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Psycho-Cultural Study of the Fulani Herdsmen's "Savagery" in Nigeria: Un coup d'œil into Possible Solution

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Abstract

Our behaviour is triggered largely by powerful forces within our personality of which we are not aware. These forces, shaped by childhood experiences, play an important role in energizing and directing our behaviour. Freudian psychoanalytic approach to literary criticism is based on Freudian psychoanalytic theory, which emphasizes that every repressed childhood experience finds a way of expressing itself, although may be distorted, at adulthood. In essence, the theory claims that the unconscious plays major role in what we do, feel, and say, though we are not aware of its presence and operation. This work as an overview of the Fulani herdsmen's atrocities in Nigeria, employed textual analysis as its methodology, while it relies on Freudian psychoanalytic theory in the analysis of some media publications related to the Fulani herdsmen's atrocities in the nation, with the view to studying the ongoing massacres carried out by the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria, it therefore takes the psycho-cultural background of the Fulani man on vengeance gathered from the printed interview with Bayeri, the Secretary General of Gan Allah Fulani Association Development of Nigeria (GAFDAN) as the major drive behind the Fulani herdsmen's callousness and irksomeness, and sees the decolonization of the Fulani's upcoming generations' mind

through a deliberately structured system of Education as an imperative method to be adopted, if the future of the nation will be secured, as the conventional system of Education seems to only tend towards equipping the Fulani man for literacy.

Key words: Fulani Herdsmen, Psycho-cultural background, psychoanalysis, unconscious, decolonization

Introduction

The menace posed by Fulani herdsmen in the different communities they migrate to for purpose of grazing their cattle is becoming very alarming. They are more and more constituting major security challenges to their host communities. The propensity towards engaging the land and the farm owners of the sites they graze there is increasing by the day as they update their arsenal with highly sophisticated weapons. This is the prevalent security challenge in some communities and states in Nigeria (Nte 2016).

The grim reality about the current situation is amply underscored by the emergence of the group as the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world, which means that Nigeria has the unenviable record of hosting two of the deadliest terrorist groups in the world, at the same time (*Nigeria Tribune* Monday, 11 April, 2016).

Many research papers have been published as touching this menace; Rahid Solagberu Adisa in his *Land Use Conflicts between Farmers and Herdsmen-Implications for Agricultural and Rural Development in Nigeria*, Okechi Dominic Azuwike in his *Nigeria changing environment and pastoral nomadism: Redistribution of Pains and Gains*, Tunuche Marietu et al in their *Resource conflicts among farmers and Fulani herdsmen: Implications for resource sustainability*, and innumerable others. Though many writers and researchers have come to agree that the Fulani herdsmen are callous, irksome, mindless and heartless (Abdulai et al, 2014; Okeke Okechukwu Edward, 2014; Jude Owuamanam, 2015; Fidelis Soriwei et al, 2016; and so on), but few or none has engaged him/herself with the psychological drive behind the callousness, irksomeness, mindlessness and heartlessness of the Fulani herdsmen.

In studying the major drive behind the Fulani herdsmen's savagery, this paper shall engage itself with the impact of Fulani culture of vengeance on the personality of the Fulani herdsmen; by referring to the interview with Bayeri on *The Nation* Newspaper on Saturday, May 7, 2016 (Pages 18-19) as the "point de depart" into our psycho-cultural study of the Fulani herdsmen. Bayeri is, according to him, the National Secretary General of the Gan Allah Fulani Development Association of Nigeria (GAFDAN), an association which aims at defending the interest of a Fulani man, registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in January this year (2016).

The fact that these Fulani herdsmen are in possession of sophisticated weapons of war like AK47 rifles and helicopters, while Nigerian law enforcement agencies are ill equipped (*Nigeria Tribune* Monday, April 11, 2016) sends a signal that they are more interested in terrorizing than in shepherding, as these weapons of war are (1) neither meant to kill flies, (2) nor meant to control the cattle (3) or is it meant to be consumed by the cattle and/or by the herdsmen.

Psychoanalytic Criticism

La critique psychanalytique est « le courant le plus proche de l'âme humaine et de la vie en général: il nous touche directement et appartient à l'homme de l'œuvre (l'auteur) et à l'homme de lecture (le critique) tout en analysant les motifs et les ambitions les plus profonds ». Sahira Yassin Hamdn (Retrieved on the 15, May, 2016).

Psychoanalytic criticism is the “closest trend to the human mind life in general: it touches us directly and belongs to the writer (author) and the reader (the critic) all analyzing the most profound motives and ambitions” (My translation).

Dobie (2002) asserted that “with Freudian theory, it is possible to discover what is not said directly, perhaps even what the author did not realize he was saying, to read between (or perhaps beneath) the lines”. According to Freud, to fully understand personality, it is necessary to illuminate and expose what is in the unconscious. But because the unconscious disguises the meaning of material it holds, it cannot be observed directly. It is therefore necessary to interpret clues to the unconscious (Robert S. Feldman, 1996). It is with this view that this paper sees the interview with Bayeri on *The Nation* newspaper of May 7, 2016 as a clue to the Fulani herdsmen's unconsciousness, in order to understand why they are so “callous” and “heartless”.

The Id

This is according to Freud, is that part of human personality that is innate, and it depends solely on the pleasure principle, always wants it desires gratified even at the detriment of its host (Adesuyan, 2015), Regoli et al (2014) in their *Delinquency in Society* explained that:

The id, which is present at birth, consists of blind, unreasoning, instinctual desires and motives. It represents basic biological and psychological drives-the id does not differentiate between fantasy and reality. The id also is antisocial and knows no rules, boundaries, or limitations. If left unchecked, it will destroy the person (p. 112).

The Id's desire is almost always in conflict with the norms of the Superego (societal norms and values) and the intervention of the Ego, Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud believes that for the Ego to protect itself from the pressure resulting from the conflicts between the Id and the Superego, it employs what is known as defense mechanisms. The concentration of this study is on the Id (being the most ancient of the three (3) human personalities), concentrating on its antisocial attitude developed through a revenge oriented culture in the face of Nigeria's strife towards sustaining a peaceful atmosphere.

Culture and Freudian Psychoanalysis

Culture has been variously defined (Emmanuel N.K, 2010:2), but we shall adopt some of the existing definitions of culture bearing in mind that we are looking at it from the point of view of psychology. Edward Sapir in Emmanuel N. K (2010) says, culture is "what a society does and thinks"; it is the "socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives". This definition of Edward Sapir reveals the fact that, culture of a particular society is an acceptable norm and values of such society determining the acceptability of an individual and qualifies him/her as a member of such society. He further explains that, "It may, therefore, be suggested or inferred that it is possible to identify the culture of any society by observing the practices and beliefs of members of the given society. Jahoda (1992) in Greenfield (2000) explained that "Culture is not seen as outside the individual, but inside in an important way... thus culture and behaviour, culture and mind are viewed as indistinguishable" (p.223).

What is Jahoda's insinuation when she said culture is "inside" the individual in an important way? This paper strongly believes she is referring to what Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) calls the unconscious. The unconscious, is, according to Sigmund Freud, in the almost unattainable aspect of human personality. All that is attainable in the conscious level of human personality, can, according to Freud, be compared to a conspicuous aspect of the iceberg and the greatest part is buried under the sea). In the same way, it is Freud's belief that what triggers our actions and reactions is buried deep in the unconscious, while the attainable evidences at the conscious level is just the disguise of the reality. According to psychoanalysts, "our behavior is triggered largely by powerful forces within our personality of which we are not aware. These forces, shaped by childhood experiences, play an important role in energizing and directing our behavior" (Feldman, 1996, p. 465).

If according to Jahoda, culture and behaviour, culture and mind are viewed as indistinguishable, it would then be correct to say, that, culture and human personality are inseparable, bearing in mind that human personality relies majorly on the unconscious and this unconscious shapes the desire of the Id (Sigmund Freud, 1901).

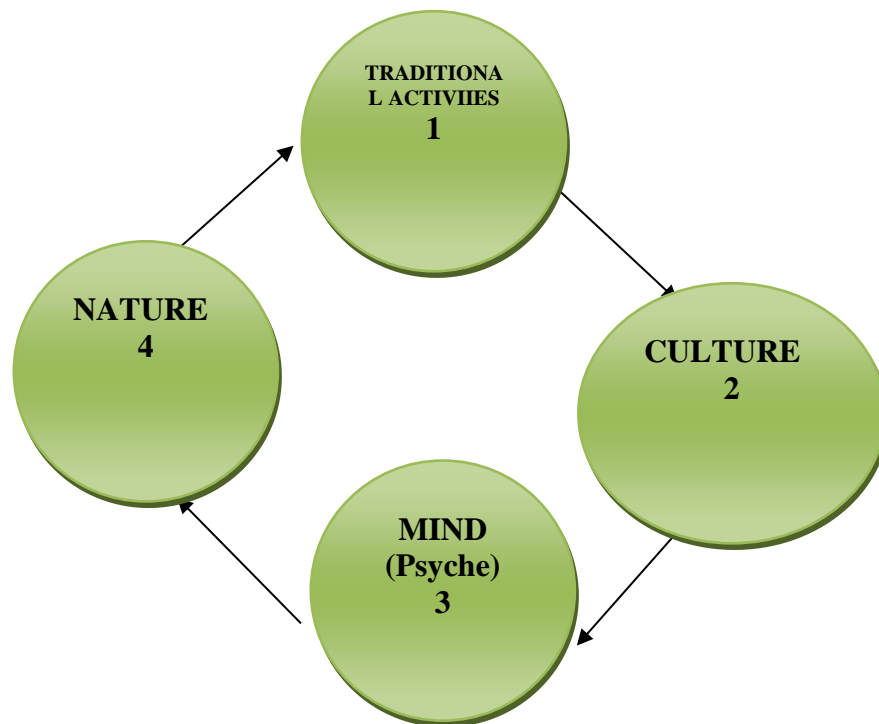
Bayeri's Interview: The Clue into the Psycho-Cultural Background of the Fulani Herdsmen

His complete name is Alhaji Saleh Bayeri, a Fulani and the Secretary General of Gan Allah Fulani Development Association of Nigeria (GAFDAN), an Association in the defense of Fulani, registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in January 2016. (*The Nation*, May 7, 2016. Pp.18-19). According to him: "this GAFDAN represents the interest of every Fulani son and daughter from every professional field including those breeding cattle". When Bayeri was asked in the interview on *The Nation* newspaper of Saturday, May 7, 2016: "Is it true that Fulani man does not forgive any error done to him?" His response was revealing and psycho-culturally inclined, he said:

This is the nature of the Fulani man; the Fulani herdsmen have this instinct of wanting to take revenge. It is in their nature. It is inherent, and in his blood even from his traditional activities. There is a Fulani cultural activity where if you are defeated today, you will be given six months to prepare and take on the person that defeats you. When you return after six months with your own tactics and you strike the other person to death, you will be crowned a hero and be given four wives as price of bravery and power as a man. **That is a cultural practice of the Fulani man and they carry this attitude to the outside world** (P.19, Emphasis mine).

This response given by Bayeri is to us a revelation into the Fulani culture, which will be useful in understanding the attitude of the Fulani herdsmen. It could sound surprising that Bayeri, who himself is one of the Fulani leaders in Nigeria, says this even with pride on a print medium, but to psychoanalytic critic it would only be seen as a revelation of the unconscious which should be analyzed in our search for durable and meaningful solution to the prevailing conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in different States of Nigeria.

Leaning back on the clue giving us by Bayeri into the psycho-cultural background of the Fulani herdsmen, that "it is the nature of the Fulani man, it is inherent, and in his blood and even from his traditional activities". This clue can be diagrammatically represented thus:



As earlier said, we discover that Bayeri's response gives us an insight into the Fulani herdsmen's psycho-cultural background and development. In the diagrammatical analyses of his response above, it shows that, the Fulani herdsmen gained their lack of conflict understanding and management from their traditional activities which always promised them a reward of four wives for every vengeance successfully carried out, (in psychoanalysis, this kind of act has a way of getting itself repressed deep into the unconscious) and this graduates to the level of Fulani's herdsmen's culture where they don't see vengeance as a thing to curb in order to think about conflict management but as a thing to be proud of, then this culture of vengeance returns to the mind (psyche) to come out again as the nature of the Fulani herdsmen propelling an incessant desire for vengeance in their Id. So, when we understand this, the reason the Fulani herdsmen don't take responsibility for any wrong done by them in many communities where they migrate to in grazing their cattle and when the farm owners of the farmlands destroyed by their cattle express their plight, they rather see a reason to attack such farmers and/or his community will be understood. We will be able to know why every complaint made by the farm owners is only seen an attack on

their (Fulani herdsmen's) personality as this propels their culturally colonized Id to seek for nothing but vengeance, because (according to Bayeri) it is inherent. These herdsmen do not create boundary as touching who they can molest, kidnap or kill:

Fulani herdsmen again invaded the farm of elder statesman and formal Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Chief Olu Falae in Ilado, Akure, Ondo State, killing one of his security guards. Falae, a Yoruba traditional ruler, had been kidnapped in September 2015 by the same band of criminals after they had ceaselessly caused untold damage on his farm by leading their cattle to uproot crops and eat up farm produce. The kidnapping which forced leaders of thought in South-West geopolitical zone to issue a two-week ultimatum to the Federal Government and caused consternation in the polity, was a clear demonstration of the alarming dimension that the activities of Fulani herdsmen have reached in Nigeria. (*Nigeria Tribune*, Monday, April 11, 2016, p. 1)

It will only be strange to us if we don't understand the psycho-cultural motivation behind their acts. It also appears rather disappointing that the Fulani leaders across the country including the current President of the Federation, Muhammadu Buhari, who is also the current Patron of Gayette Allah Breeders Association of Nigeria, are either saying nothing or not saying anything encouraging as regards curbing the atrocities of the Fulani herdsmen in different part of the Nation where their savagery reigns. Does this silence of their means that they understand why the Fulani herdsmen are killing and maiming many Nigerians? Does it mean they understand there is something to avenge on the affected Nigerians? Though this paper is not accusing the Fulani leaders (including President Buhari) of any involvement in the callous act of the Fulani herdsmen's atrocities in the different parts of the Nation, yet, it sees it expedient to question their seemingly uncared attitude towards their subjects' (Fulani herdsmen) savagery in the Nation.

Psycho-Culturally Oriented Response of the Fulani Leaders

Earlier in *The Nation* newspaper of 7th of May 2016, Bayeri tried to deny his awareness of why Fulani herdsmen strike in Benue State, when he was asked: "Can you tell us what happened in the case of attack on Agatu people of Benue State? Nevertheless, he concluded his response to this question thus:

When you hear that Fulani herdsmen attacked a community, just ask that community if there was no any clash say 10,15years ago. You will find out that one or two leaders of the Fulani might have been killed there...if they kill our one, we kill 10. (p. 9).

It was rather surprising to hear Bayeri on the one of the Nigerian online newspaper, saying: “The February bloody conflict in Benue was a reprisal attack by his people against the Agatus who he accused of killing, in 2013, a prominent Fulani man” (*Premium Times*, Thursday, May 12, 2016). It should at this point be noted that this paper is not out to criminalize or demonize the Fulani culture, but to look into Fulani culture on revenge as presented by Bayeri, who is one of key Nigerian Fulani leaders, as a way to proffering sincere and lasting solution to the Fulani herdsmen’s savagery in the different parts of the country.

Nimbo community of Enugu was attacked on April 25, 2016, men were massacred and some killed through gun shots, simply because the inhabitants of the community asked the herdsmen to quite their community due to the way their cattle were destroying Nimbo’s farm produce. The attack on Nimbo was so brutal that *Nigeria Tribune* (May 4, 2016) had to capture its headline as *Nimbo: Blood, ruin of a tortured lot*. The community leader, Dr. George Ajogu, who spoke on behalf of the people of Ukpabi Nimbo at the Village square, said: “Now over twenty people are dead. We are still discovering corpse; we discovered one this morning and so many corpses are still in the bush” (*The Punch* Wednesday, April 27, 2016, p.2). “Most of those who were killed died in the early hours of the morning. We are still counting our losses. We have not started going into the farms and bushes to look for our dead brothers and sisters” (*Vanguard News* Tuesday 12 May, 2016).

After an attack made on the people of Oke Ado in Ekiti State (*Daily Post* Saturday May 21, 2016) by the Fulani herdsmen, Ayodele Fayose, the governor of Ekiti State condemned the silent position of the President Buhari over the activities of the callous Fulani herdsmen in a statement made on *The Punch* newspaper of Tuesday May 24, 2016:

If the same president Buhari that was concerned about the killing of Fulani herdsmen in Saki, Oke Ogu area of Oyo State, such that he led Arewa (Consultative Forum) to Ibadan on October 13, 2000, to confront the then governor of Oyo State, the late Alhaji Lam Adesina, is now keeping silent when the same herdsmen are killing our people, we must rise and defend ourselves. It is our duty to protect our people and we are going to do that without fear or favour (p.7).

Ayodele Fayose seeing that if he does not protect the people of Ekiti, the case might come up to that of Benue, Kogi and Enugu where the Fulani herdsmen kill with liberty, he therefore made a statement that may lead to having a state of anarchy in the nation: “On no account should anybody come to sack our communities again, rise up against them. Before any herdsmen kill you, kill them, before they rape your wives, kill them, and before they rape your children kill them” (*The Nation* 24 May, 2016, p.44).

We never heard any Fulani leader's voice until Fayose, made an attack provoking statement against the Fulani herdsmen, due to the manifestation of their culturally oriented savagery. *The Punch* reported the statement of Governor Fayose thus:

I have directed that cattle rearing and grazing should stop in Ekiti State and those interested in cattle farming should henceforth do so in their own cattle ranches...A bill to this effect will be sent to the house of Assembly for passage into law to criminalize cattle owners whose cattle are found moving from one location to the other in the State... Any cattle seen anywhere in Ekiti State apart from the ranch created for them by their owners will be confiscated. (Tuesday, May 24, 2016, p.7).

This was the statement that provoked Nigerian Fulani leaders to talking since the manifestation of the culturally propelled wickedness of the Fulani herdsmen. But the surprising issue is that their responses were rather psycho-culturally revealing and culturally directed. Ardo, one of the seven Board of members of Gan Allah Fulani Development Association of Nigeria (GAFDAN) mentioned by Saleh Bayeri (*The Nation*, May 7, 2016) was the first to react to the statement made by Fayose when he said: "Fulani leaders do not endorse any situation where individuals or groups take law in their hands, Ardo said the legal option is being considered, it would be optimally utilized to stop the plot against *herdsmen doing their legitimate business*" (*The Nation* 24 May, 2016, p.44 emphasis mine).

One would expect Ardo who is expected to have easy access to the Fulani herdsmen, to condemn the inhuman acts of the Fulani herdsmen, it is rather surprising than disappointing that, he speaks in favour of the deadly group. This response of Ardo is a good signal to the statement made by Bayeri who stated that: "This is the nature of the Fulani man; the Fulani herdsmen have this instinct of wanting to take revenge. It is in their nature. It is inherent, and in his blood".

Who "takes law in his hands?" Fayose, or the Fulani herdsmen? Ardo is quick at looking for a way of lifting a revengeful hand against Fayose than giving a solution provoking statement on the prevailing issue by saying: "the legal option is being considered, it would be optimally utilized to stop the plot against herdsmen doing their legitimate business". One is challenged to ask what Ardo means by "their legitimate business" even in the midst of the numerous massacres carried out by the herdsmen. Did he mean it is legitimate for them to kill innocent Nigerians, rapes their women, kill their children and even steal what belong to them? The issue of legitimacy is, undoubtedly a culturally motivated statement, though it may be "unknown",

“unnoticed”, “overlooked” or “unwitting” to Ardo himself (Harry Stack Sullivan 1953:278, 312, in David Edwards & Michael Jacobs 2003:56).

Conclusion and Recommendations

What constitute our personality is buried deep within our personality which Freud referred to as the unconscious and unconscious is according to Freud the result of repression which is formed from childhood experiences (e.g. cultural etc.). The Fulani herdsmen have been psychologically conditioned through a cultural practice of revenge to the extent that killing seems not to be anything to them than a mere game of pleasure, they are the killers and at the same time the camera men covering the events of their savagery (*The Punch* Thursday, May 26, 2016). What a callous, wicked, heartless and cruel generation with a bestial attitude. Having come to the understanding of the psycho-cultural drive behind the Fulani herdsmen culture, this paper therefore suggests that:

- i. Violence can never be the solution, as violence may bring a psychological complication on already built psyche of the Fulani herdsmen towards revenge thereby instilling in them an unquenchable demand for violence.
- ii. A physical disarming of the Fulani herdsmen should come first and without delay as the atrocities carried out by the troupe in different parts of the Nation may lead to the people of different communities they attack seek to defend themselves in the same measure in which they are attacked, this goes with the recommendation of *Nigeria Tribune*:

The authorities must, without further procrastination, disarm the herdsmen before the current situation degenerates into state of anarchy with people seeking self-help by way of acquiring similar arms at all cost. The massacre, kidnapping, stealing, rape being carried out by herdsmen have compounded the security situation in the country and demands national emergency (Monday, April 11, 2016, p.13).

- iii. The psychoanalytic investigation into the unconscious of the Fulani herdsmen should be made in order to know what are those repressed aggressions which govern their actions, what are those things they strive to avenge which now govern their actions and making many innocent Nigerians victims of their “psychopathological” disorder, considering the statement made by Beyeri on *The Nation* newspaper of 7 May, 2016 thus:

When you hear that Fulani herdsmen attacked a community, just ask that community if there was no any clash say 10,15years ago. You will find out that one or two leaders of the Fulani might have been killed there...if they kill our one, we kill 10. (p. 9).

- iv. The psychological disarming should follow the physical disarming without delay. By psychological disarming, I mean to say that a deliberately structured system of Education towards a psycho-cultural decolonization of the Fulani herdsmen should be arranged for their upcoming generations (as many of the killers are young boys (*The Punch* Thursday, December 15, 2015)), in order for them to be able to see conflict as part and inevitable aspect of human relationship (Osimen, 2015:1), therefore coming to the understanding of its management and leading to a peaceful co-existence with inhabitants of the different communities where they find themselves.
- v. A sincere apology should be tendered on behalf of the Fulani herdsmen by the Nigerian Fulani leaders (including the President of the Federation) to the communities who were, are and have been the victims of the Fulani herdsmen's savagery and atrocities.

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