

## ON POLITICAL DECAY IN NIGERIA.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR OBADIAH MAILAFIA,  
FORMER DEPUTY GOVERNOR, CENTRAL BANK OF NIGERIA  
ON 2 FEBRUARY 2018

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**RLS:** The first four weeks of 2018 were bloody with over 500 persons killed across the country attacked allegedly by herdsmen, Boko Haram and cultists. In your opinion, what is responsible for this dangerous trend?

I think it is a sign of what political theorists call political decay. A situation where a system is reaching an advanced state of decay. Based on David Einstein's book on systems entitled Theory of Politics, it is when a political system has an input dimension, a processing dimension, a processing box and an output loop. A system that cannot process the inputs, distorts them and then delivers incorrect outputs to address the needs of society in terms of institutions, delivery of social services, effectiveness of administration, etc. So, in a nutshell, this is what we are seeing.

Another aspect involves factors such as climate change, the deepening of poverty, heightening of socio-economic inequities and the manipulation of social fissures by the power elites. The elites tend

to manipulate people while deploying violence as a means of pursuing their own narrow, selfish political objectives. So, all these factors have taken us to this sorry state of affairs we are in today.

**RLS:** Leaders of the Middle Belt Forum have described the New Year's Day killings in Benue, and other parts of the North Central and North Eastern Nigeria, as genocidal in nature. They insist that the killers are terrorists not herdsmen because the traditional Dan Fulani "herdsmen are peasant farmers that guide their herds of cattle with sticks not AK47 rifles that the terrorists wield to maim and kill during attacks." What are your thoughts on this assertion?

I concur with the view of the elders and leaders of the Middle Belt Forum. For one thing there is a US-based organisation that has, for the first time, placed the Fulani herdsmen on the terror watch list. No doubt about it, they are terrorists.

Unfortunately, even our own government has not seen fit to describe them as terrorists. Undoubtedly the methods they are using are highly terroristic in nature, bordering on genocide. They go into a village, often at dawn, they set fires and as the people emerge with sleepy eyes and with terrified little children, they open fire with their AK47s and hack them to pieces, like you are hacking or cutting fish ready for cooking. There is no other way to describe it than pure evil.

The late South African President Nelson Mandela once talked about carrying war to "an unarmed and defenseless people". This is really what they are – an unarmed and defenseless people meeting their painful deaths at the hands of wicked devils. People who come with rocket launchers, AK47 and AK48 - weapons that often even the Nigerian Army doesn't have. Then when the victimised communities complain, the army is brought in to literally terrorize them instead of coming to their defense and rescue. It is genocide.

A famous international jurist defines genocide as, "a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings; such denial of the right of existence shocks the conscience of mankind, results in great losses to humanity in the form of cultural and other contributions represented by these human groups, and is contrary to moral law and to the spirit and aims of the United Nations".

**RLS:** The Federal government's response to the herdsmen killings has been criticized as being biased. The Inspector General of Police, calmly tagged the attacks as "mere communal clashes" instead of arresting and prosecuting the killers. On the other hand, the Minister of Defense, Mansur Dan Ali, blamed the passing of the anti-open grazing bill in some states as the cause of the recent killings, concluding that "communities must learn to accept foreigners within their enclave". What are your thoughts on this?

We have no reason to believe that the government is treating everybody equally. The herdsmen commit their havoc and then quickly disappear into the night of the primeval savannah. When the local communities begin arming themselves with daggers, knives, bows and arrows to protect themselves, they are the ones arrested by the federal government security agencies. This is unacceptable. It is lamentable that the Honorable Minister of Defense stoops so low, demonstrates such ignorance and displays such callous bigotry. He says violence was triggered by the anti-open grazing bill. What about the years before people were killed in the absence of rhetoric on the anti-grazing bill? What about the recent killings even in Plateau State. The Plateau State Government is against the anti-open grazing bill and yet their communities have recently been attacked. For decades the Plateau people have been under relentless attack, even though no one ever spoke of anti-grazing law. Yes, we must learn to live with

“strangers”, but many of them come from Mali, Guinea, Niger, Chad and Cameroon armed with AK47s, AK48s and rocket launchers. They are killing our civilians and we are expected to roll out the red carpet and welcome them? This is madness and unfortunate. We should learn to live with one another, but there can be no real peace when one side has sophisticated weapons and appears to have the tacit support of the federal government. There will never be peace without justice. It can only amount to peace of the graveyard.

**RLS:** Several northern leaders have alleged that the upsurge in violent attacks by herdsmen on farmers are not by the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria but by Fulani from other West African countries such as Guinea and Senegal. Similarly, some foreign Fulani pastoralists are alleged to have taken over parts of Nigeria such as Zamfara state. What in your view needs to be done to counter these dangerous challenges being faced by Nigeria on this particular front?

Nigeria should live up to its responsibilities. The first duty of civil government is to protect citizens, to protect lives and property and to secure the common peace. The responsibility of the Nigerian government is to its citizens first and foremost. We have no obligation whatsoever to Fulani worldwide. It would be presumptuous of them to demand privileges over and above those of the citizens of this country. The ECOWAS Protocol on the Movement of Persons is very clear. If you are not a citizen you are permitted residence for three months. If you wish to stay longer, you must apply for residency or swiftly return home. The Nigerian government has a duty to repatriate those who exceed the three month limit under the ECOWAS Protocol on the Movement of Persons. So they cannot expect to stay here without applying to do so. Therefore, what they are doing is totally illegal, not to mention invading our country with

sophisticated weapons and the wholesale murder of innocent civilians.

**RLS:** Several states have opposed the “cattle colonies” proposed by the Federal Government as a solution to the killings across Nigeria by herdsmen. What is the difference between the proposed cattle colonies and cattle ranching as a solution to the herdsmen-peasant farmers’ conflict? What, in your view, needs to be done to address this problem?

Even the term “colony” is unfortunate. Many were outraged that in the twenty-first century there is still talk about colonies. The good news is that the Federal Government recently retracted the idea of colonies. We don't know what they are going to replace it with though. The use of the term “colony” is inappropriate because it simply implies foreigners will take your territory by force, render you a dependent in your own ancestral homeland, lord it over you until such time they decide to withdraw, and return to from whence they came.

There is, however, a difference between the colonies concept and the ranch. With a colony, a person uses the government apparatus to take over your land and imposes his own will, uses his own people, uses government money to open facilities, provides water and other infrastructure, will probably appoint his own chiefs, and use his own system of administration. This is against the Constitution of the Federal Republic Nigeria and all its fundamental judicial precepts. A ranch, on the other hand, is a private commercial business. A person will negotiate with the landowners, purchase the land from the community, obtain approval from the state Governor, who holds the land in trust for the people, and pay adequate compensation. The entrepreneur will provide the capital and business plan and start the ranching business. So there are very important differences.

**RLS:** Nigeria is the only member of OPEC that is not self-sufficient in refining petroleum products to meet its internal consumption needs. In the last five or more years it spent about 30% of its foreign exchange earnings to import refined products. How can this crisis be resolved?

It is an artificial crisis. For decades an extremely powerful cartel controlled and monopolized the import of PMS and diesel. It is so powerful it is capable of conniving to bring down a government if it so wishes. It bankrolls politicians and is ruthless. Our five refineries were deliberately killed in order for the cartel's business to flourish. The solution is twofold, we need to break the back of the cartel and revitalize the refineries. Refineries that are too old and outdated, such as the two I recently visited in Port Harcourt, need to be replaced or privatized. I understand that Dangote is building one of the largest refineries in the world that will soon be operational. We should encourage such investments in addition to creating modular types of refineries; small scale refineries to supply the needs of a region or city. Government should encourage such models by providing the necessary incentives and institutional support systems. We should set a target date by which time the import of PMS ceases. It can be done. Where there is a will, there is a way.

**RLS:** The European Union spends a minimum of 365 billion Euros annually on agricultural subsidies. Yet the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have consistently opposed agricultural subsidies for Nigeria and other developing countries. As a development economist and former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, what do you see as being responsible for these double standards in policy prescription by the guardians of the world's capitalist system?

The EU subsidies for agriculture are normally administered under the framework of its famous Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The subsidy under the European Common Agricultural Policy used to account for as much as 70% of the total annual operational budget of the European Commission. The bulk of the Commission's spending goes into these subsidies. For all 28 member states of the EU (they will soon become 27 when Brexit is finally implemented), agriculture constitutes no more than 3.5% of the total GDP. And yet it accounts for nearly 70% of the budget of the Commission. That tells you that the EU places great importance on agriculture because food security is the foundation of national prosperity. I'm not sure if the Washington Institutions still frown on the idea of subsidies for the agricultural sector in developing countries such as ours.

The problem is twofold. Firstly, do we have the money for these kinds of subsidies even if we wanted to? In Nigeria under the current administration some kind of subsidy has been operational for fertilizers. They have cut out the middlemen (especially under Femi Adesina when he was minister of agriculture). The poor farmer, armed with a voucher, could always go and buy fertilizer at the Government controlled price, cutting out the iniquitous middleman. The current administration has continued the programme under the Presidential Fertilizers Policy. This has greatly helped farmers and eliminated shylock intermediary operators. But we need similar subsidies for pesticides, herbicides and agricultural tractors and machinery. But secondly and most importantly, we need a guaranteed pricing system. I come from southern Kaduna and these days ginger farmers face very serious challenges. The actual market price has dropped below cost price. Some of the ginger growers who took loans are now desperately crying for help.

Secondly, government should guarantee prices for farmers so that even if nobody buys the product you have a place to go where you are able to sell it at a guaranteed price. This will provide incentives for farmers to continue to produce and not be discouraged. Under the late President Umaru Yar'Adua, there was budget to build silos, money was provided, but sadly nothing materialised. There are supposed to be silos countrywide where government would buy some crops from farmers and store them for a rainy day. That wisdom is as old as the Bible. Under the former Jewish slave-boy Joseph, King Pharaoh was able to build massive reserves of grain that saved the whole empire from famine. Joseph, through the wisdom that God gave him, was able to save Egypt from famine and starvation. So it is this kind of ancient wisdom that we need to apply here.

**RLS:** The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Federal Ministry of Finance are shareholders in the Bank of Agriculture, yet the CBN in the last few years spent billions of Naira in agricultural intervention without passing the funds through the Bank. In your view, what is responsible for this disconnect?

It is true. CBN owns something like a 45% and the Ministry of Agriculture a 55% share in the Bank of Agriculture (BOA). Both of them are adequately represented on the Board of the institution. For almost ten years now, CBN has put aside huge amounts of money and urged the BOA to implement an audit of their accounts and restructure the bank in line with modern best practices for management and accountability of financial controls. The CBN was insistent that if only the bank was revitalised to operate on sound management and business principles, the apex bank would infuse substantial additional capital into the organisation. Unfortunately, the BOA has not been forthcoming. I spoke to both management and staff who complain of severe

political interference with their activities. For example, if an emir takes a huge loan and fails to repay, the bank cannot compel him to do so. If a first class emir takes a loan and doesn't repay, are you able to arrest him or go to his palace, confiscate it and put it up for auction? The bank has been the victim of political capture by kulaks who are using the organization for their own selfish aims. Once politically prominent persons take loans from BOA they feel there is no necessity to repay the money and nobody is in a position to harass them to collect the funds. I'm inclined to sympathise with the CBN on this matter.

**RLS:** During a recent interview with Channels you were very critical about the poor handling of the farmers-herdsmen crisis. As one who grew up mingling with the herdsmen and therefore understand a bit of their psychology, what do you think needs to be done to address the problem on a sustainable scale?

Surprisingly, following the programme on Channels, I received significant responses from governors, politicians, student leaders, women and youth groups. The conflict between the farmer and the pastoralist is as old time itself. There are countries across Africa that have had similar experiences, although not on a scale as bloody as ours. Throughout these debates, I was surprised that nobody ever made reference to the Enclosure Movement in Britain that lasted almost two hundred years.

The bitter conflict between farmers and pastoralists in England went on from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century under what was termed "the Enclosure Movement". At that time anybody that owned cattle and livestock took them anywhere they wished, trespassing onto private landholdings with impunity. You could be in your home and cattle and livestock would take over your garden. So the enclosure movement in Britain specified that everyone's land would be

demarcated. It culminated in Acts of Parliament that declared that all cattle owners keep their animals in an enclosure and that any cow or sheep that wanders into another man or woman's property, becomes ipso facto his or her property. That law subsists in Britain till today. If you allow your cow to wander into someone's garden, they have the right to slaughter it and barbecue it. That is English Law as it exists following the Enclosure Acts of the eighteenth century. We haven't stated an enclosure movement in this country yet but it looks as if this is where we are heading.

The Fulani are a very ancient and noble race. They originally came from North Africa and intermingled with the African populations. They first settled in the Upper Mountains of Guinea known as Futa Jallon before migrating to Massina in Mali and up to Futa Toro in Senegal. They were among the empire-builders of West Africa and influential in the history of kingdoms such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai and the Tukolor Empire. The Fulani Caliphate of Usman Dan Fodio was by far their greatest achievement. They were very successful in military warfare and the ability to subjugate other people.

But they couldn't defeat the warrior tribes of the Middle Belt, particularly the Berom, Kwararafa Jukun, the Sanga and the Tiv of the Benue Valley. Apparently, Usman Dan Fodio was wounded in a battle with the Tiv people and died of his wounds a few weeks later on 20 April 1817. So perhaps the Fulani have never forgotten the humiliation by the Tiv people of Benue State. So they have regrouped and want to continue the war. I believe the issue of land for cattle grazing is quite secondary. We need to understand that there is indeed a historical perspective to the whole conflict. The entire Fulani of West Africa suffer from the delusion that Nigeria is theirs by right of conquest. If we desire a comprehensive settlement based on justice and equity, they must rid themselves of the misapprehension. The Nigerian government cannot

cater for Fulani worldwide. It has an obligation only to the indigenous Fulani of Nigeria.

The original home of the Fulani is Futa Jallon in Guinea. They are the majority in Guinea and make up 40% of the population, followed by the Malinke (Mandinka) at 35%, and then the Soussou and others. So 60% of the population have always closed rank to make sure that no Fulani would ever rule. Consequently, since independence of Guinea in 1957, no Fulani has ever ruled the country even though they are the most populous ethnic group, the best educated and the wealthiest. They accuse the Fulani of being clannish and so self-centred that once in power they will oppress everybody. As a result, they have never been given a chance to rule in their own ancestral homeland. After decades of mounting frustration, they turned their attention to Nigeria where their Usman Dan Fodio conquered the Hausa city-states and built a large empire. Then they discovered that at least three Fulani ruled Nigeria: Shehu Shagari, Umaru Yar'adua and Mohammadu Buhari in both his military and current civilian roles. They now believe that if Guinea is out of reach, Nigeria is their God-given right. But the people of the Middle Belt also remember that their ancestors were never conquered by the Fulani. It was the British who came and created emirs where none existed. Even the Tiv people were placed under the Emir of Muri in an act of colonial humiliation that they have neither forgotten nor forgiven. Where Usman Dan Fodio failed, the British prevailed.

In a free democratic Nigeria, the people of the Middle Belt assert their right to autonomy from a Caliphate that never subjugated them in the first place. They will never accept being ruled by those they regard as foreigners. They insist on being ruled by their own people and by leaders of their own choosing. So this is where we are. It is a political issue more than a technical issue of creating land. In the past we lived peacefully

because they did not make outrageous claims to ownership of the ancestral lands of the Middle Belt in the manner they are doing now. That problem needs to be resolved at political level and then we can continue to live peacefully. After all, at local level there is a kind of symbiosis between cattle

and their manure and farmers and their land. So we need to go back to that. Government must be sincere and show itself as an unbiased umpire in the whole situation.

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