THE EVILIZATION OF THE TERM "FULANI" IN PRESENT DAY NIGERIA: A REFLECTION ON THE NOTION OF SIGNIFICATION IN WILLIAM OF OCKHAM'S LOGIC

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Abstract

This paper attempts to demonstrate that the logical problematic of signification, has a very dangerous socio-political effect due to the ontological implication that is connected to the signification of terms in logic. It expounds the notion of signification in Formal Logic as exposed by William of Ockham. It thus, employs this notion of signification of terms, to discuss the term "Fulani", to show the danger potent in distorting the signification of the term "Fulani" as in every conventional and connotative terms. This work claims that as a result of the connection between logic and ontology, conceptualization and perception, names and reality, the distortion of terms, which are the building blocks of propositions in logic could lead to a dangerous cognition and perception of ontological realities. To this end, it posits a critique on the dangerous change in the signification of the term "Fulani", in the conceptualization and perception of present day Nigeria people, of West Africa. A dangerous change, as this paper claims, if not speedily reconstructed and re-conceptualized, could lead to a disastrous situation in the socio-political reality of the Nigerian State.

Keywords: Logic, Ontology, Signification, Ockham, Nigeria, Fulani

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate that the logical problematic of signification, could have a very dangerous socio-political effect due to the ontological implication that is connected to the signification of terms in logic. Hence, this paper is an investigation on Formal Logic as expounded by the Late Middle Ages Scholastic philosopher and Logician, William of Ockham (born around 1280-1290 CE). Formal Logic is the system of logical reasoning that is rooted in and influenced by the Logical works of Aristotle, collectively known as *Organum*. As the Latin word *organum* implies, which means instrument in English, the Aristotelian logic, is a means (not as an end in itself) of rigorous reasoning about things that exist. William of Ockham whose philosophical and theological writings were very much influenced by the works of Scottish philosopher John Duns Scotus (1266-1308 CE), alongside with Peter Aureoli (d. 1321/1322), followed the branch of Scotus' intellectual branch, known as conceptualism. He is no doubt the most influential thinker of the fourteenth century and the most rigorous and outspoken representative of the philosophical system known as Nominalism or of the thinkers, otherwise called the Terminists. After Boethius (480-524 CE), whose commentaries and writings on Aristotelian logical works influenced the scholastic thinkers. Ockham could be said to be the most outstanding logicians among the scholastics during the middle Ages. This, informs the choice of his logical writings in the exposition of the notion of signification and terms, for the critical analysis and exposition of this

paper.

This paper is not directly a reflection on the socio-political situation of Nigeria. It is rather, a logical and ontological critique on the dangerous change in the signification of the term, "Fulani", in the conceptualization and perception of present-day Nigerian people, of West Africa. A dangerous situation, which if not paid attention to and re-conceptualized in many, could lead to disastrous situation in the socio-political reality of the Nigerian State. Thus, lies the significance and importance of this paper. This paper argues that there is a strong connection between logic and ontology, conceptualization and perception, names and reality. Especially, for the African people where names really matter, because names, in most instances, are given based on actual ontological situations. This emphasizes that names or terms do not only have meanings, they have actual significations. For instance, a childamong the Igbo people, could be named *Ekenedirichuwu*, if the circumstances that occasioned the birth of the child demand immense gratitude to God.

The logical writings of William of Ockham, a Nominalist or Terminist, is employed because of the seriousness that isgiven to the critical analysis and operation of names or terms. This is employed, without wholly sustaining the philosophical conclusions of nominalism. Nominalism, simply put, denies the existence of universals, there are no intelligibies (intelligible forms) in the world, for they are mere names or terms employed in the

signification of the mental contents of particular realities in the world.

Hence, in engaging in this philosophical reflection, the following shall be explored:1. The notion of signification in William of Ockham. 2. The signification of the term"Fulani". 3. The evilization of the term "Fulani" in presentday Nigeria, followed by a conclusion.

The Notion of Signification in William of Ockham

The notion of signification in William of Ockham is contained in his logical works, and is a very important aspect of his logical works. This importance of signification of terms in logic in Ockham applies also to all logicians of the Aristotelian's tradition. The specificity of Aristotelian logic, otherwise known as Traditional Logic, is the necessary connection between logic and ontology. In this kind of logic, every term signifies an existing thing or at least a possible existence. This is to say, "term" has signification. A term in itself is also a signification. A term is the signification of a spoken or a written word or phrase (or a mental impression, as would be explained later). As Scott M. Sullivan observes, in the traditional logic, as different from modern symbolic logic, "the principles of logic are not laws of thought *per se*, but reproduce principles of existence that must be observed if our thought is to apply to reality"(2006, i). This means that, traditional logic, unlike formal logic does not merely deal with "the systematic evaluation of

4

arguments for internal cogency' (Peter Smith, 2020, 1). That is to say, traditional logic does not only deal with the deductive or inductive entailment from premises to inference or conclusion, that is to say, logical validity, but it deals also with the signification of actual existence.

Like all logicians, Ockham, holds that arguments are composed of propositions and propositions are composed of terms. Thus, he defines a term as "simply one of the parts into which a proposition is directly divided" (*Summa Totius Logicae* [subsequently as STL], *De Terminis*, 1). According to Aristotle, a term is 'that into which the proposition is resolved, i.e. both the predicate and that of which it is predicated, "is" or "is not" being added' (Prior Analytics, 24b,15-20). That is to say, strictly speaking, for Aristotle,a term is either the predicate or what is predicated in a proposition. A proposition is a statement that affirms or denies a thing is or is not something. This means that, a proposition makes a claim that something is or is not something else. When the terms of a proposition,do not only point to, but signify that something exists, the signification of something existing is known as "suppositio" (supposition). Hence, in a general sense, the subject, the copula and the predicate, which are the three main parts of a proposition, and other syncategorematic parts of proposition (such as: all, some, no, none, and so on), and in addition all the parts of a sentence, are terms. But in a strict logical sense, as Aristotle understands it, only the subject and the predicate of a proposition are terms, that is to say only the categorematic

components of a proposition are terms. But Ockham, understands a term as the contrast of a sentence, by which, 'every non-complex expression is called a "term'" (STL, De Terminis 2). This, thus, distinguishes terms into categorematic and syncategorematic terms. Their difference, according to Ockham, is while categorematic terms have fixed and definite signification, syncategorematic terms do not have fixed and definite signification. For example, in the proposition: *Some Fulani people are herdsmen*, while "Fulani people" and "herdsmen" are categorematic terms, having fixed and definite signification:*an ethic group in some African countries* and *an agricultural occupation* respectively, but the term "some" is syncategorematic, having no fixed and definite signification, but only contributes to the signification of the categorematic term "Fulani people".

For Ockham, there are different kinds of terms. Following Boethius, whose works on Aristotle's logic, influenced Ockham and other scholastics and through whom the scholastics mainly encountered Aristotelian logic, Ockham maintains that, there are three terms: written terms, spoken terms and conceptual terms.While the written and spoken terms, are perceptible through the bodily senses (either seen or heard), the conceptual terms, he contends, only exist in the intellect. Hence, he submits that the written terms are part of a written proposition; spoken terms are part of a spoken proposition; but a conceptual term "is a mental content or impression which naturally possesses signification or consignification, and which is

suited to be part of a mental proposition and to stand for that which it signifies" (STL, De Terminis 1). It follows that conceptual terms are languageless, they do not belong to any human language, as argued by Augustine and sustained by Ockham (De Trinitate Bk 15;STL, De Terminis 1). What we call "computer language" could be an example of mental propositions that are made up of conceptual terms.

Ockham contends that vocal words are signs that are subordinate to mental concept or contents (STL, De Terminis 1). He argues, that they are subordinate to mental concepts because though mental concepts are also signs (signs of concrete and actual existents, *esse*) but vocal words are signs of mental concepts. That is to say, vocal and also written words, are signs of beings (*esse*), that are first conceived in the mind. This means that what is signified primarily or naturally in the mind by the means of concept, is also what is signified secondarily by the means of vocal or written words. Following this argumentation, Ockham makes a contention that is very important to this write up: "This holds to such an extent that a word conventionally signifying an object signified by new convention, come to signify another object, simply because the concept came to signify another object" (STL,De Terminis 1). Ockham states two implications of this argumentation on the relationship between spoken/written terms: 1. "A concept or mental impression signifies naturally whatever it does signify; a spoken or written term, on the other hand, does not signify anything except by free convention." 2. We can change the designation of the spoken or

written term at will, but the designation of the conceptual term is not to be changed at anybody's will" (STL,De Terminis 1).

Ockham gives a third kind of the differences of terms, namely, absolute terms and connotative terms. He describes the absolute terms as "those which do not signify one thing principally, and another or even the same thing secondarily; but everything alike that is signified by the same absolute name, is signified primarily" (STL,De Terminis 4). That is to say they do not signify a thing primarily and another thing secondarily in such a way that there could be a change in the definition of the things signified. For example, the term "man", is signified by, Ayo, Obi and Musa, as having one primary definition, in such a way that Ayo, Obi or Musa, cannot have a secondary definition absolutely different as being a man. Thus, absolute terms are natural signs, that is to say they signify naturally. Hence, absolute terms are directly related to the essence of things (in the mind not in the world, for Ockham). On the other hand, connotative term, "is that which signifies something primarily and something else secondarily" (STL,De Terminis 4). The definition of a connotative term, expresses the meaning of the term. Connotative terms are conventional signs, the meaning of the terms is derived by the means of convention. For example, the term "Obi" is the name for the chief of an Igbo traditional clan, and it is also the proper name of an Igbo person. It signifies both a "chief" and a "proper name"; both significations are conventional, there are no natural connection between the term "Obi" and the significations "chief" and "proper

name". This is unlike the natural connection between the term "man" and "Ayo", "Obi" or "Musa", for "Ayo", "Obi" and "Musa" are by nature men. Natural signs strictly speaking therefore, deal with mental contents, which are generally called concepts. This includes genus, species, that is to say, all universals. These are actually the subject matters of logic.

Natural signs, holding that they are mental contents or concepts, are known as second intentions. They are not the direct signifier of something with actual existence (*esse*). The direct signifier of things with actual existence are primary intentions, thus, strictly speaking primary intentions are conventional signs. For example, if there is *a man* walking with a dog, whose name is Ayo, the concept "man" (a species) of the mental content in the mind is second intention, while the subject (the individual person), the man walking with the dog is the first intention, which is signified by the name or term Ayo. Ayo (a conventional term) signifies the first intention (the man walking with the dog); the first intention signifies the second intention (the concept of man in the mind) which is a natural sign. According to Ockham, conventional signs in a strict sense are names of "second impositions".A name of second imposition, strictly speaking, "signifies only a conventional sign, and therefore does not refer to mental contents, which are natural signs" (STL,De Terminis 5). It should follow, therefore, that strictly speaking, natural signs, that is to say second intentions, are names of "first impositions", for they deal with mental contents. However, Ockham, maintains that:

> Names of first impositions in the strict sense, are

of two classes. Some are names of first intention, others of second intention. Names of second intention are those nouns which are used precisely to signify mental concepts, which are natural signs, and also other conventional signs, or what goes with such signs. All the following are of this kind: "genus", "species", "universal", "predicable" and the like. For such names signify only mental contents, which are natural signs, or conventional signs (STL,De Terminis 5).

Ockham, summarizes his investigation on sign and signification into these possibilities: (1) Certain names precisely signify conventional signs, but only as long as they are signs. (2) Some signify both natural and conventional signs. (3) Some, however, signify only those things which are not such signs, which are parts of propositions. (4) Some indifferently signify both things which are not parts of propositions or speech, and also such signs, for example are the following names; "thing", "being", "something", "one" and the like.(see, STL, De Terminis 5).Finally, Following Aristotle, Ockham maintains that all conventional terms can be divided into univocal, equivocal and denominative terms. A conventional term is univocal, if one term has the same mental content. It is equivocal, when diverse mental content is signified by the same term. It is denominative, when a term is derived from a mental content or concept, for example the term "just" from the concept of "justice". Hence, Ockham observes, "only a spoken word or a conventional sign is an equivocal or univocal term; therefore a mental content or concept is, strictly speaking, neither equivocal nor univocal" (STL,

De Terminis 6).

The Signification of the Term "Fulani"

The signification of the term "Fulani", shall be explored following the different possible ways of the signification of term by Ockham as expounded above. The signification of a term is not merely the meaning of a word, though in daily communication it is common to use signification and meaning synonymously. So, words have meaning but terms have signification. While meaning strictly speaking is merely linguistic, signification is at the same time logical and ontological. The question on the signification of a term is: What reality (esse) comes to mind when a term, either spoken or written, is mentioned? Or put differently, it is to ask: What reality ought to come to mind when a term is mentioned? Now the import, and that is to say the signification of these two questions are not exactly the same, "What reality comes to mind?" and "What reality ought to come to mind?", are not the same. Hence, the distinctions of "Term", is based on the difference between: "What reality comes to mind?" and "What reality ought to come to mind?"

When the term "Fulani" is mentioned, it is therefore important, to examine its signification from the two perspective of:"What reality comes to mind?" and "What reality ought to come to mind?" The question, "What reality ought to come to mind?", signifies a sort of natural signification, in the sense of having a universal logical signification. Oughtness, is both categorical and imperative, that is

to say, it is both universal and duty bound. Thus, in the foregoing, can one say the term "Fulani", is both categorical and imperative? If it is, it would have only one signification, but, if it is not it would have different significations. This can be known by interrogating the term, "Fulani" based on Ockham's notion of Signification of terms.

The first thing to affirm, is that "Fulani" is not merely a word but that it is a term. This affirmation has been presupposed in the ongoing discourse. A word becomes a term only when it is employed within a proposition; in the Aristotelian definition, when it is either the subject or the predicate of a proposition.There are other words which have the same signification as "Fulani", they include: "Fula" and "Fulbe". These words, "Fulani", "Fula" and "Fulbe", though are three different words but they are the same term, because they have the same signification. They all signify *an ethnic group predominantly found in the Sahel and West Africa parts of the African continent*. Thus, to the question:"What reality ought to come to mind?" when the term "Fulani", "Fula" or "Fulbe" is mentioned, is that it is *an ethnic group of persons*. So, "Fulani" *is* "an ethnic group of persons", is at the same time a logical proposition and an ontological proposition. Hence, we can say: *All Fulani are an ethnic group of persons*. This is a categorical/universal proposition. The presence of the copula *are,* does not only connects the subject (Fulani) to the predicate (an ethnic group of persons), it also makes the proposition a *suppositio*, thus, asserting that the subject (Fulani) is a being that has real existence (*esse*), which is an ethnic group of

persons existing predominantly in the Sahel and West African parts of the African continents. But even when there is a Fulani in any part of the world, it does not change the universal reality, that he or she belongs to a specific ethnic group of persons. Therefore, the natural signification of "Fulani" ought to be a person (*persona*).

In the indefinite proposition, *Fulani is an ethnic group of persons*, the term "Fulani" being the subject of the proposition is a term and more specifically it is a categorematic term. This is because the term "Fulani" in the proposition has a fixed and definite signification, which is "an ethnic group of persons". For according to Ockham, categorematic terms has fixed and definite signification, syncategorematic terms do not have fixed and definite signification. Therefore, "Fulani" is not a syncategorematic term. It should be noted that the fixed and definite signification of a categorematic term is within the limit of a logical proposition. This means that in two different logical propositions, the same categorematic term could have different "fixed and definite" significations. For instance, in the propositions: (1) *Some Fulani are herdsmen* and (2) *Fulani is an ethnic group of persons*, the categorematic term "Fulani" in both propositions (1) and (2), have a fixed and definite signification in each of the propositions, but they, "Fulani" in (1) and (2) have different significations, when considered as different logical propositions (1) and (2). For not all Fulani (people) are herdsmen, but all Fulani (people) are persons of an ethnic group. So, the signification of "Fulani" in proposition (1) is different from that in

proposition (2). Thus, the "fixed" and "definite" signification of categorematic terms should be understood as delimited within a given proposition, not as ontologically fixed and definite.

From the above, it is obvious that the term "Fulani" is both a spoken and written term, not a conceptual term. The term "Fulani" appears as signifier in both spoken and written propositions in daily communication to construct different significations. Since the term "Fulani" belongs to a natural or human language, it is not a conceptual term. For a conceptual term is a mental content or impression that stands for that which is signified only in the mind, that is, it possesses only mental signification. Therefore, when the term "Fulani" is used in communication, it always possesses a signification or significations of ontological realities that is extra-mental. Since the term "Fulani" is not merely a mental impression which is private to one's mind, the signification of the term "Fulani" when used either intended or not, is open to the cognition and perception of others. Phenomenologically, this cognition or perception, is always a cognition or perception of a lived experienced reality, an ontological reality. To this extend, like every term in signification, whenever the term "Fulani" is used one is making an assertion open to the judgment of others, which one must be ready to defend. Hence, the term "Fulani" is not a mere apprehension of the *intellectus*. In simple apprehension no logical claim, assertion or judgment is made. It is only the grasp of a form or concept in the mind, without stating the *thisness* of the form or

concept. As a mental content only, therefore, one can say that at the level of simple apprehension, the apprehended form or concept inthe mind is a conceptual term.

Since the term "Fulani" belongs to spoken and written term, it does not signify naturally but conventionally. Only conceptual terms signify naturally and primarily. When a Fulani person is stands before my eyes, what signifies naturally and primarily is the concept person or the form of person, *personness*. The mind does not naturally or primarily grasp the person, in this case, as a Fulani person or as a person belonging to any other ethnic group or race. The mind only secondarily, and thus conventionally, signifies the concept or form of the person standing before me as a Fulani person. Thus, the term "Fulani" is a second order signifier, for it signifies what has been naturally or primarily be signified by the mind in the mind, that is to say, it signifies the concept in the mind, while the concept in the mind naturally and primarily signifies the ontological existent outside the mind. Therefore, the term "Fulani" is a primary (first) intention not a second intention, because it does not naturally signify an ontological existence, but conventionally signifies an actual existence by signifying the natural signification (concept) in the mind of an ontological existence. Being a term of conventional signification, not a naturally signification, the term "Fulani", like every other conventional term, is open to diverse significations which is consequently open to diverse ontological perceptions. It is to this effect that Ockham contends: "This holds to such an extent

that a word conventionally signifying an object signified by new convention, come to signify another object, simply because the concept came to signify another object" (De Terminis 1).This portrays the dynamic relationship between a conventional term and what it signifies (ontological existent). When the conventional term signifying an object changes, the object of signification, that is, what is signified also changes. What changes directly when a conventional term changes is not the ontological existent, but the natural term of the ontological existent which by convention has imposed different signification to the concept in the mind of the ontological existence. The distortion is in the mental content, which consequently means a cognitive and/or perceptive distortion.

The claim that the term "Fulani" signifies conventionally, entails that it is not an absolute term but a connotative term. For absolute terms do not signify a thing primarily and another thing secondarily in such a way that there could be a change in the definition of the things signified. Absolute terms signify a thing primarily. Therefore, absolute terms include all universal substances, such as species and genus, or put differently the concept of species and genus. The term "Fulani" is neither a species nor a genus, it is rather a term that signifies the concept of logical species or genus. Thus, it is a connotative term, because it can primarily signify a thing and secondarily signify another thing (rightly or wrongly). Using the proposition employed above for elucidation, in the propositions: (1) (*Some) Fulani are herdsmen* and (2) *(All)Fulani is (are) an ethnic*

group of persons, it is obvious that the term "Fulani" does not have one signification. One could say that it primarily(by convention in time) signifies *an ethnic group of persons* but secondarily signifies *people of which some are herdsmen*. The problem is that as a connotative term, people can by convention consciously or unconsciously decide to signify the term "Fulani" generally as *herdsmen*. Fallaciously, changing the logical form of the particular proposition, *Some Fulani are herdsmen* to a universal proposition *All Fulani are herdsmen.*

Since all conventional terms can be divided into univocal, equivocal and denominative terms, the term "Fulani", in its signification, following the analysis above, cannot be a univocal term and a denominative term. For a term is univocal, if it has the same mental content in its significations and a denominative term when a term is derived from a mental content or concept. The term "Fulani" neither has the same mental content in its significations nor has it been derived from a mental content, as the term "just" is derived from the mental concept "justice". The term "Fulani", thus, could be equivocal. It could be equivocal, because diverse mental content could be signified by the same term "Fulani". It cannot be said to be denominative, for a denominative term is obtained when a term is derived from a mental content or concept, for example the term "just" from the concept of "justice". It thus follows that in the usage of the term "Fulani" the logical fallacy of equivocation is always lurking around the cognitive discourse. Hence, the possibility of

committing the formal fallacy of changing a term of a proposition from particular to universal or vice versa, and the fallacy of equivocation in the usage of the term "Fulani", is a danger always lurking around in discourses employing this term. Due to the possibility of these fallacies, the usage of the term, "Fulani" can cause havocs that are beyond logic and ontology but more seriously socio-political crisis.

The Evilization of the term "Fulani" in Present Day Nigeria.

Globally there have been different levels of security challenges in different countries. In Nigeria, like many other countries, there has not been any time when there is perfect peace and harmony. However, the state of insecurity and sense of fear and terror all over the country, have been heightened in the past seven years. These past seven years have been the period of the political and economic governance of the President Muhammadu Buhari. The reasons for this heightened situation of insecurity and fear in the country are not few, as everyone has his or her view of the problem. It is not the place of this paper to discuss and diagnose, either the security problem in Nigeria today or the general political and economic situation of the country today. However, one thing that is needed to be said as its relates to this paper, is the place the term "Fulani" has occupied in the present discourse and analysis of the political economy of Nigeria today in general, and in particular, its place in the discourse of insecurity and violence today.

In this discussion of the term "Fulani", the focus remains the connection between logic and ontology, and its social and political consequence. This paper, claims that in present day Nigeria, there is an unconscious logical distortion of the signification of the term "Fulani". A distortion which is imposing upon the term "Fulani" an evil signification. Every adult Nigerian, across the ethnic groups, including those belonging to the ethnic group, Fulani, will agree that the signification of the term "Fulani", say twenty years ago, did not have exactly the same signification as it does today. Twenty years ago, an average Nigerian saw the Fulani as nomadic people whose main occupation was animal husbandry. Hence, most Fulani people (men) in Nigeria and in other countries of Africa were herdsmen (and many are still herders), who go about the country to feed their cattle with green pastures, holding their stick to control their cattle, carrying small bags containing daily food and a water bottle. For children then, it is fun (mixed with the fear of the approaching big animals) to see the herd of cattle moving across the street. The only inconvenience felt by commuters then, was to exercise some patience waiting for the herd to cross over a road, for them to continue walking, riding or driving. And maybe also the smell of their excreta, could be another problem, but of which some people especially rural subsistent farmers anticipate to gather as natural fertilizer, to nourish their farm lands or gardens. This is definitely a description of my image of the Fulani herdsmen about twenty years ago, which I think many people of my age and older would agree to. This image one could say, is consistent with the signification of the

term "Fulani" as an ethnic cultural people, of whose main occupation is animal rearing, as logically analyzed above.

Today, the image is different, and consequently the signification of the term "Fulani" is becoming different for many people in Nigeria today. Today, the image of a Fulani herdsman for an average Nigerian, are people who in place of holding a stick to control his cattle, now holds AK 47 guns either to defend himself and his cattle or to terrorize people in their farmlands or raid people's homes in the rural areas. As a result, almost every news on the Fulani people in the media or in general conversation is about violence and terror, kidnapping and banditry. In the consciousness of an average child in Nigeria especially in the southern part, the term "Fulani" has a negative signification and the Fulani herdsmen has a signification that is evil or at best negative and causes fear. In other words, there is an evilization of the term "Fulani" in the present-day Nigeria, due to the violence and terror caused by not all but some herdsmen of the Fulani ethic group. Rightly or wrongly, many Nigerians today perceive the Fulani people of Northern Nigeria to be the problem of the nations. Hence, the recent general call for the restructuring of the country in Nigeria or secession, especially in the Southern parts of Nigeria. Thus, the term "Fulani" has taken up different negative significations in Nigeria today. The term "Fulani" especially in its combination as "Fulani herdsmen" is now signifying injustice, rape, banditry, murderers and every other terror. This is what this paper implies by the evilization of the term "Fulani".

As expounded in the section above, the term "Fulani" is not a natural absolute term and thus is not a second intention. The term "Fulani" as a categorematic term, is a conventional and a connotative term, thus, it is a first intention. This means that the term "Fulani" is not a concept in the mind that naturally signifies an ontologically reality. It is rather, a term created by convention used to signify a concept or notion in the mind of an ontologically reality. The concepts in the mind as the forms of ontologically reality are usually universals (species or genus) substances (*ousia*), not subjects (*hupostasis*, *suppositum*) or the (nine) categories of subject according to Aristotle. Thus, the concepts in the mind are not open to conventional distortions or individual opinions. They are as a result of a direct action of the mind (*intellectus*), the mind apprehends the forms or essences of things directly. On the other hand, the conventional and connotative terms signify subjects and their categories, which are actual existence. The term "Fulani", therefore, signifies *particular people of an ethnic group* (subject), in the Sahel and West African (category-*place*), whose life style is predominantly nomadic (category-*quality*)and of families of herdsmen (category-*action*).The human mind does not directly grasp the subject *particular people of an ethnic group,* the place *Sahel and West African*, the quality and action *nomadic herdsmen*, for they are not universals (second intentions). What the human mind, conceives is a human being, a rational animal. They are, rather, all conventional and connotative terms, that is to say they are product of the human community, which is open to alteration, modification

or distortion by the community that uses the terms. Hence the term "Fulani" as a conventional term is open to alteration, modification or distortion by the human community that uses it, by giving it a different signification.

The alteration, modification or distortion of a term, therefore, happens on the level of rational discourse which is conditioned by people's perceptions and cognitions. In rational discourse terms are employed, propositions are made and inferences are established, in other words reasoning or logic takes place. Of which the propositions or inferences established could be true or false, without affecting the validity of the logic or rational discourse. The building blocks of logic are terms, which constitute a proposition and propositions which in turn constitute argument or syllogism in the traditional logic. It follows that when terms that signify an ontological reality are distorted, the argument or syllogism will be fallacious, and the entire discourse can be dangerous because the perception and cognition of ontological realities could be falsified and the ontological realities *per se* be harmed. For example, when the term "Fulani" which signifies *an ethnic group of persons*, is uttered based on certain perceptions of people in Nigeria today, it becomes negativized into *injustice, rape, banditry, murder and every other terror*. The term "Fulani" is thus evilized. The ontological reality which the term "Fulani" signifies, would thus, become an ethnic group of *rapers, bandits, murderers, terrorists and unjust people*. To maintain this negative signification for an ethnic

group of persons, is no doubt very dangerous. The danger is that it will harmfully affect the collective subjectivity, that is to say consciousness (*ego*) of a majority people in Nigeria, which gives an evil *persona* to the Fulani peoples. This evilization (as rapers, bandits, murderers, terrorists or unjust people) of the *persona* of the Fulani peoples definitely has a social and political consequences. These consequences, which if not speedily dealt with could lead to deep social and political disharmony or a complete disintegration of the Nigeria State.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that the logical problematic of signification, has a very dangerous socio-political effect due to the ontological implication that is connected to the signification of terms in logic. It expounded the notion of signification in Formal Logic as exposed by William of Ockham. It thus, employed this notion of signification of terms to discuss the term "Fulani", and showing the danger therein, in distorting the signification of the term "Fulani" like in every conventional and connotative terms. It claims that as a result of the connection between logic and ontology, conceptualization and perception, names and reality, the distortion of terms which are the building blocks of propositions in logic could lead to dangerous cognition and perception of ontological realities. To this end, it posits a critique on the dangerous change in the signification of the term, "Fulani" in the conceptualization and perception of present day Nigeria people, of West Africa. A

dangerous change, the paper claims, which if not speedily reconstructed and re-conceptualized in many, could lead to a disastrous situation in the socio-political reality of the Nigerian State.

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