

Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The “Maitatsine” and “Boko Haram” Crises in Northern Nigeria

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BACKGROUND

“In the context of general interest in Islam and the Muslim world, Nigeria has become a focus of attention” (Sanusi, 2007, p. 198).

Great social thinkers like Karl Marx, Engels, Nietzsche, Lenin and David Hume have postulated the ‘death’ of religion in the face of philosophy, economy and improved standard of living condition of humans. The argument holds that suffering and social hardships make religion relevant in the society. Karl Marx, in fact, canvassed for the abolition of religion because it is illusory to genuine human happiness. For him, therefore, “*The abolition of the religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness*” (see, Social Theory: Marxism, retrieved from <http://www.megaessay.com/viewpaper/16779.html>). This philosophy and social theory of religion have influenced contemporary social theorists and thinkers. “*Not least, Western-trained thinkers largely failed to foresee the resurgence of religion, because they had made a series of wrong assumptions about the place of religion in regimes of modernisation*” (Ellis and Haar, 2004: 17). Modernity will take care of religion and give it its deserved place in the past. This is because the “*practice of defining Western modernity in terms of ‘leaving religion behind’ has become common*” (Willaime, 2006: 77; see also Monod, 2002). Modernity promotes secularism which denotes liberation from the ‘growing worldliness of religion’. For Marcel Gauchet (cited in Willaime, 2006: 83) “*Religious belief is ceasing to be political. It is abandoning its time-honoured involvement in the form taken by human communities...This emancipation from the initial framework that contained the agreement about our world ushers us into a new age of politics and, more broadly, historical action*”. Beck (1992: 10) summarises modernity vis-à-vis religion thus: “*In*

the nineteenth century, privileges of rank and religious world views were being demystified...” Accordingly, the general thinking is that:

“While religion may persist in modern societies, and in great variety, it is assumed that the claims of religion have been relativised, by both the abundance of conflicting and yet plausible options available and the increasing idiosyncratic nature of peoples’ religious beliefs and practices. For both reasons, it is assumed, religious activities are becoming increasingly marginal aspects of peoples’ lives. In short, the significance of religion as a force in social life is structurally impaired” (See, Dawson, 2006: 105; Also, see, Giddens, 1990).

For a long time therefore, scholarship did not pay much attention to the study of religion, considered to be a private affair. Promoters of secularism have also played a crucial role in reducing the potency of religion in public life. Secularization theory holds that Christianity, with its value centred on the promotion of Western education, intrinsically brings about rationalization- independence in thought- which naturally reduces the significance of organized associations such as religion (Wilson, 1982; Weber, 2002). In the greater part of the 20th century, it would seem that Max Weber’s ‘Protestant Ethic’ has made a deep impression on the rise of capitalism, which inadvertently ‘diminished’ the strength of religion in the society in the face of consumerism and hedonism. For Marx, religion is the “sigh of the oppressed”, the “opium of the people” which abolishment can only occur by emancipation from “the estranged world of human objectification” (see, Tucker, 1978: 54).

After the collapse of communism in 1989, which marked the end of the ideological battle between the East and the West, the late political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington (1996) has warned in his seminal research ‘Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order’ that emerging civilizations especially from the Arab world and the communist China would pose serious challenges to Western civilization.

“The West is and will remain for years to come the most powerful civilization. Yet its power relative to that of other civilizations is declining. As the West attempts to assert its values and to protect its interests, non-Western societies confront a choice. Some attempt to emulate the West and to join or to “band-wagon” with the West. Other Confucian and Islamic societies attempt to expand their own economic and military power to resist and to “balance” against the West. A central axis of the post-Cold War world politics is thus the interaction of Western power and culture of non-Western civilization” (Huntington, 2003: 29).

Beckford and Wallis (2006) have clearly represented the mind of Huntington when they said the latter emphasized the importance of religion for civilization, because for Huntington, civilization “*applies not only to those societies defined by their identification with Islam, but also structures what we mean by the ‘the West’, since this is constituted by societies that have evolved along specifically Christian lines*”. The 9/11 2001, when the twin towers of New York were put down by an Islamic fundamentalist attack, led by Osama Bin Laden, and which led to the death of thousands of innocent people, religion began to gain global prominence. It became the centre stage of scholarly discourse and analysis trying to understand the entanglement between religion and violence. Beckford and Wallis (2006: 11) have

observed that “*Today, however, it often appears that we have a different problem: rather than there being too little religion, it may be said that there is too much*”, especially with the rising tide of militant activities reinforced by religious ideologies.

In Nigeria especially, religion plays a very vital and influential role in the society that has manifested itself as a potent force in the political development of the Nigerian state from pre-independence to post-independence. Hardly can the Nigerian state be talked about without reference to religion (Kukah, 1994; Falola, 1990; Kenny, 2006; International IDEA, 2000; Suberu, 2009). However, religion in Nigeria, at different levels, is mostly mentioned in negative terms. Or rather, historical events linked to religion tilts more towards its negative than its positive contribution to the Nigerian state. The Jihad, the civil war propaganda, the *Sharia* law controversy, the tensions provoked by the Nigerian accession to the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the incessant religious crises that have engulfed the Northern part mainly indicate that religion cannot be ignored or wished away in the Nigerian political development.

Several religious crises have occurred in Nigeria. They have been documented as academic dissertations for some of them. This piece of work does not intend to start the discourse on religious violence anew but only recognises the fact that as a recurrent phenomenon it is worth being explored further. Thus, the “Maitatsine” and “Boko Haram” sectarian riots of December 1980 and July 2009, which are the central focus of this study, add to the debate on the place of religion on the governance in Nigeria. Contrary to common opinions on why the crises broke out, we strongly believe that these sectarian crises can be traced and linked to the failure of governance in Nigeria. We acknowledge that a study of this nature can best be substantiated by a practical field experience since it spanned six Northern states. Interaction with victims and primary witnesses would have enriched the work more. However, analysis of this piece of work relies mostly on media deduction and academic presentations.

ISLAM

Defining religion has and will always be an arduous task; it can be viewed from different points of angles such as philosophy, philology or theology. For example, a definition of Islam can be undertaken from the word “*Salam*”, which means peace, but the understanding of Islam as a way of life goes beyond the derivative to incorporate a complete way of life. Therefore, Islam cannot be totally understood without the component of *Umma Muhammadiya* which is the community of Muslim believer and the *Dar-ul-Islam* (place of peace). Cragg (1965) described “*terra Islamica*” which for him best illustrates Islam, as: “*a land where things are forever bearing witness to ideas and ideas to things; where things and ideas alternately and simultaneously, are exalted and humiliated in a constant shift from act to essence, from abstract to concrete*”. Islam, therefore, means total submission to the will of Allah (God) as revealed by the prophetic message of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. It is guided by the five pillars of the belief in one monotheistic God, prayer (through the medium of Arabic); fasting; arms giving; and pilgrimage to Mecca.

Islam derives its strength from simplicity and contentment because it “*offers no unattainable ideal, no priests, no bishops, there are no complexities of dogma or ritual...and there are no barriers whatever of caste, race or colour*” (Hobgen and Kirk-Greene, 1966: 20). Peace in Islam, therefore, remains a means to an end, which is the *al-janna* (paradise) being Allah’s reward for righteousness.

FUNDAMENTALISM

Fundamentalism is an eclectic word that can be viewed from three perspectives- (i) from a cognitive understanding where the word is associated with a closed personality type that expresses exclusivity, particularity, literality and moral rigour; (ii) from a cultural theological framework where the word expresses opposition to religious and cultural liberalism in defence of orthodoxy and religious traditions; (iii) from a social movement perspective, fundamentalism denotes organizational and ideological uniqueness from other types of religious movements (Komonchak, Collins and Lane, 1993: 411). Religious fundamentalism is a microscopic but also a literal understanding of religious practices and teachings, especially in its relation to the direct transliteration of the Holy Scriptures and its insistence on the sacred perpetuation of the traditions. In other words, fundamentalists stress “*the authority of scripture and the necessity of righteous living*”. It also places great emphasis “on right doctrine and the necessity of organized warfare against the forces of modernism” (Ibidem, p. 212). It is in this light that this paper discusses the Maitatsine and Boko Haram fundamentalist reactions to the Nigerian state.

ISLAM AND SECTARIANISM

Khuri (1990) has made a brief but interesting study about understanding religion and sectarianism in Islam. He classified religion as *Din*, which can mean judgment, faith and divine law, and sect as *Ta’ifa* and said the word *Ta’ifa* (sect) recurs more than 26 times in the Qur’an. He adds that this word is often used interchangeably with words like team, strain and creed. The word *Ta’ifa* means literally ‘a part splitting from a whole’ or a ‘split-off group’. In this sense, a sect is a segregated group of persons who may not necessarily disbelieve a religion but holds to certain fundamentals of the religion as platforms of belief expression. Every religion is therefore inundated with different sectarian movements. That is the reason why Sa’b (1981: 34) said that “Islam is a continuously interpretive revolution”. This is to say that sectarian movements would continue to emerge as long as there is dynamism in religious thoughts and practices.

To further understand the ambivalent character of sectarianism in Islam, there is a need to underscore the fact that whereas religion is all-embracing and all-encompassing, sectarianism isolates group members with particular and peculiar

identity from the larger body. In this regard, all Muslim faithful can profess Islam as their religion but not all can claim to be members of a sect, and there are many sects in Islam as there are variations in teachings and interpretations.

The earliest known sects in Islam are perhaps the Sunni and the Shi'a (Shiites). Whereas the Sunni believe in integrating religion and society by adopting religion to state structures, the Shiites believe in religious Puritanism such that Islam must be practiced in its pure form and must be guarded from being adulterated by the society. Secondly, there is also a controversy over the origin of their caliphs (representatives of the Prophet of Islam). Whereas the Sunni have designated family roots that would always produce the caliphs or imams, the Shi'a believe that the position of imam can even be earned by commoners who have excelled in religious teachings and traditions. Since the Sunni adopted religion to social structures, they also have accepted and respected political authority. In fact, Sunni leaders can function both as religious and political leaders. The Emirate systems of administration actually derive from the Sunni tradition. On the other hand:

“Shi'a sources always depict their Imams as ‘the wretched’, ‘the tortured’, ‘the humble poor’, ‘the worshippers of God’ and ‘the followers of his religion’. By contrast, the imam’s enemies are depicted as ‘the usurpers of power’, ‘the religiously corrupt’, ‘money mongrels’, ‘the worshippers of gold’” (Khuri, 1990: 40).

To this day, the Sunni and the Shiites have continued to engage themselves in fratricidal wars over the origin of their caliphs or imams. This violence has been of an indefinable magnitude in Iraq where thousands have been sacrificed to death as a result of sectarian violence between the Sunni and the Shiites. A recent report considers that 85,694 persons have lost their lives in Iraq over the last four years. This number depicts deaths recorded by the issuance of official death certificates by the Ministry of Health in Iraq (see, *The Guardian*, Thursday, October 13, 2009, p. 11).

There are different Islamic sects in Nigeria among which are the *Derika*, the *Izala*, the *Kaulu (Kablu)*, the Muslim brothers, the *Tijjaniya* and the *Quaddiriya*, the Shiite, the Muslim Brotherhood, and several other splinter groups. Once in a while, there are skirmishes between and among some of the sects. In Zuru town of Kebbi State, in Northwestern Nigeria, serious violence over the control of the market (then central) mosque between the *Derika* and *Izala* sects occurred in 1987 for instance. It led to the closure of the mosque for several years and to this day, the two sects have separate mosques where they worship. However, sectarian activities that threatened the corporate existence of the Nigerian state and rejected political authority have been less common. The “Maitatsine” riots of December 1980 and “Boko Haram” riots of July 2009 are one of those. Activities of both sects culminated in violent demonstrations and resistance that led to the death of thousands of people.

PHILOSOPHICAL DOCTRINE AND IDEOLOGY OF “MAITATSINE” AND “BOKO HARAM” SECTS

Muhammed Marwa was an Islamic scholar who migrated from the town of Marwa in Northern Cameroun to the city of Kano in 1945. While in Kano he became an Islamic zealot concerned with the purification of Islam. He believed that Islam had been corrupted by modernization (Westernization) and the formation of the modern state. His constant preaching became very abusive and provocative, especially against established institutions like the emirate and the political class to the extent that the then Emir of Kano, Alhaji Sanusi Lamido, expelled him from Kano. Marwa found his way back to Kano in 1966, presumably after the death of Alhaji Sanusi. Between 1972 and 1979 Marwa was detained in prison several times for his provocative preaching and acts of lawlessness against the state. As Falola (1990: 143) puts it:

“He (Marwa) was a Qur’anic teacher and preacher. Forceful, persuasive and charismatic, he rebelled against many popular opinions among Kano Islamic circles, denouncing certain parts of the Holy Qur’an and even criticizing Prophet Muhammad. At one stage in his career, Marwa granted himself his most prestigious credential when he revealed himself to be an **annabi**; a prophet with divine power and a mission to save the world...He was alleged to have replaced the name of the Prophet Muhammad with his own in personal copies of the Qur’an...He was opposed to most aspects of modernization and to all Western influence. He decried such technological commonplace as radios, wrist watches, automobiles, motorcycles, and even bicycles. Those who use these things or who read books other than the Qur’an were viewed as hell-bound ‘pagans’”.

It is very obvious that Marwa exploited the dwindling economic situation and the *Almajeri* system and was able to attract large followers amongst the commoners, who, unable to afford the basic necessities of life, became die-hard patriots of the sect and Marwa himself. In the *Guardian* of March 18, 1984, Iwere further distinguished the sect from the general practice of Islam:

“The prayed while counting their beads, five times a day, facing the East, but think Prophet Muhammad was not a breathing image of Allah...They read the Qur’an but don’t see the need to visit Mecca...At worship, the other Moslems in supplication to the Deity, place their open arms, facing away from themselves, in upright positions, on the side of both ears. But the Maitatsines, in prayers, rest the open palms of both hands on their chest...The Maitatsines preach a strong compulsion to kill. They believe that if they are able to kill ‘Arnas’ (infidels) who don’t believe in Allah, they will go to heaven”.

The leader of the Boko Haram movement, Yusuf, was a secondary school drop-out who went to Chad and Niger Republic to study the Qur’an. While in the two countries, he developed radical views that were abhorrent to Westernization and modernization. Like the late Maitatsine, Yusuf got back to Nigeria and settled in Maiduguri and established a sectarian group in 2001 known as the *Yusufiyya*, named after him. The sect was able to attract more than 280,000 members across Northern Nigeria as well as in Chad and Niger Republic. Yusuf began his radical and provocative preaching against other Islamic scholars such as Jafar Adam, Abba Aji and Yahaya Jingir and against established political institutions.

The ideology and philosophy of the movement can best be understood by explicating the two words- “*Boko*” and “*Haram*”. In Hausa language, the word “*boko*” is an equivocal term which means either “Western” or foreign; while the word “*haram*” is an Arabic derivative meaning “forbidden”. Piecing the two words together ‘*boko haram*’ means to forbid everything Western and Western education. The intent is to replace modern state formation with the traditional Islamic state, because Western values run contrary to Islamic values. *Umma Mahammadiya* (Muslim faithful) and *Dar-ul-Islam* (Islamic community) cannot be compromised in the face of Western influence. Evil in the society is as a result of the embrace of Western civilization, and in order to curb such evil an Islamic society must be entrenched by destroying modern state institutions. The philosophy goes hand in hand with the entrenchment of the *Shari’a* law in the society. This accounts for the reason why police formations and government establishments and properties became the target of destruction by the sect. Alhaji Ali Dandume, minority leader in the House of Representatives said that “Boko Haram” was an assemblage of youths who were school drop-outs and university graduates who were not gainfully employed and who believed that their state of hopelessness was caused by the government that imposed western education and failed to manage the resources of the country to the benefit of all. Ideologically, any member who fought and died for the cause of an Islamic/ Sharia state by destroying modern state formation and government establishment would automatically gain “Aljanna” (paradise or heaven). Tell Magazine aptly captured the ideology and philosophy of Boko Haram sect thus:

“The mission of the sect was to establish an Islamic state where ‘orthodox Islam’ is practised. Orthodox Islam according to him (Mohammed Yusuf, leader of the sect) frowns at Western education and working in the civil service because it is sinful. Hence, for their aim to be achieved, all institutions represented by government including security agencies like police, military and other uniformed personnel should be crushed” (Tell, August 10, 2009, p. 34).

Newswatch magazine learnt that as far back as 2004, parents and security agencies became worried about the activities of the sect and the involvement of youths.

“This is because students especially in tertiary institutions in Borno and Yobe states like the University of Maiduguri, Ramat Polytechnic Maiduguri, Federal Polytechnic Damaturu and others who constitute their members withdrew from school, tore their certificates and joined the group for Qur’anic lessons and preaching” (Tell, August 10, 2009, p. 34).

However, despite several complaints by parents and security agencies, government did not deem it necessary to take steps to curtail the activities of the sect. In fact, Governor Ali Modu Sherrif of Borno State, where the Boko Haram crisis wrecked a lot of havoc on people and government institutions, acknowledged that he was approached by a former Commissioner in his cabinet, who had resigned to join the sect, to also resign as governor and join the sect. According to him, it would be the only way he could merit heaven, politics being corrupted¹.

¹ Interview presented on the African Independent Television, Wednesday, September 2, 2009, The 8 pm News.

In Northern Nigeria there is often a distinction between “makaranta boko” (schools providing “Western” education) and “makaranta addini” (school for religious instruction) or “makaranta allo” (school of the slate understood to be Koranic schools). There is no gainsaying that even among Muslim elite in Northern Nigeria, preference is usually given to the Islamic slate than to Western education. This accounts for the “almajeri² syndrome” (pupils and students learning the Koran) to the extent that pupils who attended schools for Western education were treated with contempt and derision. A Hausa popular song that pervaded Northern Nigeria, and often sung by the almajirai, goes like this:

*Yan makaranta boko,
Ba karatu, ba Sallah.
Sai yawan zagin mallam.*

The song translates as:

*Pupils of western schools,
You do not learn or read the Qur'an
Save continuous abuse of your teacher.*

It is worth noting that a good number of almajirai (Hausa plural of almajeri) come from very wealthy homes but are subjected to the mendicant way of life, ie. surviving by begging. Parents, the society and the government do not find it disturbing that the almajirai roam in the streets. It often makes them vulnerable to social vices including being a ready-made army that can be recruited to perpetrate violence. In 1964, the late Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and the Premier of Northern Nigeria, boasted of establishing over 2 million Koranic schools scattered in all parts of Northern Nigeria (see, Paden, 1986). This notwithstanding, colonial authorities also conspired with the Northern elite at the inception of colonial administration through the indirect rule. They shielded the Muslim north from being exposed to Western education and culture (Coleman, 1986; Dudley, 1968; Ohadike, 1992). As succinctly put by Sanusi (2007: 181):

“One consequence of the alliance between the British and the emirates was that the integrity of the political and social structures in the north could only be achieved by sealing the region off from Western influences, including from southern Nigeria. In this attempt to insulate the north from modernity, Western education was severely curtailed in order to prevent in the north what Lord Lugard termed the “utter disrespect” for British and natives ideals alike that was beginning to emerge in the south”.

For this reason, only few Western schools were built by British colonial administration in Northern Nigeria, and the consequential impact became one of the major reason for which Nigeria could not gain independence in 1957. In fact, the north lacked the human capacity to run its administration.

Furthermore, there is also growing concerns of external influences that are impinging and shaping religions and religious organisations in sub-Saharan Africa,

² The “almajeri syndrome” is where male children learning to read the Koran are forced to beg in order to earn a living for themselves and their teachers.

especially in Nigeria. Nigerian Muslim organisations and their Christian counterparts have links to the Middle East and the West. While the Christians are seen to tilt towards the Euro-American pole, the Muslims look up to the Arab world for religious alliance. The Iranian revolution of 1989, anti-Western imperialism, has gained acceptance amongst the Muslim community in Nigeria. In Northern Nigeria today, Christian evangelism and even academic research sponsored by the international community other than from Islamic countries are perceived to be a part of the agenda of Western imperialism (Umar, 2001; Ohadike, 1992).

THE MAITATSINE RIOTS OF 1980

After the death of Alhaji Sanusi, Muhammed Marwa found his way back and settled in the Yan Awaki area of Kano and continued his abusive preaching which earned him the name “Maitatsine”, which means ‘one who curses’. Maitatsine attracted a large crowd of followers among which the *tallakawa* (commoners) referred to as *Yan Tatsine* (those who curse). The activities of Maitatsine and his followers became a threat and a source of worry to the people of Kano to the extent that Governor Abubakar Rimi issued a letter on November 26, 1980 giving the sect 2 weeks to quit Kano state. On December 18, 1980 the sect launched attacks on police formations, government establishments, Churches, Christians and moderate Muslims.

On December 18 1980, the Maitatsine group went to “Shahuci” (a popular open field) to preach when the police stormed the place to prevent the sect from preaching because they did not obtain a permit. Moreover, the public had always complained of harassment by the sect whenever it was preaching. Conflict ensued between the police and the sect. Obviously, the police underrated the strength of the sect and the two police units that went for the operation were soon over-powered by the members of the sect who appeared with bows and arrows, knives and Dane guns. The sect burnt down all the thirteen police vehicles, killed four policemen and injured the rest whom they stripped off their weapons (see, Falola, 1998: 153).

Encouraged by the ‘defeat’ of the police, the sect marched in Kano city chanting “Yau zamu sha jinni”, meaning “today we shall drink blood”, in Hausa. By December 19, the sect took over strategic places in Kano city including the Fagge mosque, some schools, a cinema house and the Sabon Gari market. For eleven days, the police was unable to bring to control the sectarian riots. When the situation was getting out of control, ex-President Shehu Shagari had to invite the Nigeria Army to intervene. It took the army two days to dislodge the sect while their leader was killed in the operation. More than 1,000 members of the sect were arrested and detained in prison where they received agonizing treatment from the police. The crisis lasted for 11 days, claimed the lives of more than 4,179 people and hundreds of houses and shops were either torched or destroyed (Okafor, 1997; Isichei, 1987; Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry, 1981).

THE “BOKO HARAM” VIOLENCE

“From the beginning of the latest violence last July 26, 2009 to the killing of the misguided group and others last Thursday, the culture of peacelessness (sic) appeared to have been let loose like a loaded cannon. While those who precipitated in the crises appeared hell-bent to embark on mindless bloodletting and suicide mission, those who should keep peace and restore order, according to media reports, in overzealous hyperactivity and trigger-happiness, engaged in summary executions and extra-judicial killings” (Oloyede, 2009)

The violence took place between July 24 and July 28, 2009 in six Northern states: Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe, Kano and Katsina. *Newswatch's* account has it that violence began 4 kilometres from the headquarters of the sect in Maiduguri after an explosion killed one person and wounded several others. Armed members of the sect were said to have stormed and attacked and burnt police stations, churches, mosques, prisons and government establishments. Simultaneous attacks also occurred in Bauchi, Kano and Yobe states. Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, was the worst hit leaving hundreds of people dead and several houses, churches and government properties burnt and destroyed. Churches that were targets of the violence in Maiduguri included the Celestial Church, the Eklesiyar Yan'Uwan Nigeria, the Deeper Life Bible church and several other evangelical churches. These were burnt and more than 30 vehicles were also burnt by the sect in the premises of the churches. The residence of the Commandant, Police Training College Maiduguri, was also razed to the ground by the sect. Also burnt and destroyed were five primary schools and the headquarters of the Universal Basic Education. In the neighbouring Yobe state, the town of Potiskum also suffered its share of the sectarian violence as churches, the headquarters of the Federal Road Safety Commission, a Police Command and the National Population Commission office as well as several vehicles were attacked and burnt by the sect (*Newswatch*, August 10, 2009, pp. 33-35 & 43).

More than 500 members of the sect were killed by government security forces in Borno. In Bauchi state, 41 persons including a soldier and a police officer lost their lives while in Yobe state 43 persons lost their lives with greater casualty on the sect. By the time the violence was contained, between 1,000 and 1,400 people have lost their lives with inestimable damages to properties. The sect was said to have used propelled grenades, locally produced bombs and AK 47 rifles in carrying out the attacks. A certain Abdulrasheed Abdullahi confessed to the police that he and another member of the group were sent to Afghanistan to train in the art of bomb and explosive making devices (see, *This Day*, Thursday, September 3, 2009, p.1); which leaves the impression that the sect had been receiving financial and military support from foreign countries and other terrorist groups.

Though the Boko Haram violence did not occur with the same magnitude in some Northern states, the movement enjoyed a wider spread within a short period of time. In Kano city, 300 of its adherents and sympathizers were prevented from carrying out arson on a police station. The police was said to have discovered large quantity of arms and ammunition in a swift raid of the residence and mosque of a certain Al-Amin Aljasawi, the leader of the Yusuffiya sect in Kano. In Katsina state, members of

the sect attacked a police station in the Danja local government but were timely dislodged by the police who arrested some of the arsonists. In Kaduna state, 23 persons who had links with the sect were arrested. In Sokoto, 5 persons were arrested when they were planning to launch attacks. Bauchi state's forces demolished several buildings belonging to the members of the sect and discovered a well poisoned by the sect.

During the Maiduguri riots, the sect was said to have held government security forces to ransom for about 3 days, while their leader, 39 years-old Mohammed Yusuf tried to escape into the neighbouring Chad. He was later arrested by the Nigerian Army in a chicken coop in his father-in-law's house and handed over to the police who later announced his death to the public. According to Governor Isa Yuguda of Bauchi state, Mohammed Yusuf beclouded his people by living a life of deception. *"Imagine, their leader is about 32 years old, he rides exotic cars including expensive jeeps, has his children in choice private schools receiving sound and quality education, has private lawyers and doctors who treat and attend to him, yet he has the powers to indoctrinate people"* (Newswatch, August 10, 2009, p. 14). This revelation by the Governor suggests there is more in the Boko Haram crisis, it indeed became manifest that religion could actually be used as a tool for mobilisation and protest.

TRIVIALIZATION AND POLITICIZATION OF BOTH THE MAITATSINE AND "BOKO HARAM" SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

After the clamp down of the Maitatsine sectarian violence in Kano by the Nigerian military, the Federal Government under ex-President Shehu Shagari set up a Commission of Inquiry under the chairmanship of Justice Aniagolua and the term of reference was to ascertain the actual and remote causes of violence. The commission came out with 7 points:

1. Provocative preaching by Muhammadu Marwa, leader of the Maitatsine sect against traditional Tijjaniya and Kaddirya sects;
2. The sect's deep-rooted hatred for constituted authority, especially the police;
3. The sect's hostile attitude to their neighbours;
4. Build-up of contingent armed disciples, especially the Almajeris;
5. The death of Maitatsine's first son;
6. Governor Abubakar Rimi's letter of ultimatum issued to the sect to vacate the Yan Awaki area of Kano in two weeks;
7. Leakage of official documents to Maitatsine.

Of great importance to our analysis are points 6 and 7. One would wonder why the order to vacate an area issued by the Governor would constitute an indictment on the part of the Kano state government, since the activities of the sect constituted a threat to national security. It rather appeared to be a clear case of political indictment. Kano

state was controlled by an opposition party, the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) formed by Aminu Kano, a political party that was radically opposed to the oligarchic National Party of Nigeria (NPN) from which belonged President Shehu Shagari. Secondly, the leaking of official documents to the leader of the sect means that either he had followers who were top government functionaries or such information have been provided by the security agencies under the control of the federal government. Based on political differences, it was therefore expected that the federal government would indict the Kano state government. But this is cheap political blackmailing since security agencies only take orders from the federal government. Even the federal chief of police acknowledged the fact that the federal government underestimated the strength of the sect and that was why the state Police Commissioner's request to have more troops to clamp down on the sect was turned down.

As expected, Kano state government reacted swiftly by rejecting the outcomes of the commission set up by the federal government. It set up its own commission of inquiry which conclusions were rather indicting the police and the Nigerian Security Organization (now the State Security Service) for inefficiency since the government of Kano had reported prior activities of the sect to them. Furthermore, the Kano state government accused the federal government of political treachery because it "commissioned" the Maitatsine sect *"to create the conditions that would guarantee the declaration of a state of emergency in Kano by the NPN controlled Federal Government"*. Hence, it was the *"NPN Kano aristocracy and the propertied class that organized, sustained, equipped and shielded the Maitatsine gang of religious fanatics from the period of its gestation, birth and infancy"* (Zahradeen, 1988: 113).

There is a sense in which the Kano state government could be adjudged to be on the right track for the reason that the NPN central government had done everything to capture the state but failed because of the popular support the PRP had in Kano. But more worrisome was the fact that the Maitatsine sectarian activities were wished away because of political bickering. The oblivious attitude of government towards the sect made it possible for the members to disperse and regroup and launch other attacks on government installations especially on police posts in Gombe and then Bauchi states in 1985.

Likewise, President Yar'Adua trivialized the "Boko Haram" crisis by choosing to be in Brazil while a large section of his country was on fire. On his return, embarrassed by the "Boko Haram" violence, the President set up a Commission of Inquiry headed by the National Security Adviser to the President, retired General Abdul Sarki Mukhtar. Its mandate was to look into the crisis, but most importantly, to look into the circumstances of the death of Yusuf and other leaders of the sect. The Commission of Inquiry is yet to submit its report. However, successive governments in Nigeria had adopted the "Commission of Inquiry approach" without any positive result. In most cases, even the reports of the Commission are not released to the public. Therefore, it would not be surprising for the "Boko Haram" Commission of Inquiry to add up yet another file to the governmental mortuary of unattended reports.

CONTAINMENT OF THE “MAITATSINE” AND “BOKO HARAM” VIOLENCE

It is important to note that both the Maitatsine and Boko Haram riots occurred during ‘democratic’ regimes of ex-President Shehu Shagari and President Umar Musa Yar’Ádua who are both Fulani Muslims from the Northwest of Nigeria. However, the manner in which the riots were contained, especially the extra judicial killings of the leader of Boko Haram and his father-in-law, shows that Nigeria is actually far from enjoying a culture of democracy. Extra-judicial killings are indeed a violation of fundamental human rights. It also highlights the absence of the rule of law.

Despite 10 years of civil rule, the militarization of the Nigerian state has continued to manifest itself in different forms and at different times, defying all democratic processes and the rule of law. In November 1999, the then government of Olusegun Obasanjo reacted to the crisis in Odi, a small community in the Niger Delta, by a military clamp down after a state of emergency was declared. The military carried out the operation with crude brutality and left the reminiscence of massacre, rapes and arson. Again, in October 2000, the same approach was used against the Tiv people in Zaki-Biam, where men were massacred in reprisal attacks by the military over the killing of 19 soldiers who were perceived to have helped the Jukun fight over the Tiv. This could actually be the case because retired General T. Y. Danjuma who was the Minister of Defence at that time was a Jukun and could have used his influence to aid his people. The military was also fingered out in carrying out extra-judicial killings in containing the November 2008 Jos crisis.

The July 2009 Boko Haram crisis is another illustration of Nigeria’s crude response to crisis management and was justified by saying that the sectarian movement wanted to depose the government of President Yar’Adua. Security forces, especially the Nigeria Army and the Nigeria Police were said to have engaged in reckless killings of members of the sect. An eye witness recounted to *Newswatch*: “*They are killing these people like chickens*”, obviously referring to the indiscriminate manner by which members of the sect were being killed by Nigerian security forces.

Although the Nigerian state has the right to respond to threats of insecurity using aggressive means (delegated authority), such exercise must be guided by democratic principles and the rule of law. Yusuf was arrested by the military in his father-in-law’s compound and was handed to the police hale and hearty but died of gunshots with bullets riddled all over his body. Yet, the police claimed he died in a shoot out while trying to escape from custody, but could not explain why the deceased sect leader was still in handcuffs while his body laid lifeless. Moreover, the military had released video tapes of the interrogation of the sect leader to demonstrate the fact that it handed him hale and hearty to the police. Other victims of extra-judicial killings by the police were Buji Foi, a former Commissioner of Religious Affairs who had resigned to join the sect and who became one of the sect’s financiers, and Mallam Baa Fugu Mohammed, the father-in-law of the leader of the sect who willingly surrendered himself to the police. The Police high command in Nigeria admitted that these sect leaders were ‘hastily killed’ (*The Nation*, Monday, August 10, 2009, p. 1).

IGNORING EARLY WARNING SIGNS

The Nigerian government, at all levels, has always treated issues of religion lightly no matter how serious and threatening they were. Virtually all the sectarian and religious violence that took place in Nigeria could have been dealt with earlier; security reports have always alerted governments at all levels on the dangers posed by religious extremism. Both the Maitatsine and the Boko Haram crises did not just occur out of the blue; security agents had presented reports of their threatening activities before both crises broke out. When the activities of the Maitatsine group was threatening the peace of the people of Kano, Baba Yaro who was a member of the State House of Assembly moved a motion on the floor of the House praying that Maitatsine and his group should be barred from public preaching. However, he did not receive the support of his colleagues who saw the activities of Maitatsine as a way of spreading and defending the cause of Islam (Falola, 1998: 152).

In April 1980, 8 months before the crisis, the Secretary to Kano municipal local government advised the State government to take urgent steps against Marwa and his preaching before it was too late. In his words:

“The way and manner the preaching is being conducted is not acceptable to the majority of our people as it is a total condemnation of the principles of Islam as accepted and practiced by the Moslems. The fanatic had gone to the extent of arming his lieutenants with knives and other deadly weapons. He has, in fact, built an empire” (Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry, 1981).

On its own part, the Police dispatched a telegram to Lagos, then the capital of the federation, to report the true situation of the activities of Marwa and his disciples so that the federal government would take drastic action:

“Religious fanatics numbering about 2,000 occupied Yan Awaki Quarters in Kano city....The do not obey any law. When any member is arrested and charged to Court, they would not attend. Kano Municipal Development Board served quit notices on them but they did not obey. House of Assembly summoned the leader Muhammadu Marwa four times for discussion but did not attend. They constitute their area into a private republic not accessible to other people” (Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry, 1981: 170).

Two months before the Maitatsine riots broke out in Kano, the Nigerian Security Organization (NSO), now the State Security Service (SSS) reported thus:

“As at now, in spite of public demand for the government to use all reasonable force to dislodge the thugs and also to bring to book their leader, Marwa who is believed to be a Camerounian and had been causing trouble in the area for long time, nothing seems to have been done to check his religious vandalism and hooliganism. The generality of the people in the state therefore feel surprised that such a person is allowed to take the law into his hands at the detriment of peace in the state” (see, Falola, 1998: 151).

Of course, both the Federal Government and the Kano state government did not heed the warning of the police and the NSO, but rather shut their mouth, eyes and ears to the damning activities of the Maitatsine group until great damage was inflicted.

In the case of “Boko Haram”, “Operation Sawdust”, carried out in 2005 by the military and the police and which covered Borno, Bauchi and Yobe, led to the arrest of some Islamic fundamentalists whose activities posed a threat to the security of the Nigerian state. Among those arrested were Yusuf Mohammed the leader of the “Boko Haram” sect, a certain Bello Maiduga and one Ashafa. These arrests provided the first facts about the links between the fundamentalists and the Al-Qaeda terrorist group. The three arrested revealed they had been trained in the act of terrorism in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Pakistan and Iraq. Items recovered during the operation included maps and diagrams of government establishments and of some specific buildings in Abuja (*Tell*, August 17, 2009, p. 69). They were kept in prison custody until ex-President Obasanjo left office in 2007. When Musa Yar’Adua accessed to the Presidency, some Muslim scholars and elites lobbied for the release of arrested fundamentalists by persuading him they were simply Islamic evangelists. President Yar’Adua therefore ordered the release of Yusuf and some other fundamentalists.

Prior to the “Boko Haram” crisis, the State Security Service (SSS) submitted 14 reports to the government of Borno state, the Presidency and the Police Headquarters under Mr. Mike Okiro. Except for Governor Ali Modu Sherrif, both the Inspector General of Police and President Yar’Adua failed to take action against Yusuf and his activities. When Governor Sherrif received security reports revealing that the sect was making bombs, he ordered the security agencies to take action. The security agencies invaded the premise of the sect and dislodged them. It was during this raid that one of the bombs exploded, killing a member of the sect. It also triggered the violence that ravaged the six Northern states (*Ibid.*, p. 69). In Nigeria, where power is centralized, there is absolutely no way for the Inspector General of Police to take action unless he is ordered by the President to do so. If the President had refused to carry out any action, it could be assumed that it was because he had a soft spot for his fellow Muslim brothers who belong to the same Muslim *Umma*. However, it cost the Nigerian state a lot in terms of human lives and destroyed property resulting from the sectarian violence.

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN NIGEIRA: ZEAL OR BAD GOVERNANCE?

A lot of analysis would like to limit the reasons for sectarian violence in Nigeria to issues of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism. However, there is a lot more than ideological radicalism to be taken into account to understand the reasons for sectarian violence in Nigeria. Historically, there is the issue of unhealthy rivalry between Islamic movements whose sponsors can be linked to transnational bodies, especially in the Middle East and Asia. A lot of Muslims have been brainwashed and believe that dying in the course of defending Islam would make them earn the status of martyr. Therefore they are inclined to sacrifice their lives through violent means.

There is also the “Almajeri syndrome”. A large army of unemployed vagabonds roam around the streets paying the dues of discipleship by begging and scavenging. These are ready to get involved and even perpetrate violence for a token. I visited a

Catholic hospital in Kaduna shortly after one of the religious crises occurred. I met some admitted Almajirai who had been seriously injured during the crisis. One of them who had lost his limb was in deep pain and was crying with the words: “why should this happen to me? Now I have lost my life because of N200”. Upon further inquiry, the victim revealed that a large number of them (the Almajirai) were given some money to go perpetrate violence.

Perhaps the most viable explanation for the recurrent violence, including religious and sectarian violence, is the failure of good governance in Nigeria. During the “Boko Haram” crisis, *Aljazeera* made an impressive analysis about the situation in Nigeria; a country that is the 5th largest producer of oil in the world but where the vast bulk of the population live below the poverty line of 1\$ a day. Northern Nigeria is the worst hit by poverty according to Charles Soludo, the former Central Bank Governor. His statistics show that the North-Central recorded 67%; the North-West recorded 71.1% and the North-East recorded 72.2% of people living below the poverty line. Accordingly, the “*teaming population of unemployed youth, especially in the urban centres, takes full advantage of the opportunities provided by these sectarian crises to wreck havoc on the economic institutions of the state*”. I think that the point *Aljazeera* wanted to make was to dissociate Islam from violence, even though it could not explain the sectarian violence in Iraq between the Sunni and the Shiites. But there is a strong point in stressing that Nigerians have been denied good governance for long. The youths that are mostly engaged in acts of violence or serve as an army of this sectarian violence are the first victims of this bad governance and acute corruption. Those educated youths who tore their university degree certificates to demonstrate their loyalty to the sect, could have done that out of frustration. One can imagine the frustration for a young man or woman who had graduated from the university and could not secure job years after graduation. For such a person, Western education will ever remain valueless. As a matter of fact, such youths live in a country where education is treated with much disdain and where the educated are insignificant, but where uneducated political bandits are assigned status privilege.

One of the reasons given by the Commission of Inquiry for the Maitatsine riots was the economic situation of the country that left millions of people, especially the youths, without jobs or any means to live a decent life. The late Bala Usman had consistently maintained that violence in the garb of religion has always been a manipulation of the elite and the political class. He went further to question the link between violence and Islamic fundamentalism:

“What are they actually fanatical about? What beliefs, values and practices in contemporary Nigeria are they specifically fanatically opposed to or in support of? What exactly in the Islamic faith and practice in the contemporary world do they regard as so fundamental as to determine all their actions so totally and exclusive?” (Usman, 1987: 73).

Bala Usman refused to accept the fact that it was fanaticism that drove the Maitatsine sect into violent demonstrations but rather economic hardship triggered by bad governance. Mallam Hussaini Salisu, an Islamic cleric, said “*the level of frustration and poverty among youths in the country is a fertile ground for activities*

of such groups...their conduct is totally un-Islamic but the whole problem boils down to the failure of government at all levels to make the welfare of the citizenry a priority". The Islamic cleric went further to say: "A nation that allows its youths to be idle is sitting on a time bomb because frustrated people seek relief in religion" (see, *Tell*, August 10, 2009, p. 38). There is some sense in the position of the Islamic cleric because those engaged in the "Boko Haram" violence were between 18 and 40 years old and virtually all of them did not have a job. An editorial from the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper captured it all:

"In some other more serious climes, the recent mayhem in the North should be an opportunity for the state as represented by federal, state and local governments in Nigeria to put some commitment in their statutory responsibility of protecting life and property. Such will of course include creating an enabling environment for individuals to have access to good life and be able to actualise themselves. This is the first step towards security of life and property. To neglect to do this is to give rein to violence, anarchy, even anomie in whatever guise or disguise. The insensitivity of the government and the resentment of the citizenry are the recipe for an avoidable and eventual conflagration" (*Nigerian Tribune*, Monday, August 10, 2009, p. 17).

During her visit to Nigeria in August, 2009, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, aptly captured the problem associated with the rise of conflict in Nigeria when she said:

"The most immediate source of the disconnect between Nigeria's wealth and its poverty is the failure of governance at the federal, state and local levels....Lack of transparency and accountability has eroded the legitimacy of the government and contributed to the rise of groups that embrace violence and reject the authority of the state" (Clinton, "Nigeria: Lack of Good Governance", *The Nation*, Friday, August 14, 2009, p.1).

It would seem that there is a deliberate attempt by the Nigerian political elite to continue to pauperise the citizenry for political gains. Most of the problems associated with the electoral process in Nigeria can be linked to the fact that many a Nigerian has to first contend with issues of poverty. Thus, they are ever willing to give up or even betray their civic responsibility for some meagre money thrown to them by politicians (Danjibo and Oladeji, 2007).

In this sense, there is a very strong correlation between poverty and conflict. Good governance, which ultimate goal is to reduce poverty, will go a long way in addressing the issue of conflict in any society. According to Fisher et al (2000: 151):

The aim (of good governance) is no less than to upgrade the capacities of political, economic, social and community structures so that the basic needs and rights of the population are met. Part of this process is to enable these institutions to be managed and structured in such a way that conflict can be dealt with effectively within them and in the communities in which they operate.

Political authority and systems are therefore geared towards providing human basic needs through the institutionalization and practice of good governance.

CONCLUSION

Religion will continue to be a reckoning force in Nigeria, but more potent will be the sectarian movements that will ever be ready to continue to engage the Nigerian state. As long as there is no meaningful alternative, Nigerian youths will continue to be the actors of violence in whatever guise. The Nigerian government has failed in terms of providing good governance to its citizens, despite the huge resources that the country has accumulated over the years. It is estimated that the youths constitute over 70% of the population and yet over 60% of this category lack jobs and better opportunities. A nexus can therefore be drawn between mass poverty as a result of bad governance on one hand and frustration and violence on the other since it is observed that “*the breakdown of law and order in African states was basically the result of the legacy of bad governance*” (Clapham, 2002: 200). The Maitatsine and Boko Haram sectarian violence can be viewed from this perspective. Religion is used to mobilize against modernity which is seen as the root cause of social ills. As Reverend Father Matthew Hassan Kukah rightly observed, “*The evil effects of bad governance, corruption, total lack of security and welfare have all become part of our daily lives. Clearly, in the eyes of the sect members, the persistence of corruption, collapse of public morality, injustice and so on could only be attributed to those who govern. In their reasoning, those who govern us do so because they have acquired their tools by gaining Western education*” (Kukah, 2009: 3). The Nigerian political elite must therefore demonstrate strong commitment and willingness in pursuing genuine democracy and good governance. In this respect, good governance is the remedy for conflict and disorder, including sectarian violence. As long as the Nigerian government does not show strong commitment in reversing the style of governance for the good of all, it will continue to be inundated with crisis of such kind.

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