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Spring 1984

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### WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Cobern, William W.; Umar, Abdurrahman; and Junaidu, Mohammad I., "Traditional Education and Folktales: A Stimulus to Literacy Amongst the Nomadic Fulani" (1984). *Scientific Literacy and Cultural Studies Project*. 53.

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## TRADITIONAL EDUCATION AND FOLKTALES: A STIMULUS TO LITERACY AMONGST THE NOMADIC FULANI

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Across the savannah lands of West Africa are scattered the pastoral Fulani (Fulbe na'i). They are a nomadic people who move in rhythm with the rain cycle. During the dry season they move in closer to the riverine areas. During the wet season they withdraw into the bush to escape the disease carrying tsetse flies. After the harvest season their cattle can be seen grazing on the grain stubble left behind by the farmers. In return the fields are manured for the farmers. In the markets the pastoralists can be seen selling their dairy products and buying grain. They are nominally muslim but always seem more interested in cattle than in religion. They have only marginally been affected by the modernisations taking place around them. Their life-style and subsequent lack of interest in formal education effectively insulates them from modern life. It is their resistance to change that is both a challenge and a burden to educationists.<sup>1</sup> If attempts to bring the Fulani into the mainstream of modern life are to be successful more needs to be known about these people. This is especially so if one wants to avoid humiliating a proud and self-reliant people.

In this study we have examined one portion of Fulani culture, their folktales. There are many types of folktales and they all give insight into the subtleties of the collective view that a people holds of its society and world.

Within the folktales of a group one is likely to find important lessons that are passed from generation to generation; lessons which when learned help to maintain the integrity of the group. The telling of folktales is viewed in this study as a mode of traditional education. Our purpose has been to explicate the kinds of lessons the Fulani teach via their folktales and thus to provide insights valuable to modern educational planners. In particular there is a need to develop literacy materials more closely tailored to suit pastoral Fulani culture, and thus more acceptable. It is hoped that the folktales will provide a pool of themes and styles from which educationists can draw.

### EDUCATION AND THE PASTORALISTS

The outside world is not completely ignorant of the pastoral Fulani since there are various ethnographic studies of these people.<sup>2,3</sup> From these one learns how completely life for the Fulani revolves around their cattle. As the Fulani say:

'If one harms the cattle one harms the Fulbe'  
(Kul neddo no memi na'i ommo memi fulbe),

'If the cattle die the Fulbe will die'  
(Kul na'i baasti Fulbe no mai), or

'Cattle surpass everything, they are even greater than one's father and mother'

(na' buri koomi, i buri inna i baba fuh).<sup>4</sup>

The education of children, especially boys, is 'on-the-job'. At five, boys keep the calves out of the family's grain stock. At six, they have the responsibility of tethering the calves in the evening so

that the calves will not be able to feed from their mothers. By seven, the boys are old enough to spend the entire day with the cattle. Often they go with the father or elder brother but sometimes alone. They now learn the Fulani cattle lore for the tending of the herds and also the elaborate cattle calls. A boy's basic training is complete when he is nine; the time at which he should be able to tend the cattle on his own under all circumstances.

The education of a Fulani child includes another aspect exceeded in importance only by the cattle lore. It is called the 'Fulani Way' or 'Laawol Pulaaku', and is a kind of code which states the duties and virtues of the good Fulani. 'Fulfulde' is the first component of the Fulani Way and refers primarily to the Fulani language. The second, 'Semtende' refers to the virtues of modesty and reserve. 'Munyal' represents the virtues of patience and fortitude. The last component, 'Hakkilo' stands for care and forethought. The Fulani are acutely aware of the pressure to assimilate brought to bear upon them by their more numerous Hausa-speaking neighbours; a pressure that the young are more susceptible to than the old. The continuation of the herds and the Laawol Pulaaku are thus the essential outcomes of their children's indigenous education. It is that which will ensure ethnic integrity.

Ethnic integrity is however the very thing that is being threatened by modern educational designs. In Nigeria the most fervently pursued educational goal is universal primary education (UPE). The consequences for the pastoral Fulani and other groups who live outside the mainstream of modern society are grave. As noted by McDowell:

'First, UPE and an unprecedented expansion of schooling at all levels are accelerating demographic and cultural changes in the society and their accumulating effects on indigenous education. Second, the *National Policy* (a) has been founded on a new concept of education which extends far beyond the schools, (b) has proposed a strategy of attacking directly many effects of traditional indigenous educational assumptions operating in the schools, and, (c) has declared the Government's intention to intervene directly in certain indigenous educational forms outside the schools'.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the Nigerian pastoralists are already fleeing to the neighbouring states of Niger and Cameroon in an attempt to escape from authorities bent on enforcing new UPE regulations.<sup>6</sup> This is no solution because eventually all West African states will have similar educational schemes. It must be kept in mind that the primary concern of all of these states is development; and as explicitly stated in the Nigerian *National Policy on Education*<sup>7</sup>, to educate its people is the best investment a nation can make towards the rapid development of all its resources. Summed up by McDowell:

'The schooled elite in control of setting and implementing policies are convinced of the usefulness of the schools in

transforming society and building a nation; of the need to eradicate geographic and cultural inequities in educational opportunities; and of the parochialism and inefficiency of some current indigenous educational practices. New-found financial resources [referring to Nigeria] in the past fifteen years have unleashed an optimism generating grand plans, high hopes and a multiplicity of sometimes expensive projects'.<sup>8</sup>

The question for the pastoral Fulani is thus not whether they *will* change and modernise, but *how* it will happen. This point is discussed at length by Cobern in an earlier paper.<sup>9</sup> The conclusion is that educationists need to work out educational schemes that will be attractive to the pastoralists and that will help facilitate their assimilation into the modern African mainstream; but without precipitating Fulani cultural extinction. Basing education upon their cattle interests is one avenue. Another avenue is to make use of Fulani oral literature such as folktales.

## METHODOLOGY

For this study pastoralists were visited at their dry season camps in three locations of Gongola State, Nigeria: Yolde, Song, and Gombi. Initial approval for the study was obtained from the Secretaries of the Local Government areas involved. At each camp the camp head or 'Ardo' was approached first for his cooperation. The Ardos in turn were asked to introduce the head of each family in the camp. It was important to gain the trust of the Ardos and family heads. For many years there was a bitter dispute between the pastoralists and the government authorities over the 'Jangali' or cattle tax. The pastoralists are thus inclined to distrust foreigners (i.e., any non-Fulani) considering them to be potential tax collectors. Such difficulties made it impossible to randomly select pastoralists for inclusion in the study. This was not considered to be of much concern since the object of the study was the folktales and not so much the narrators of the tales. From the peoples' reaction to the tales being told there was every reason to believe that these were common tales.

After we gained the pastoralists' confidence times were fixed for further visits. At these subsequent visits tales told by twelve pastoralists were recorded on tape. The settings were typical in that an audience was always present. In all fifty complete tales were recorded. Many of these were duplicates and thus dropped from the study. A few had no discernable pedagogic value and also were dropped. The remaining twenty tales (see Table 1) were analysed for the lesson or lessons contained in each. This analysis was carried out according to the following four categorisations:

- 1 *Personal Relationship lessons* — lessons relating to the proper conduct between husband and wife, within the family, and with strangers.
- 2 *Personal and Group Values lessons* — lessons relating to the kind of values important in Fulani society, e.g., the Laawol Pulaaku.
- 3 *Skills* — lessons which emphasise important skills such as cooking, cattle tending, or herbalism.
- 4 *Historical/Religious Information* — lessons on the history of the pastoralists (e.g., their origin, leaders) and lessons on religious beliefs and practice.

The identification of lessons and assignment to categories was made by consensus within the research team. For the purpose of this study a lesson was defined merely as something taught whether explicitly or implicitly. The researchers asked themselves this question 'What would a person learn if he grew up listening to these tales?' If the study had been primarily ethnographic or philological then more rigorous techniques would have been required.

Table 1  
Twenty Fulani Folktales\*

- 1 Kumbo the Rain Girl
- 2 Dija's Marriage
- 3 The Trader and the Pullo Girl
- 4 The Origin of the Fulani
- 5 The Girl Who Wants to Marry Her Father
- 6 Squirrel and the Old Woman
- 7 The Jealous Wife
- 8 The Adventurous Youngman
- 9 The Pumpkin Seeds
- 10 The Man Who Slept With His Mother
- 11 The Hyena and the Baobab Tree
- 12 The Child and the Crocodile
- 13 The Dog and the He-Goat
- 14 The 'Oil' Girl
- 15 Why the Hyena is always on the Run
- 16 The Arrogant Woman and the Stork
- 17 The Wicked Step-Mother
- 18 The Clumsy Woman
- 19 The Lazy Hamman
- 20 The Disobedient Girl and the Python

\* At the end of this paper the text of one tale has been added. None of these tales has yet been published but copies may be obtained from the researchers.

## ANALYSIS OF THE FOLKTALES

This collection of folktales was not found to be like Aesop's Fables. Aesop's Fables are short tales that teach one explicit moral or lesson. Furthermore they are intended to be a teaching device. The Fulani, however, do not purposely tell their tales in order to teach people. As a result no single lesson is explicitly stated for each tale. Nevertheless even a casual reading of the tales reveals that they do contain valuable information. An examination of the twenty folktales under study produced fifteen distinct lessons. Most of these lessons appear in more than one tale. Their nature is that they are implied. For example, in 'The Dog and the He-Goat' the weaker dog and goat escape the clutches of the stronger hyena by out-witting him; by implication craft is better than strength. The fifteen lessons are listed in Table 2 according to category. The numbers of the tales (referring to Table 1) in which the lessons are found are also given.

Table 2  
A List of Lessons

			Tale No.
Relationships	1	Obedience to Parents	1, 8, 9, 17, 20
	2	Marriage Guidelines	3, 5, 9, 10
Values	3	Jealousy and Greed are Bad	7, 11, 13, 14, 17
	4	Patience is a Virtue	7, 9, 14, 17
	5	Good Deeds are Rewarded	7, 12
	6	Be Kind and Not Wicked	14
	7	Modesty and Reserve (especially sexual) are Always Proper	1, 10
	8	Always Avoid Boastfulness and Arrogance	13, 16
	9	Cooperation Benefits All	15
	10	It is Best to be Honest	6, 11
	11	Wisdom and Craftiness is Better than Strength	2, 6, 8, 10, 14
	12	Cleanliness is a Virtue	18
	13	Work Hard or Lose Your Cattle	19
History-Religion	14	Fulani Origins	4
	15	The Spirit World	7, 11

Table 2 clearly shows that two-thirds of the fifteen lessons fell into the category for personal and group values. This appears to follow the pattern of the Laawol Pulaku in which three of the four components are about values. Furthermore the Semteende, Munyal, and Hakkilo can all be found amongst the lessons. One can therefore infer that the tales of the Fulani are generally concerned most with values. Practical skills such as cooking are probably learned by observation and trial. As previously stated a boy's education in cattle tending can best be described as 'on-the-job'. Rules regarding relationships are not well represented amongst the lessons. As with skills these are probably learned primarily by observation and direct instruction. Obedience to parents is likely taught by punishing disobedience. In 'Kumbo the Rain Girl' Kumbo is slapped by her mother for disobeying. The complete description of all fifteen lessons is quite lengthy; so for the purposes of this report only lessons Nos. 1, 2, 3, 9, 13, 14 and 15 are discussed. This is sufficient to show the kind of lessons found in the tales and how they are implied.

## THE FULANI LESSONS

*Lesson 1:* One of the most frequent lessons was that children ought to obey their elders, especially their parents. In various forms and with various emphases this lesson appeared in five tales. 'Kumbo the Rain Maker' is the story of a girl who can make rain by laughing. One day she is told by her mother to stay at home and guard some belongings that have been set out to dry. She told Kumbo that she must not smile or laugh. When the mother had gone playmates came and began to tease Kumbo. Kumbo gave way and smiled which resulted in a sudden downpour. All of the belongings were swept away in a flood. Later Kumbo received a sharp slap from her mother for disobeying. In the 'Adventurous Youngman' a youth encounters a strange, magical beast who tries to trick the youth into giving away his special secrets. The beast does this by becoming a beautiful girl who then tries to seduce the youth. Fortunately the young man follows the advice of his father on what he should do. 'The Pumpkin Seeds' is a different kind of tale. In it a son is asked by his wicked father to perform an impossible task. The son obediently tries to do what he knows is not possible, but is surprised when he is helped by a wealthy man. In the end the son accomplishes his task and later grows up to be a very wealthy man. In a similar tale, 'The Wicked Step-mother', a boy obeys the voice of his deceased mother and is driven from home by his step-mother. The boy is saved by a Jinn who also takes revenge against the wicked step-mother. Finally this lesson on obedience is found in 'The Disobedient Girl and the Python'. Some parents tell their daughter that she must remain at home, but she refuses and goes out to the river with her friends. There she encounters a python that chases her. Just at the point when she can run no more she is saved by her fiancé.

*Lesson 2:* In four of the twenty tales there was information on marriage, that is, whom one could and could not marry. 'The Man Who Slept with His Mother' and 'The Girl who Wanted to Marry Her Father' dealt particularly with incest taboos. In the first, a man is tricked into making love to his mother. Later when he discovers what has happened he is humiliated and guilt-ridden. It is only after a long and desperate search that he finds peace of mind. In the second story the daughter is harshly treated by her family until she finally renounces her immoral ambition. In 'The Trader and the Pullo Girl' one finds a non-Fulani trader who wants to marry a Fulani girl. He encounters many problems because he is unfamiliar with Fulani marriage procedures. For instance, he is too forward with the girl's parents and he also visits the girl too regularly. The trader is finally sent away by the father. He lost his case for several reasons but primarily because he was non-Fulani. In 'Dijas' Marriage' it is made quite clear that it is the parents who arrange marriages for their children. In this and in the other tales

there is also much about the particular procedures for marriage that must be observed.

*Lesson 3:* This lesson is that one should avoid jealousy and greed, for it leads to destruction. 'The Jealous Wife' is the story of a man with two wives both of whom are ugly hunchbacks. Ndujja was concerned about her problem, Dudu was not. Dudu was good-natured and happy which aroused deep feelings of jealousy in Ndujja. The kind-hearted Dudu was eventually helped by a magical old woman who transformed Dudu into a beauty. The jealous Ndujja sought out the old woman but instead of being helped she was transformed into the ugliest of all women. In 'The Hyena and the Baobab Tree', the Hyena's wife is jealous of the gifts that Mrs. Hare receives from her husband. She sends her husband on a search for like gifts but it is fruitless and he is beaten up in the process. A third example is 'The Dog and the He-Goat'. The dog and goat were on a journey with a pot of honey when they were stopped by a hyena. The greedy hyena demanded the whole pot of honey and would not settle for less. Blinded by greed he was tricked and killed. The dog and goat who were willing to share went safely on their way.

*Lesson 9:* In the tale 'Why the Hyena is Always on the Run', one finds a lesson on group cooperation. It tells the story of a severe famine that comes upon the land. In order to survive, the animals agree that they must all work together. They go out in groups to search for food and all return with what has been found. The Hyena however refuses to participate and when it comes time to share the food he is found out. Because of his lack of participation, he is not given anything to eat; instead, he is publicly rebuked and humiliated.

*Lesson 13* comes from just one tale. It is the lesson that one must work hard if one intends to keep his herd. 'The lazy Hamman' tells of a man who always slept late in the mornings. He left his cattle to look for food on their own. Invariably, the cattle would wander into farms and eat the crops. The farmers would then take Hamman to court to be fined. Hamman also neglected to take his herd to the veterinary clinic. As a result of his negligence and laziness Hamman's herd diminished until he finally had lost all of his cattle. He thus suffered the humiliation of having to go to work tending other people's cattle.

*Lesson 14* comes from the tale 'The Origin of the Fulani'. According to the tale the Fulani originally came from some city named Dallon. In that city there was a great priest named Modibbo Amadu. This man saw a Jinn making love to his wife who later gave birth to a boy and a girl. The twins refused to take any interest in learning and scholarship and so the Modibbo cursed them. One day the children met the Jinn who was their father. He then gave them cattle and sent them off to live as nomads. The boy and girl married and from them are descended all the clans of the Fulani.

*Lesson 15* is more religious in nature. It is a lesson on the existence of the Jinn, that is, the spirits. In 'The Jealous Wife' a friendly Jinn disguised as an old woman rewards a good wife and punishes a bad one. A similar lesson is taught in 'The Hyena and the Baobab Tree'. The hard working and obedient hare is rewarded by a Jinn, but the impatient Hyena ends up being physically assaulted.

## CONCLUSION

There are a number of important things to note from these tales. Although the pastoral Fulani are muslim they are only nominally so. This is evident from their folktales which have little, if any, Islamic content. In one tale the lack of literacy and scholarship among the pastoralists is explained and justified. This is a concomitant feature of their lack of interest in the literate religion of Islam. Although the tales do not say much about cattle it is

interesting to note that the one which does also recommends the use of modern veterinary clinics. To date the pastoral Fulani have been quite successful in resisting modern education. This present study gives one hope that that resistance can be overcome. Although their Islamic tepidness gives them an excuse for illiteracy, the lack of religious rigidity eliminates one possible point of resistance to change. Furthermore it is not even that the pastoralists resist all modernisations. As seen in one of the folktales they value modern veterinary medicine. What they resist is the useless and the obvious incursions upon their ethnic integrity. Unfortunately modern education is usually both, but it need not be so.

The folktales studied tell one that the pastoralists are interested in preserving their cattle, their language, and their values. The modern educationist can help them by producing literary materials in the Fulani language (Fulfulde) on topics of interest. The folktales are an excellent and ample source of such topics. Either the oral tales can be transcribed and simplified for use as reading primers; or the lessons taught in the folktales can serve as topics to guide the writing of new stories, bearing in mind that Fulani folktales are only implicitly moral tales.

Literacy materials in Fulfulde written on folktale topics might appear at first as a narrow education scheme. Its strength is its workability. The pastoralists are much less likely to flee from literacy education if they find that it is not useless, and it is not an incursion upon their culture. They are not likely to resist learning to read their own language and especially so when the content of what they are reading is familiar folktales. Such Fulfulde primers would serve well in the secondary stages of the Fulani Livestock and Literacy Enhancement Scheme (for details of this scheme see Cobern, 1983). Once literacy has become respectable amongst the pastoralists then plans for further education can be made.

Let us bear in mind that change amongst the pastoralists is

virtually inevitable. The only question is how that change will come about. Will it be crude and coercive, or will it be subtle and humane? From studies like the present one an ever increasing catalogue of information is being compiled about these people; and it is now more than ever possible to construct a thoughtful and informed educational plan for reaching out to the pastoralists.

### THE LAZY HAMMAN

This is the story of Hamman. Hamman is a young man who has inherited a considerable number of cows from his father. Before his father died, he had told Hamman: 'My Son, work hard, do not bring shame on to our family. Look after the cows, increase the size of the herds'.

Hamman however was very lazy. He does not wake up until late in the afternoon. While people took their herds to the grazing fields or employed a *Gainako* to do that, Hamman let his cows fend for themselves. Invariably the cows went into people's farms. The farmers always took him to court and he was fined. The Judge even told him: 'I am tired of seeing your face in this court. I have told the farmers to kill your cows if they go into their farms. Either you tend to your cows or you lose them'. Hamman promised the Judge that he would take proper care of his cattle.

The *Ardo* had told everyone to take their cattle to the veterinary clinic for a check up and inoculation against cattle disease. People took their herds to the clinic. Hamman however forget all about it. So it was that when the great cattle disease came, his entire stock was wiped out. The disease killed all his cows. 'That is what happens to those who don't want to work', his colleagues used to say as Hamman wept and wept. From the owner of many cows he was reduced to nothing. He now works for other people as a *Gainako*, looking and tending to other people's cattle for a small wage.

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