

A Response

Maitasine: A Myth or a Mischief?

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There have been erroneous statements made by some writers that the "Izalah Muslim sect, which is officially recognized, has a doctrine similar to those of Muhammadu Marwa Maitatsine". This was the interpretation of West Africa Magazine and also that of Dr. M. A. Ojo whose article on *The Maitatsine Revolution in Nigeria* appeared in the *American Journal Islamic Social Sciences*.

The actual name of *Izālah Movement* is *Izālat al-Bid'ah Wa Iqāmat al-Sunnah*, the movement that aims at removing devilic innovations (al-Bid'ah al-Shaytaniyyah) and establishing Sunnah in the life of Muslims on the same pattern as that of the great Nigerian *Mujāhid* and *Mujaddid* Shaikh 'Uthmān Danfodio. The person who started this reform movement is no other than Shaikh Abūbakar Maḥūd Gumi who has been recently recognized and awarded King Faysal Award for his meritorious services to the cause of Islam in Africa.

The question is then, who was Maitatsine or who are the Maitatsine followers who made their very strange appearance in Nigeria at different times? I have read all the writings about Maitatsine by various scholars and I have closely tried to study this mischievous anti-Islamic and destructive movement, but as time goes on I have become more and more perplexed like many of my friends about the real identity of Maitatsine and his followers. The recent write-up by the columnist *Candido* in *New Nigerian Newspaper* entitled, "The Maitatine Scare", on Wednesday April 8, 1987 is an alarming disclosure:

A MAITATSINE SCARE

SOMETIME ago there was a Maitatsine scare in Gombe. At that time I was somewhere near Zaranda hills, and I thought it was too close for comfort. I did nothing but "borrowed from inside that of dogs". I hope you understand, I mean I ran as fast as my feet and car could carry me to Imam House. I arrived gasping for air, confused and with a panting mask. Luckily for all of us the scare turned out to be a hoax; or better still it showed that our security agencies are now equal to the task and can nip the Maitatsine disturbance in the bud.

To be sure we have had too much hell from that devil; and his dare-devilry had proved uncontrollable wherever and whenever it struck. So the next thing I did as the scare wore thin was to strap my mask on to try and see whether some scouting will prove necessary. I had done it in Kano, Kaduna, Maiduguri, Jimeta and Gombe. My sojourn in all these places had been most instructive of course but I must confess, like the telling-it-as-it-is grey-haired gentleman of the press that I am, that all my scouting had helped me little in understanding this man and his violent phenomenon. That is until I visited the Federal Capital recently – and there I got a shock of my life and lost even the little understanding of it that I had.

The visit, besides reminding me that there had been other scares successfully contained, convinced me that even those who thought they knew Maitatsine would now have to think thrice. From the socioeconomic opium-eaters and those who see him as an aberrant “ayatollah” to those who have no opinion about him at all, my FCT discovery is sure to give their opinion (or lack of it) a jolt.

Remember the Maitatsine scare in Lagos? I am sure you do. That was when bows, arrows, guns and other deadly weapons were supposedly confiscated from supposed members of the Maitatsine “muslim” fanatics. They were all rounded up and detained.

Now it appears that the Immigration Department of the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs has finished with them. Many of them were found to be bloody aliens, and the order was given for their deportation. And so it was.

On the way from Lagos to Chad (which is where they came from and which is obviously not one of the best destinations for any traveller now) one of the Maitatsine fanatics decided to die. Whether it was because he didn't want to go to Chad or not is another matter, but for us it was a fortuitous decision.

Luckily again for me, he died near Abuja where I was surveying the beauty and virginity of the land. The officials deporting them decided to seek permission from the immigration office there to bury the deceased. Permission was granted.

Since Maitatsine fanatics are supposed to be muslim, the officials were considerate enough to decide to bury him “according to muslim rites”. But while they were trying to do the muslim burial rites of washing, digging and so on, they stumbled across the man's travelling papers – and they discovered that he was a Chadian and a Catholic. They were flabbergasted, and they confronted the others to find out what was happening. The others too said none of them was muslim. So you see, you don't know Maitatsine yet, but some one, somewhere obviously does.