

Religious Violence in Nigeria: A Comparison of Boko Haram and Maitatsine Groups

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Abstract— This paper compares the activities and impacts of Boko Haram and Maitatsine terrorist groups in Nigeria. The historical surfacing of the two groups and circumstances surrounding the acceptance of the groups by some local population were explained. Although the two existed in a different period of time, the paper identifies that they shared some common ideas regarding western education. Hence, they resorted to the use of violence means to impose their ideas on people. While Boko Haram is an international terrorist group with a relative understanding of teaching of Islam, believed and accepted the tradition of the prophet of Islam, and ascribed themselves to the Wahabi salafi jihadist, the Maitatsine group, on the other hand insisted that only the Quran should be learned and practiced by Muslims, regarding any statement reported from the prophet of Islam or any other Islamic source as unauthentic, unacceptable and mere heresy. The Maitatsine group is also more of a local terrorist group with apparently no international linkages, except that some few members including its leader hailed from neighboring countries. The paper concludes that the members of the two groups have little knowledge of Islam, as no any renowned and recognized Islamic scholar endorsed their ideas.

Keywords— Religious crises, Boko Haram, Maitatsine, Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Extremism among Muslims can be traced back to the early history of Islam when Dhul-Khuwaysirah at-Tamim rebelled and challenged Prophet Muhammad PBUH to be just. Some companions of the Prophet present at that time sought his permission to deal with the person, but he objected and prophesied that: There shall emerge a generation of such person who will speak with the best (and most alluring) of speech (that is spoken) by people and will recite the Qur`an but it will not go beyond their throat, they will pass out of Islam as the arrow passes through its game.

During the reign of the third Muslim Caliph Uthman, the revolutionary Saba`ite movement whos rebellion, eventually led to the assassination of Uthman emerged. Thereafter the Kharijite revolted against the fourth Caliph Ali who was also assassinated by the group. The Kharijites eject Muslims from Islam on account of major sin, revolt against the rulers with arms and incite local populace to fight against them.

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Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 A.H 1328 C.E) said: the Kharijites strived to kill every Muslim who did not agree with their view, declaring the blood of the Muslims, their wealth and the killing of their children to be lawful, considering that as an act of worship due to their ignorance and innovation which caused them to stray.

The Prophet illustrated that people with such view will never cease to appear until the emergence of Dajjal (the anti-Christ). Therefore the emergence of movements such as ISIL, Boko Haram, Maitatsine etc in the contemporary Muslim`s world was long Prophesied by the Prophet of Islam. Just as their views and activities were long condemned by Islam.

Since its inception in 1914, Nigeria has witnessed several devastating religious violence in which the followers of the two major religions of the country (Islam and Christianity) lost lives and properties. Boko Haram and Maitatsine religious violence are two examples of the serious religious crises which Nigerians cannot simply forget. Some writers like {Moses E. & Abimbola Adesoji} have tried to make a comparison of the groups but the approach they follow is more of mere opinion in news papers than an academic writing, thus, they focused their attention on the material side of the two groups, comparing their military power, area of domination and attacks, the political goal etc, ignoring the actual teachings of the groups and looking at the issue from religious or an academic angle.

II. THE EMERGENCE OF MAITATSINE

The word Maitatsine is a Hausa language word which simply means the one who curse, this is because the leader of Maitatsine group used to repeat, frequently during his preaching wanda bata yarda ba, Allah ta tsine meaning those who don`t believe in what we preach may God curse them.

Not much is known about the early life of the founder of the Maitatsine sect, save that his name is Muhammadu Marwa (d.1980), and his second name indicates he was originally from Marwa in northern Cameroon of the west African sub-region. After his education he moved to Kano, in northern Nigeria in about 1945, where he became known for his contentious preachings on the Qur`an. The British colonial authorities at that time banished him to exile. Towards the late

1960, after independence Maitatsine made his way back to Kano, and in 1962 the emir of Kano Sir, Muhammad Sanusi issued a royal order indicting Maitatsine of various crimes which include preaching illegally and committing Shatimati (public abuse of royal and political authorities), he was therefore arraigned before a Qadhi who sentenced him to ninety days in jail, after which he was deported for the second time to his country Cameroon. In the early 1970 he made his way back to Kano again and continued to preach the way he did before, he was severally arrested on different times. On 18th December 1980 the members of Maitatsine sect overwhelmingly defeated the police unit consisting one hundred and fifty personnel who were sent to disperse the members who gathered at their usual preaching site situated at Shahuci. This victory of Maitatsine disciples boosted their morale and continued to disturb the people of Kano, and at the end the State government left with no option than to seek the intervention of the military to end the crises, after 48 hours of the military campaign the sect was crushed and the leader Muhammad Marwa died as a result of gun wounds. His disciples dispersed across northern states in Nigeria and staged similar crises in Bulunkutu of Borno state in 1982, Jimeta-Yola of Adamawa state in 1984 and Pantami ward in Gombe in 1985[Awoniya. 7]

III. TEACHINGS OF MAITATSINE GROUP

There is no written document traced to the Maitatsine group which explains the group's teachings, therefore, writers mostly rely on what was heard of his teachings during his preachings, the most deviated teachings from the conventional Muslims teachings are rejection of the Hadith and the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH, regarding the reading of any other book other than the Quran as paganism and the declaring himself prophet sent by Almighty Allah. Other teachings of the group include the condemnation against the use of modern equipments such as radios, television sets, watches, bicycles, cars and the possession of more money than necessary.

IV. THE EMERGENCE OF BOKO HARAM

The name Boko Haram is a combination of Hausa and Arabic words respectively, the word Boko literally means fake, while the word Haram means forbidden. The word Boko fake was long ago used by Hausa speakers, during the British colonial rule to refer to the western education imposed on the local populace by the colonialist, which they believed at that time is opposed to the long inherited Islamic education.

Boko Haram is usually translated as western education is forbidden. The group has an official name which is Jama'at Ahl us-Sunnah li'd-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad the group emerged in 2002 under the leadership of Muhammad Yusuf in Maiduguri of Borno state of northeastern Nigeria who was born in 1970 in Girgir of Jakusko local government of Yobe state. Despite the fact that Muhammad Yusuf appeared to be a Salafi-based oriented person, but he was not able to attend and complete any formal Islamic school in or outside Nigeria, in fact one

Islamic Scholar and proprietor of Damaturu High Islamic school Malam Hudu explained that Muhammad Yusuf requested him to assist him obtained high Islamic certificate from his school, but returned the request. Therefore he obtained his Islamic education from scholars who give lessons in mosques and from other sources like radio cassettes etc.

V. TEACHINGS OF BOKO HARAM

The teachings of the group are mostly compiled from the lectures and sermons of the two leaders of the group Muhammad Yusuf and Shekau and as well as the movement's pamphlet known as *Hadhi Aqidatuna wa Manhaj Da'awatina*. The main teaching is based on the opposition of western education and western system governance and life, for instance Muhammad Yusuf rejected the concept of a spherical earth and the Darwinian evolution and the concept of the condensation cycle that produces rain. The group also condemned working under government and regarded that an act of infidelity.

Ahmad M. (2013) highlights the teachings of the group as follows:

* Affirming Hākimiyyah for Allāh only, and that democracy totally conflicts with Islām. They hold politicians who participate in elections as all being kuffār due to them being involved with a system which conflicts with Islām. They say that "ruling by man-made laws is clear kufr [Kufrān Buwāhan]". .

* They prohibit studying in the ewestern ducational system from primary through to university level for the reasons that missionaries and colonialists established these schools as a means to serve their missionary interests among Muslims in Nigeria. They argue that the Islamic system of education was widespread in our country before the missionaries arrived and it was still fully functioning until the colonialists took over the entire country. They also condemned mixing between the genders [Ikhtilāt] and Tabarruj [uncovering and wearing impermissible revealing attire], while Allāh says: "And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance."

* The movement rejects employment under the current democratic Nigerian government, whether as a member of the police, military, security services or any other government position. They regard this as total obedience to a disbelieving system while Allāh says: "And do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire, and you would not have other than Allāh any protectors; then you would not be helped." {Hūd (11): 113} After mentioning a number of ahādeeth which he views as justifying this stance, Muhammad Yūsuf mentioned in one lecture: "All of these ahādeeth provide a decisive indication that employment under the government which does not rule by the Book and Sunnah is impermissible. These governments rule solely by Satanic man-made laws, and thus the impermissibility of working in the police or army is even more so."

These are some of the Boko Haram teachings, and now we

move to the comparison of the two groups.

VI. COMPARISON OF THE TWO GROUPS

Many writers both academicians and non-academicians have authored books and papers on Maitatsine and Boko Haram movements, some have made comparison of them but not from religious angle. Moses Ocheno (2015), in his writing entitled: *Boko Haram Is Not Maitatsine*, tried to make a comparison between the two groups in terms of their militancy, weaponry and other aspects, he established that Maitatsine was a localized religious movement with no inspirational and ideological ties to foreign groups. Boko Haram, on the other hand, derives inspiration and ideological nourishment from global jihadist groups like Al-Qaida and ISIS and models itself after the Afghan Taliban and ISIS.

He further maintained that Maitatsine was a largely urban movement and their residential areas (such as Yan Awaki in Kano, Bulunkutu in Maiduguri, etc) could easily be identified and attacked. Conversely, Boko Haram is largely a rural insurgency, although it has a presence in both rural and urban areas. This makes the task of identifying and crushing its fighters and infrastructures more complicated. Maitatsine's followers fought with bows and arrows and perhaps a few locally made guns. These were no match for the firearms of the Nigerian security services. Boko Haram on the other hand boasts of an arsenal of weapons that is as deadly if not more deadly and modern than that of the Nigerian armed forces.

Maitatsine was numerically much smaller than Boko Haram. Maitatsine's presence was confined to four urban areas, Kano, Maiduguri, Yola, and Gombe. Boko Haram is everywhere in the entire Northeast and Northwest zones of the country and has staged attacks all over those areas and even in Abuja, the capital of the country, and Lagos in the south west of the country. Maitatsine had no capacity for bomb making; Boko Haram does. Maitatsine members and their families largely ran from soldiers sent to combat them because of the asymmetry of weaponry; Boko Haram brazenly takes on the army, confident in their ability to match and even surpass the weapons of Nigerian troops.

Maitatsine was not a radical territorial movement intent on capturing, holding, and governing territory as part of an imagined theocratic state or caliphate; Boko Haram is. The sheer scale and intensity of Boko Haram's brutality make Maitatsine a primitive, mildly destructive uprising. Although the leader of Maitatsine, Mohammad Marwa was from Cameroon, the Maitatsine uprisings were confined to Nigeria, unlike Boko Haram, which now threatens Cameroon and Niger and has emerged as a regional insurgency.

Boko Haram is a deadlier, more ambitious, more extreme, and more globally inspired movement than Maitatsine was. Murtala A. (2013) in his book entitled: *Boko Haram in Nigeria*: It's beginning, Principles and Activities in Nigeria, had a look on the group from the religious angle, and distanced it's creeds from the original salafi manhaj, establishing that Boko Haram were mere Khawarij who revolt against

legitimate authority, he cited many examples of early scholars statements which condemned revolting against rulers, however Murtala did not make a comparison between Boko Haram and Maitatsine, although he mentioned the group as one of the violent religious group in northern Nigeria.

Maitatsine group insist that only the Glorious Qur'an should be learnt, teach and practice by Muslims and any other things weather Hadith of the Prophet PBUH or other Islamic sources are unauthentic, unacceptable and a mere heresy. The Boko Haram on the other hand accept the Hadith of the prophet PBUH and work with other Islamic sources particularly those that emanate from the Salafist authorities. Here the two groups differed, this due to the fact that Maitatsine leader and his disciples are mostly students who learnt recitation of the Qur'an and its meanings from what was known in Hausa language Masu Wa'azin Turmi (the unqualified people who preach in market places). Most of these people dont know Arabic language, let alone other Islamic subjects that are prerequisite for embarking on doing Tafsir. The groups consider those who opposed their teachings as infidels who are allowed by Shariah to be killed. The leader of Maitatsine group claimed prophet hood, and non of Boko Haram leaders do. Maitatsine group condemned the use of modern equipments such as radios, television sets, watches, bicycles, cars and the possession of more money than necessary. Boko Haram never do that, except that they rejected the concept of a spherical earth and the Darwinian evolution and the concept of the condensation cycle that produces rain. Boko Haram and Maitatsine are generally violent in their teaching and preaching, this has given them resemblance to Kharijites.

VII. CONCLUSION

Maitatsine and Boko Haram are two religious groups existed in northern Nigeria, who lunched a ferricious attack on government and people of northern Nigeria in which they killed several innocent people. in the process of comprison of the groups we have seen how they agree on condemning those who refuse to accept their calling and dare to kill them innocently, the groups differed in terms of teachings and principles as Maitatsine appeared to reject anything other than the Quran while Boko Haram present themselves as the people of Sunnah and practice the teaching of the Prophet PBUH, we have also seen that Boko Haram is more of global terrorist group having link with ISIS while Maitatsine group was more of local organization with limited influence in some northern Nigeria states.

The paper identifies that the emergence of extrimist group like Maitatsine and Boko Haram is caused by several factors, these include the Nigerian system of government who's constitution granted an absolute right to citizens to practice any kind of belief he wishes, in the process of using such right some exceed and violate the teaching of the religion they claim to belong , yet no one can forced them to order due to the so called freedom of religion. It is for the benefit of peace and tranquillity of the country to make a provision which will grant

authority to the original custodian of religion, Emires and Ulama', to have control over religious affairs since that was the case before the colonialist invasion, and history has it that there was no religious crises like that of Boko Haram and Maitatsine at that time because of the absolute control the emires and Ulama have over religious and other affairs.

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