

Nigeria's Banditry

– *How it all started*

By Moddibo Dawobe – Ladduga



Last week, we witnessed the genocide of about 50 innocent herders who were bombed by a supposed drone of the Nigerian Airforce base in Makurdi. The storyline was a sad, painful, and pathetic one. When calamities like this happen, what we usually talk about is the number of people killed – 27, 40, 50 etc. While I acknowledge that these numbers are big, people don't remember that these innocently slain individuals, as significant as the numbers are, translate into hundreds more lives that are directly affected and millions that are indirectly affected. The innocent people whose livestock was stolen by the Benue state Livestock Guards were asked to illegally pay the sum of N27 million to get back their livestock which they did. Again, they were forced to load the cattle in trailers (as according to the guards, no livestock will be allowed to roam the land of Benue state) to Nasarawa state, which again they did! However, while they were offloading these animals, the 'BOOM' happened, leaving tens of innocent civilians dead, and other tens in dire need of emergency medical support. Of course, thousands of family members and friends are equally left in the agony of the loss. The Akwanaja community is in Doma Local Government area of Nasarawa state; a state that has for more than 2 decades hosted displaced herders from Benue, Plateau, and Taraba states. Whenever herders are forced to leave their original areas by Tiv farmer communities in Benue, Jukun in Taraba, and Birom and co. in Plateau states, Nasarawa hosted them and gave them places to stay and earn a living. A digital clap to Nasarawa state and its successive government. Many people believe that a Fulani man does not forgive and does not also forget! It is natural for people

not to forget atrocities meted on them. This is scientific. But I don't believe that the Fulani don't forgive. Human beings forgive when forgiveness is sort! The Fulani has a history of forgiveness. They forgive people that have offended them, as long as they acknowledged the offense and pleaded for forgiveness. But in many situations, they are offended and are blamed on top of the offense meted on them, while the media helps to escalate this and give them a bad picture of being illiterate, barbaric, reckless, and dangerous. This makes them to surely harbor their agonies for years and given the slightest opportunity, they will engage on a revenge mission. We have seen this in Kaduna and some of the northcentral states of Plateau, Benue. Targeting and killing innocent Fulani by communities and government agencies in Nigeria did not start today. It dates decades! They have been killed, maimed, and severely extorted by the traditional leaders, security agencies, and worst of all, some corrupt Fulani associations. The Fulani cattle herders are a group of people that have existed for centuries doing their herding business without any recourse to causing any havoc to the communities they live with. They travel hundreds of miles from the south to the north, east to the west, looking for green vegetation and water for their livestock. As long as the livestock is able to secure enough fodder and water, then the family's life is not threatened as they will be able to feed without concerns. Their lives style is simple. They sleep in huts made from thatches of grasses and leaves, close to their livestock. Their mattresses and pillows are also made from grasses and leaves. They do not have a permanent house to stay in. Environments that is favorable for their animals is their

favorable environment and therefore they stay and live where the animals graze. They do not have access to a borehole for clean drinking water; they do not have access to a primary healthcare center or electricity. They drink from the streams where their livestock drink. Manage their sicknesses traditionally – many women and children die of treatable diseases. They are attached to nature and sleep most of the time outside, counting the stars until midnight, and making sure that no criminal is around to steal their livestock, before finally resigning into their huts to hide from the cold of the night. The Fulani herders have for centuries respected their neighbor; the farmer whose animal dung helped to grow his produce. They respect the farmer communities amidst whom they stay with. They address their occupational challenges of livestock destruction of land via traditional and community leaders. The situation has always been managed internally with no recourse to the police, the judiciary, or other government authorities. The Metamorphosis Criminality cuts across all tribes and ethnic groups. To contend and limit it depends on the capacity of the state authorities to cope with the situation by arresting and prosecuting culprits and perpetrators no matter their connections and no matter their ethnic influence. This seems to be lacking in Nigeria and especially regarding herder Fulani, whose majority did not go to school, both western and sometimes Islamic. Because of their level of education, they are treated as second-class citizens not just by government authorities, but also by communities at large. As they keep livestock, they stay in bushes where their livestock can get enough food to provide the family with enough milk. While bushes serve as a means of livelihood to the herders, criminals who intend to attack villagers of their belongings hide in these bushes and commit crimes, then melt into the dark of the bushes to escape. Unfortunately, a few meters away from the scene of the robbery incident, live a Fulani herder and his heads of animals. Failed Policing – my experience. As we have a policing system that is myopic in their investigations, they simply use 'common sense' to arrive at their judgment that the crime was committed by the Fulani herder who stay (as mentioned) hundreds of meters away from the scenery of the robbery attack. The police work closely with the local vigilante who already considers the herder Fulani as criminals, or to frankly say it they criminalize them to keep the extortion going! Seven years ago, I was approached by Idrisa, a young Fulani herder whom I know their family well. Idrisa wanted me to support him in getting bail for his 60-year-old father who was arrested by the police and tagged for alleged armed robbery! Knowing Julde all my life, I will be surprised that he changes to be a criminal at the age of 70; what he did not do when he was 25 years. Julde was asked to pay N10 million to get bailed out! But bail is free? The police constable at the counter never thought I went to school or could speak English, due to the way I dressed. I heard him say to the corporal, "These people own millions of naira, but they don't even know. Because of their illiteracy, once you put pressure on them, you can grab good money and complete the roofing of your house. They are easy to succumb to pressure and pay huge amounts to get bailed! Let's arrest this one too and put pressure on him to get our own share before OC arrives. We can say he is a friend to Julde and therefore an accomplice. Then ask for a hundred thousand as bail charges," said Bello, the police constable. Least to mention that Nigeria's policing system is one of the most corrupt in the world. Many



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times, the police know that their victims are innocent, but as long as they will get something out of them, they will capitalize on that and continue 'milking the cow'. The Fulani herders are easy targets and have had many cases of multiple extortions from the vigilante, the traditional leaders, the police, and the judiciary system, including lawyers that are hired to protect them later turn out to be their enemies due to their supposed level of education. Nobody seems to be concerned with what happened to them, including some filthy and corrupt associations of the herder Fulani – I will not mention names. I have witnessed this a hundred times in many parts of Nigeria and especially in the northcentral and northwest where we are presently experiencing the situation of banditry. In the year 2016 in Kudaru of Kuru LGA along Kaduna to Jos road, I met a Fulani herder stopped at a checkpoint by a police sergeant. When I noticed a truckload of Fulani-looking belongings, it dawned on me that something is fishy. From experience, millions of herder-folks have gone through this in Nigeria. I decided to stop and inquire. When I asked the Fulani herder, he told me that his offense was 'he did not have a relocation permit' to relocate from his old location to a new location! I was perplexed! I did not believe him and decided to ask the vehicle driver who seemingly looked a Hausa man. He narrated the same story to me that the Fulani herder does not have travel permit documents. They were stopped by the Police