

## Organ Laundering in Nigeria, Socio-Psychological Implications

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**Abstract** This paper examined the concept of organ laundering, its sustaining factors, the various organs highly harvested and the socio-psychological implication of the whole practice. Among the Nigerian etiological factors for organ laundering are penury, lengthening patient waiting lists, greed and deception of victims, boom and life organ donors and better quality of life organs. Behavioural tension, fear, suspicions, violence, confusion, somatic pains and loss of brotherhood, freedom and recreation were unveiled as socio-psychological implications of organ laundering in Nigeria. The following were recommended:- Nigerians, especially the youths, should endeavour to be at the right place with the right people and at the right times; Girls specifically, should avoid flexing (mixing up with unknown people, for entertainments or going to unknown destinations); Sick persons, Ladies for abortion and people seeking medical attentions should go to known or traceable hospitals to avoid being butchered; Government and the general public should assist to fight poverty and corruption, and build high morals in people and then create job opportunities.

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**Keywords:** Human laundering/ trafficking, Organ laundering, Commercialization of humanity.

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### 1. Introduction

Human/organ laundering or trafficking has become a booming international business. International business magnets, government top officials, medical professionals, the religious fellows etc. are all involved. Due to its long history, calibre of individuals involved and rapid spread in dimensions, this inhuman but 'lucrative' business becomes globally difficult to combat. The migration of young biblical Joseph to Egypt was via human trafficking. A slave merchant Ishmaelite bought him and on getting to Egypt sold him to Portipher. The processes that packaged Sampson, the Israeli-fighter, to Philistine with his eyes completely removed as he 'entertained' the Philistines in their great temple involved advanced human trafficking. The early slave trade that ravaged Africans and forced them to Europe and America was real human trafficking. The recent and incessant announcements of Nigerians missing in various Nigerian villages, towns, and cities are just a clear manifestation of this barbaric business in Nigeria.

Looking at the Nigerian picture of human trafficking, Titi Atiku Abubakar, wife of Nigeria's one time Vice President lamented; 'For those of you who think it cannot happen to you, I want to let you know that the dragnet of the traffickers is so wide that only God knows who is safe.' Again from the Nigerian scene Agbu (2003) sees human trafficking as presently practiced as a recent addition to the dictionary of global woes. It is an organised business just as the transatlantic slave trade was with various linkages spread around the globe.

According to UN protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, human trafficking is the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by improper means, such as force, abduction, fraud or coercion, for an improper purpose such as forced or coerced labour, servitude, slavery or sexual exploitation. It also includes persons trafficked into forced marriages or bonded labour markets such as sweet shops, agricultural plantations, hawking or domestic service. It is prizing human beings as commodities and exchanging same for money like any other article in the market. It is simply put, the commercialization of humanity, which is akin to modern day slavery. In the past, slavery and slave trade existed in various forms. People became slaves as war captives; criminals were punished with enslavement, and in some cases individuals in impoverished circumstances sold their relatives (Agbu, 2003). In the light of these explanations, what is American, Australian and Canadian visa lottery? Is this not another modern slavery package or greener pasture-hook for members of the Third World?

No matter how human trafficking is viewed, it constitutes a fundamental violation of the human person. It has continued to expand in dimensions and categorizations as it wears varying faces across the continents of the globe. However, it broadly includes, forced and child prostitution, domestic servitude, illegal and bonded labour, servile marriage, false adoption, sex tourism and entertainment, pornography, organized begging, organ laundering and other criminal activities.

## **2. Organ Laundering**

Organ laundering also referred to as organ harvesting entails the trafficking of human beings with the intentions of selling their organs for money. It is organ theft and trading. This thriving organ business unveils the barbaric nature of this present age. Organ harvesting, the dissecting of a person into organs and parts, has made it possible for today's man to float "human organs or spare parts stores" just as one can easily float electronic spare parts' stores in Singapore or Nigerian Alaba International market. This is just taking place in our so-called jet age with jet planes, cellular phones and internet. Exploiting the poverty rate and the low status of women and children in the developing world, middlemen are able to bring together the supply and demand for human organs in ways that would have simply been unthinkable not long ago.

Organ trafficking could be seen as the unhealthy outcome of the international ban on organ sales and life donor organs. Wherever there is demand there is a market. The excruciating poverty of potential donors, lengthening patient waiting lists and the better quality of organs harvested from life people make organ laundering an irresistible proposition.

## **3. Statement of the Problem**

A day hardly passes in various cities and towns in Nigeria without the street sweepers and refuse collectors or the innocent and empathetic public picking dismembered corpses and body parts. The pages of our daily newspapers and voices from our radio and television houses speak volumes about missing Nigerians. This is gradually spreading to the rural areas where our culture and traditions ought to be firm and where close kinship knitting is suppose to excel. Nigerians more than ever before live in fear. The observed recent increase in fear is based on the fact that body parts of people of varying ages, gender, and socio-economic strata are involved. Repeatedly, certain identifiable body parts seem to be sourced for. As this episode erodes the Igbo man's philosophy, of "onye aghala Nwanne ya" (being our brothers' keeper), the total reasons for the incessant nature of this ugly 'business' seem not to be comprehended. No matter the reason for organ laundering, it has serious national and international ugly socio-psychological implications.

## **4. Objectives of the Paper**

The general objective of this paper is to draw a contemporary attention to the prevalence of organ

laundering in Nigeria via a consideration of its historical antecedents and nature. In specific terms the paper aims at:

- identifying various reasons for organ laundering;
- unveiling major body parts involved or highly sourced;
- consider the socio-psychological implications for this monster; and
- Proffer solutions towards its eradication.

## 5. Reason for Organ Laundering

Organ laundering is attributed to different reasons internationally and locally. The following reasons were advanced by Abidde (2009) for organ laundering in Nigeria;

- For magical or religious reasons to appease or please deities and spirits. Traditionally in some communities in Africa, it was a norm to either bury alive human beings with the corpse of a king or get some human parts to appease the gods before the dead king is buried.
- People also procure, buy and sell human cadavers and body parts for scientific and research purposes. Even at that people make money out of the exercise.
- Lengthening patient waiting list is yet another factor, "each day about 63 people receive an organ transplant, but another 16 people on the waiting list die because not enough organs are available (U.S. Department of Health and Human services), hence, the need to explore the dark World of organ harvesting and trafficking black market.
- For the fact that organs harvested from life people are of a better quality than those from dead fellows, the business of organ theft continues to strive in its crude form of "catch, dissect and sell".
- In India, some very poor and very miserable people willingly sell body parts just to make ends meet. Hence, penury has stood tallest among the factors sustaining organ harvesting as people are daily reduced by penury. The excruciating poverty of potential donors is a heavy force. As a result of abject poverty, human beings get to a high level of barbaric behaviour of forcefully dissecting others into parts for sales. But in real terms, if an individual is not greedy he would not sell his body or assist in dissecting others no matter how poor he may be.
- There are some Nigerians who still believe that money, fame and good fortune can be acquired if certain parts of the human anatomy are consumed or sacrificed. Hence people whose organs are harvested just become victims of their greed and deception. Of course some victims are persons who want to become rich over night.

## 6. Sources of Organs

The 2003 movie, "Dirty Pretty Things" has hinted that illegal immigrants in the United Kingdom sell their organs for money and residency papers. It also reported of organs harvested from condemned Chinese prisoners. In March 2004, the U.S. News stories reported of organs harvested from cadavers stolen from UCLA's medical school over a five-year period. The April version of this same source indicated that organs were stolen during unauthorized autopsies and from executed prisoners not clinically dead.

## 7. Body Parts/ Organs Harvested & Highly Sourced

The importance of an organ to the living often determines its price. Of course, the availability and how easy it is to fetch such a body part or organ are major factors in fixing its value and price. According to VAKMIN (2002), body organs and parts mostly sought for and harvested include; Kidneys, Lungs, Liver, Corneas, Bones, Tendons, Heart Valves, Skin tissues, and other sellable human bits. These organs are kept in cold storage and air lifted to illegal distribution centres. These processes hence make the business an exclusive for the rich persons.

On the other hand Abidde (2009) opined that in Nigeria it has been said that the liver, tongue, brain tissues, the kidneys, lungs and the eyes are much wanted, but the most priced parts are the breasts, private parts and the heart all of which can be bought in some not so discreet markets the way beef and chicken or goats are sold and bought. Abidde, further disclosed that in most western countries where parts/organs are transplanted, a trader in body parts can make upward of \$500,000 a year. However in

Nigeria and other African countries body parts are almost free since snatchers and harvesters are primarily concerned with voodoo and magical use of such organs.

In NY Times (2004) it was said "Delivery of an intact Cadaver costs as little as \$1,000, but different specialists seek out specific pieces of anatomy for their work, and individual parts can be expensive. A head can cost \$500 in processing fees, according to brokers who handle such parts. A torso in good condition can fetch \$5,000, a spine goes for as much as \$3,500, a knee \$650, a cornea \$400".

## 8. Socio-Psychological implications of Organ Laundering

The act of organ laundering can and will definitely affect social relationships that exist between and amongst people in the society. Even the psych of the people will also be affected. Some of the socio-psychological implications of organ laundering are discussed below: -

- 1) Brotherhood is gone: No man is an island. Man is a group being whose success and/or failure depends often on the group(s) he belongs to and of course, his position, role and commitment to such a group (Uwaoma et al, 2001). The Holy Bible demands that we be our brother's keeper and as such share in each other's burden. Organ laundering, a barbaric act, runs counter to this philosophy. Before you try to bear a person's burden, take him in or extend a helping hand, you must be sure that such a behaviour would not endanger your health or dissect your body organs as per the prevalent organ laundering. The Igbos are known for brotherhood, "onye aghala Nwanne ya". This highly valued philosophy, the pride and respect of an Igbo man is gone.
- 2) Behavioural Tension: - The Nigerian environment is tension soaked. Nigerians live, work, make travels, sleep, eat, drive and relate under tension due to organ theft. Just walk down to any public eating centre and shout "Lekwa ha, abiala ha" (look at them, they have come), and see the panic-reactions of Nigerians. No matter the kind of "security" available on ground, a riot situation must be created. Both the operators/owners of the eating centre and customers would manifest tension expressed in an escaping behaviour. Often the first thing that would occur to persons in the above centre is "is this the way I will die". Such tension soaked behavioural patterns negatively affect productivity, quality of relationships, thinking and health of Nigerians.
- 3) Fear and Suspicion: - Fear is a killer psychosomatic disease. To live under a constant fear is just the easiest way to burn the candle of one's life from both ends. Due to the incessant and offensive sights of dead bodies without some organs and adverts on missing persons, there is this fear of "who is the next victim". Hence, the fear and suspicions most Nigerians in towns and villages exhibit. Certain festive periods like Christmas, New Yam feast, Local festivals, etc. heighten the fear since they are associated with increased rate of organ laundering. When a wealthy or titled man dies, people around would live in fear for the fact that certain burial rituals involving human organs or parts would be performed.
- 4) Behavioural Confusion: - Various body organs go for an impressive price. Just get a valued human organ and the money is in your hand. This barbaric business has succeeded in making; mostly the Nigerian youths run away from genuine enterprises, hard work, perseverance, and honest behaviours. "It is the end that justifies the means", most youths assert. Just get the money no matter the source. Even if it means trading one's brother, sister, child or parents' organs. However, the younger generation is confused not knowing whether to follow completely the old peoples' culture or dance along with the "jet age phenomenon".
- 5) Somatic Pains: - Due to consistent tension, fear, lack of trust and other related ills of organ laundering, many Nigerians express somatic pains. They complain of butterfly sensations, headache, heat in the body and head etc. The older persons report on insomnia, hopelessness, loss of appetite and dizziness.
- 6) Loss of Freedom and Recreation: - Organ laundering restricts social, mental, political and religious movements. Tourism attractions and movements are never favoured by organ harvesting. People find it difficult lodging in hotels, and picnicking for fear of missing their body organs.
- 7) Death of Trust: - As a result of fear and suspicion brought through the act of organ laundering, trust has lost its place among Nigerians. It is difficult to even trust a relation who behaves suspiciously towards a person not to talk of a friend.
- 8) Loss of African Hospitality: - Africans, Nigerians inclusive, are known for their hospitality.

The warm acceptance and assistance to visitors are suspicious of each other. Gifts are frowned at and discarded.

## 9. Recommendations

Nigerians, especially the youths, should endeavour to be at the right places with the right people and at the right times. Girls specifically, should avoid “flexing” (mixing up with unknown people for entertainments or going to unknown destinations). Sick persons, ladies for abortion and people seeking medical attention should go to known or traceable hospitals to avoid being butchered.

Government and the general public should assist to fight poverty and corruption, build high morals in people and then create job opportunities. The aged who are poor without relatives to take care of then should be assisted by good spirited Nigerians. Old people’s homes could be built for such people. Street/professional begging should be banned and destitute, socially assisted.

All agents of socialization; the family, school, religious groups, mass media, law enforcement agents etc. should emphasis morality and patriotism and dethrone respect and worship of wealth presently ravaging our culture. The police force should be restructured to wear human face.

## 10. Conclusion

There was a time in Lagos and Ibadan when “Gbomo Gbomo” phenomenon (missing body parts) was very common. Today body parts and people disappear not to be seen again. Like a hurricane fire, the monster is fast spreading in all nooks and crannies of Nigeria. As an enterprise it is sophisticated in nature due to the calibre of Nigerians and huge amounts involved, the privy associated with it and reasons fixed for it. Thus effort to fight or eradicate it must be multifaceted involving the vulnerable groups, individual Nigerians, Nigerian government and the international community.

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