher fare from Oru to the university main campus. The attack left two students dead.

Sesan Fadeyi, a final year student in the Department of Philosophy and one of the victims of last month's attack recalled how he escaped death by the whiskers. He sustained various degrees of injuries during the attack.

Following the attack, the university was shut down for two weeks for normalcy to return.

On June 15 and 16 last year, the university was engulfed in violent cult clashes that left on its trail broken limbs, rape victims and wanton destruction of properties worth several millions of Naira.

As part of efforts to curb the excesses of the cult groups, the Ogun State Government drafted armed security personnel to the university. The operatives now keep surveillance on the university community and carry out routine checks on students in and out of the two campuses.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Odutola Osilesi said, the university would leave no stone unturned in its efforts to curb cult killings and activities.

In the past two weeks, no fewer than 110 students were expelled from the university.

Another 360 students are to appear before the Students Disciplinary Committee for alleged gross misconduct.

OOU Students Union President, Comrade Femi Awoyele deplored what he described as the "theatre of violence" in the institution and urged students and members of staff to be more vigilant and security conscious.

Said he: "The feeling of insecurity among the students of late is as a result of security threat on campus."

Awoyele assured members of the university community that efforts were being made to bring the situation under control.

Meanwhile, the university has set up a panel of inquiry to investigate the recent upsurge in violence and cult killings on its campuses.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), OOU chapter, was shocked and aggrieved over the killing of its members and the state of insecurity in the university.

Its chairman, Gbenga Ogunbote, threatened to call his members out of the classrooms and laboratories until adequate security is ensured.

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Cultists on the prowl

A similar cult attack, which occurred at the University of Ado-Ekiti (UNAD), Ekiti State on June 8, left in its trail tears, agony, fear and anxiety. Two students including an officer of the cadet corps were killed in the incident. It took the intervention of the Iworo-Ekiti, the university's host community, to curtail an escalation of the crisis.

More stringent security measures have been put in place by the university, to prevent what the university's Vice Chancellor, Prof Isreal Orubuloye described as "our own version of September 11".

At the university's main gate, anti-riot policemen, drafted to keep the peace in the wake of the June 8 attack, were still at their posts. A source told our reporter that operatives of the State Security Service (SSS) are also on the school's campus.

Since the last incident occurred, each driver entering the campus gets a tally which is expected to be returned to the security post when leaving.

Besides, commercial vehicles are thoroughly screened.

According to Orubuloye, the university's security officials would undergo re-training while necessary support would be offered members of the cadet corps, the target of the cultists in the last attack.

Orubuloye had met stakeholders in the wake of the attack, briefing them on the new security measures being adopted. He told them that students would wear identity cards about for easy identification.

The Vice-Chancellor said a meeting was held with the Iworoko community, host of the university for the assistance rendered in the last cult attack which led to the arrest of two of the eighteen suspected cultists.

A joint security committee was set up by the university and the community. The university cadet corps, the VC added, would be encouraged to do its work without molestation.

Orubuloye also noted that the university would be more thorough on its screening of students. He said the names of expelled students published in newspapers would be thoroughly checked to ensure that no student expelled elsewhere for cultism finds his way to UNAD.

He also disclosed that names and photographs of students expelled from the university for cultism would be posted on the university's website.

It was gathered that following the cult attacks at the Obafemi Awolowo

University (OAU), Ile-Ife in 1999, which led to the death of six students, the Federal Government gave a "marching order" to all institutions of higher learning to step up activities towards the eradication of the vice.

At the Federal Polytechnic Ado-Ekiti, "Anti-cult programmes are held for students in which they are mobilised and enlightened on the evils of cultism.

"If such is investigated and found to be true, they forfeit their studentship. In our matriculation oath, they are made to swear not to belong to unregistered anti-social groups. The wages of cultism is expulsion and termination of studentship," the polytechnic spokesman, Mr Adeyemi Adejolu said.

Although, the polytechnic has not witnessed any cult-related attack for over six years, Adejolu said the school runs social and academic programmes while the heavy academic workload leaves little or no time for students to indulge in cultism.

At the College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, the Provost, Dr Timothy Ikudayisi spoke of moves to eradicate cultism. He noted that security officials have been put on red alert over threats by suspected cult members to attack the campus.

"As part of the security measures undertaken to avert the onslaught of the cultists, the school management had placed a ban on commercial vehicles entering the campus since most of the cult groups are outside the campus," the provost said.

Ikudayisi said the college organised a seminar on how to eradicate cultism in which lectures, delivered by resource persons, were compiled into a book entitled: *Cultism and its attendant effects*.

The book, which was approved by the National Commission of Colleges of Education (NCCE) was sold at N500 per copy to students. Over 10,000 copies of the book are said to have been sold.

Ikudayisi also read the riot act to the students on cultism at the swearing-in of officials of the Students Union Government (SUG).

He warned those who belonged to secret cults to renounce their membership as the college for integration into the college, failing which they would be expelled when exposed.

Ikudayisi said the names and the data of cult members in the college are being

monitored by an anti-cult committee.

Members of cult groups are said to be asking for a tenth of the sales proceeds.

At the Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, a Part Three NCE student in the Department of Primary Education/Social Studies, Friday Omuye, was said to have been stabbed in the stomach by some of his alleged cult colleagues. He died in the hospital.

A violent clash between two rival cult groups at the Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma in Edo State, left three students dead and three others injured. *The Comet* gathered that the clash occurred when a member of the Eiye confraternity strode into a birthday party organised by a member of a rival group, the Black Axe confraternity, provoking a clash.

The groups, at night launched an attack on those at the party, killing two of the students instantly. One was said to have been shot, while the other was axed to death.

The clash, it was gathered, heightened tension in institutions of higher learning across the state, as the two cult groups have members in tertiary institutions.

In Benin city, suspected cultists waylaid our reporter, stripping him of valuables.

Three months ago, suspected cultists threatened to kill the Vice-Chancellor of University of Benin, Prof. Emmanuel Nwanze, if he failed to dissolve the committee on "Renunciation of Cultism," which he set up after two medical students of the university were killed by suspected cultists. The cultists have also widened the scope of their operations to include armed robbery.

One of the members was identified to have graduated from the university.

No fewer than 24 students of the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, belonging to various cult groups were arrested by the school authority in collaboration with law enforcement agents.

According to the Director of Information of the university, Dr. Akhilomen, the arrest was to forestall a cult clash. He said that the approach would be adopted as a strategy in a bid to sustain the present level of successful war against cultism.

Akhilomen said security and intelligence outfits have virtually closed on suspected cultists, adding that in the event of the slightest breach of the peace, the suspects

would be rounded up to face the law.

The suspected cult members were moved to the state Force Headquarters in Benin City to their level of involvement in cult-related activities.

In July 2005, the Edo State police command deployed mobile policemen to beef up security at Ekiadolor community, a Benin suburb, when suspected cult members kidnapped the village head, Pa Iyekowa, and held him hostage for over four hours in the bush. The cultists sought for the release of their leader.

For instance, accusing fingers are being pointed at the government for lack of sincerity of purpose in tackling cultism headlong.

According to observers, the eradication of cultism and violent crimes on campuses transcends mere allocation of funds without the right law being put in place to punish cultists.

Three years ago, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors (CVC), called for the re-introduction of police posts withdrawn 26 years ago from the campuses.

To them, the return of the posts would help salvage the situation and help curb crimes on the campuses.

The government withdrew the police from the campuses in 1978 following the "Ali-Must-Go" protest during which several students, including a UNILAG student, Adekunle Ojo were killed.

To combat the rising cases of cultism and other sundry violent crimes on campuses, the Lagos State Polytechnic, two years ago, introduced its own campus marshal.

According to its Rector, Mr Olawumi Anthony Gasper, the security outfit is headed by a retired and experienced Army colonel.

To complement the efforts of the well-armed security unit, the polytechnic recently expelled over 1,500 students for alleged certificate forgery, admission irregularities and cult-related activities.

Gasper said the measures had greatly reduced, if not eliminated cult activities in the polytechnic.

LASU also followed, introducing Campus Marshal, whose members patrol the campus with ammunition to ward off cultists.

Worried by the rising case of cult activities on campuses, some states have enacted laws on cultism on campuses.

Such laws, according to the states, are to treat cult offenders as criminals.

But since their introduction, no cultist has been brought to book. According to observers, until this is done, such laws will remain mere paper tigers.