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Trafficking in Women and Children in Yoruba land : The Pre-Colonial, Colonial and Post Colonial Situations Compared

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Abstract - Trafficking in human beings is today a global phenomenon with global consequences. Within trafficking in human beings are specifics such as women trafficking, children trafficking and women and children trafficking. Although trafficking in women and children is going to be the subject matter of this paper, trafficking in human being generally is an old phenomenon with a positive effect, until it became abused from the pre-colonial days to now. Culturally, some aspects of Yoruba people's culture are consistent with it. Unlike the position of the United Nations which prohibits extracting labor from women and children under certain age, the Yoruba culture encourages it. A Yoruba proverb "ati kekere laa ti pee kan iroko, to ba dagba tan apa ko nii kaa mo" (children are better caught and molded when they are young, or else it would be difficult to do so when they are grown up), tells us why. The Yoruba believe in the virtue of training children from tender ages in some forms of trade and craft. However, the noble cultural intention of catching and molding children at tender age has been given a dehumanizing tar by modern day trafficking in women and children, locally and internationally. This paper intends to examine trafficking in women and children in the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial periods with the aim of establishing and understanding the motivational (?) nexus of the operators of these illegal trades across the ages.

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F.A Olasupo^α & Ile-Ife^σ

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I. INTRODUCTION

Trafficking in women and children was initially informed by training of children at tender age in the business of trading and engagements in other forms of work. Among cultural factors that encouraged this in Yorubaland were systems of marriage that was essentially polygamous, economy, traditional trading (including slave trade), marketing and other social roles such as ceremonies (naming, marriage, death or house warming), information gathering and dissemination. Women and children were culturally considered fit to do this because while women were imbued by what Ogunremi termed "Freedom of talking and walking"; children were allowed to follow their parents (mothers in particular) to farms, markets and on trading and thereby receiving tutelage on what their parents were engaged in.

In doing these, women and children criss-cross neighboring villages, towns or kingdoms. But they were,

sometimes, in the process, exposed to dangers such as kidnapping, raping, forced marriage, (where the woman concerned was a beautiful one) and slavery. The focus of this paper is to explore the mechanism of how Yoruba cultural activities encouraged women and child trafficking that resulted in kidnapping for ritual purposes, rape, forced marriages, labor and, sometimes, slavery in the pre-colonial days. A comparison of this with post-colonial transatlantic and transcontinental trafficking in women and children would as well be made.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

A word or term that needs clarification here is "traffic". Four distinct dictionary meanings of the word "traffic" are provided by Hornby. But the one relevant for our purpose here is the one on "numbers of people or the amount of goods moved from one place to another by road, rail, sea or air"¹. Thus, trafficking, that is the movement of a "number of people or the amount of goods moved from one place to another by road, rail, sea or air" is legal if due process of doing so is strictly adhered to especially where it requires obtaining passport and visa or declaring goods being trafficked before Custom and Excise. But it becomes illegal if these due processes of obtaining passport and visa or declaration of goods before Custom and Excise are sidetracked. In the pre-colonial days, those women and children who in the course of their "traffic" were kidnapped and put in "trafficking" as slaves and serfs constituted illegal trafficking.

Conceptually however, Agnes sees human trafficking as "simply a modern day slavery which involves the recruitment, transportation, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of fraud, deceit or coercion for the purpose of exploitation"². Wikipedia on the other hand, trafficking in human beings includes recruiting, harbouring, obtaining and transporting people by use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjecting them to involuntary acts, such as

¹ Hornby et al, (1974) *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English*, Britain: Oxford University Press. P1267

² Agnes E.M. (2007) "Styles of Parenting and Human Trafficking in Africa" in the *International Journal of Development and Policy Studies*, Vol. 3, Makurdi, Nigeria : Quality Development and Management Resources Center (QDMRC)

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commercial sexual exploitations or involuntary labour”³ . Finally, for Carling, “trafficking in person is restricted to instances where people are deceived, threatened or coerced into situations of exploitation including prostitution”⁴ .

III. FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGED TRAFFICKING IN PRE-COLONIAL DAYS

Factors that led to women and child trafficking in the pre-colonial days included the following:

economy, polygamy, marketing, slave trade and slavery. These factors were operated by traditional leaders who were sovereigns of their various communities. Of particular interest to this paper is the case of female traditional leaders (or rulers) who also operated these factors like their male counterparts. Three categories of women traditional rulers exist in some communities in Nigeria. There are those who are rulers over males and females in their communities. Examples of this could be found in Niger, Eboyin and Adamawa states. See pictures below.



Pictures one and two. In picture one is the researcher, F.A Olasupo, standing by the left of the female king, Hajia Hadisa Muhammed. To the right is the research assistant.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid



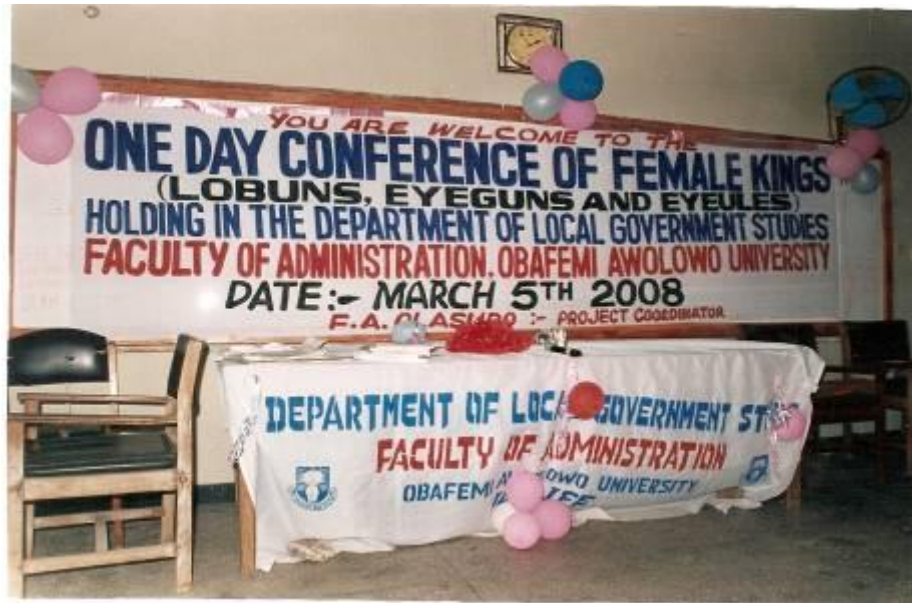
Picture three is the researcher, paying homage to female king of Unwana, Eze Ogo II, in the Afigbo North Local Government of Ebonyin state.



The researcher making a point before the female king

There are also those communities who operate dual-sex political system in which case male king and female king co-rule their communities on gender basis.

Ondo, Ekiti, Delta and Anambra states are examples of places where this system could be found.



Above is the banner of one day conference held at the Department of Local Government Studies for the female kings in the south western part of Nigeria.



The researcher and his assistant beside the female kings as they were about to enter the venue of the conference – Local Government Department Lecture Theater, on the 5th of March 2008.



A cross section of the female kings about to enter Obafemi Awolowo Conference Center to attend a National Conference on Chieftaincy Institution in Nigeria. Organized by the Department of History, Obafemi Awolowo University, between April 9-10, 2008. Stooping in front of them all is the researcher, F.A Olasupo.



A cross section of female kings at the palace of Ooni of Ife, Oba Okunade Sijuwade. In their midst is the researcher, F.A Olasupo



Female kings in a group photograph with Alaafin of Oyo. Seated on the ground to the left hand of Alaafin of Oyo is the researcher, F.A Olasupo. The picture was taking at the palace of Alaafin of Oyo on the 4th of May 2009. See more pictures on page 19.



The researcher in the midst Female Regent and the female King of Ibulesoro



Finally, there are those who are regents and who exercise traditional rulership far in excess of the

mandatory three or six month's regency. Some of them stay in office as regent for close to five, ten, fifteen, and even twenty years.

IV. ECONOMY

Traditional pre-colonial Yoruba economy was imbued by three vital sectors: farming, trading and craft industries. Although each of these occupations was dichotomized by gender, there was no hard and fast rule about it. While "Men were predominantly craftsmen, farmers, hunters and soldiers...women were predominantly traders and producers of commodities like dye, thread and oil which they took to the market to sell". In addition to these occupations, there was another one – weaving – that both sex participate in, and interestingly, creating gender in this as well⁵.

Interestingly as well, these occupations were such that encouraged huge women and children traffic. Farming as an occupation, for instance, was and is still of three types: oko ogba (farming in garden located behind the compound) oko eti'le ("farms cultivated in the thickly forested land surrounding all the compounds" and oko iwaju (distant farms of between eight to twenty or more kilometers⁶. With regards to trading, its

⁵ Osinubi T.O and Amaghionyeodiwe L.A, Women in Development: The Case of Bodija Market in Ibadan, South Western Nigeria" in the *Journal of Development Alternatives and Area Studies*, Vol. 24. No. 1&2, USA: San Antonio TX 78232.

⁶ Falola T, (1984) *The Political Economy of A Pre-Colonial African State*. Ibadan, 1830-1900, Ife: University of Ife Press.

trademark was essentially traffic. Within the town could be as many markets as possible with the central one called Oja Oba (king's market). Added to these were those in the neighboring villages and towns. Traders criss-cross all these in the course of their trading. Craft industries such as blacksmiths and weavers also engaged in traffic in search of raw materials and establishment of industries outside their own towns and thereby establishing inter village, town and kingdom commercial and industrial links⁷. In 1830's and 1840's for instance, a prominent weaver, Oluokun, from Iseyin, in Oyo kingdom, came to Ibadan kingdom to establish "the Oke-Oluokun quarter which became a famous center for weaving in the town"⁸.

Of these vital economic sectors however, farming in which most men engaged in required more hands that also necessitated having more wives who would lend helping hands to their husband farmers⁹. As traders, women extended their trading activities to carrying farm products to the market. These resulted in heavy women traffic. But, for Hodder, what led to heavy women traffic during this period was because of the "necessity of adapting trading to the dangers of movement through the country-side since it was unsafe for men to move away from their farms while women enjoyed relative immunity from attack"¹⁰. But there were also some of them (women) who fell victim of trafficking. Some of them who were attacked during the wars or by marauders were trafficked to slavery¹¹.

V. POLYGAMY

Polygamy, as family institution, started women and child "traffic" although a legitimate one. Wives of the husbands appear in the same uniform and also moved in groups to the markets, ceremonies and in carrying out public duties. Karin Barber puts it this way:

"Women undertake their public duties in large groups. At any funeral and festivals, teams of women in 'ankoo' go in procession round the town. Daughters who have married bring back groups of thirty or forty of their 'co-wives' to important family events, and no festivity can go forward without the influx of female relatives to collect firewood, cook the food and serve the guests"¹².

Akin Mabogunje corroborated this when he said:

"Under guild system, traders in the market organized themselves according to commodity being dealt in... The social aspect of this guild necessitated a sense of belonging that fostered periodic outings (e.g. naming,

burial or house warming ceremonies) of such social groups with members all dressed alike in "aso-ebi", which "demands some expenditure of money on the part of every member of the social groups"¹³.

With regards to women and child traffic to the markets, even queens were not let out. In those days, queens, monarchs' wives, were not left out in trafficking. As a matter of fact the queens, numbering between one hundred and one hundred and eight in respect of Alaafin of Oyo and the Kabiyesi of Ajase (King of Porto Novo) respectively, engaged in long distance traffic in the course of trading.

In short, polygamy as a form of association or group in those days contributed to legal and illegal trafficking. This institution, polygamy, has inbuilt arrangement that allows the older wives to engage in some legal trafficking in economic activities while at the same time safeguarding "integrity of the institution of polygamy by turning the husbands sexual emotions to the younger wives within the accepted social framework"¹⁴.

The arrival of foreigners and their religions strengthened this institution and its potential for women and child trafficking. "While Islam has a clear cut tolerance of, or almost a mandate for polygamy, Christianity per se, encouraged monogamy". But this is in the New Testament. Old Testament contradicts this as "Jewish patriarchs and kings like Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon had multiple wives. Solomon, for instance, is reported in I Kings 11:3 as having 700 wives and 300 concubines.

This is a system which only male traditional rulers and other affluent members of the society could afford but commoners also copy it without having the wherewithal to sustain it. The upshot of their action is breeding of children beyond their capacity to train which in turn result in children undertaking antisocial activities to survive.

Today, it is a commonplace finding in our towns and cities, hoards of beggars, particularly women and their children, able and disabled, stationed in a particular place – roundabouts and the adjoining pavements – and trafficking from there to other parts of the town and cities for alms¹⁵. Beggars trafficking is said to be a lucrative business in which not only the disabled persons engage in it but able persons as well. Investigations show that "a good number of these beggars had built houses which they put on rent instead of living"¹⁶. It is getting alarming, the way parents trafficked their children abroad to engage in beggary. In the run-up to Ramadan, as Umrah pilgrims flock to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, numbers of beggars, of different gender, ages, and nationalities, are found to increase. "These children", being forced by their parents

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. P 30.

⁹ Ibid P 54.

¹⁰ Ibid P 55.

¹¹ Ibid P 55.

¹² Karin Barber, (1991) *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and The Past in A Yoruba Town*, Great Britain: Edinburgh University Press. P271.

¹³Mabogunje A.L, (1961) "The Market Women" in *Ibadan, A Journal Published at University College, Number eleven*. P16

¹⁴ Ibid. Falola, Op cit. P54.

¹⁵ *The Nigerian Tribune* of August 11 2006, P16.

¹⁶ Ibid.

"to pester the pilgrims and beg", "are seen begging in and around the religious places"¹⁷. A disabled Nigerian child beggar, Ahmad Ibraheem, found in this kingdom during a holy month of Ramadan begging, caught and interviewed by Saudi Arabia's Anti-beggary Department, said:

"My parents told me to go and beg and that I was doing a good thing and that God would reward me for my helping them. My mother said that God has 'blessed' me with this handicap so that I can earn money and help the family"

The ten-year-old child who was caught by officials begging in the Grand Mosque and was brought to the center said: "I like it here, it is clean and the people want to help us. The food is nice and they gave me nice clothes to wear"¹⁸.

In the days of Oyo kingdom, the building of the palace of Alaafin of Oyo and the annual re-thatching of it was not left to the inhabitants of the capital alone, women groups (some with children strapped at their backs) in neighboring towns and villages such as Ejigbo, Iwo, Ogbomoso, Iseyin, Oke-Iho, Irawo, Shepeteri, Iganna, Ijio, Igboho and Shaki trafficked to the capital, Oyo, to lend hands¹⁹. In the process of this kind of trafficking, Alaafin of Oyo could without the consent of somebody's wife order her to be brought to him for sexual fun or outright takeover of her from her legitimate husband. Soyinka beautifully captured this in his play *Death and the King's Horseman* when he said, "the old rascal with a restless eye spots a beautiful girl passing by. Although she is already betrothed to another, he insist on taking her as bride so that the grain that will not feed the voyager at his passage drop here and take root as he steps beyond this earth and us"²⁰.

In those days there is also what can be regarded as trafficking in death, but those who engaged in this kind of trafficking were male traditional rulers. In the distant past, when powerful monarchs died, their wives, whatever the number, must die with them. In this wise, the one hundred and one hundred and eight wives of Alaafin and that of the kabiyesi of Ajase (Port Novo) respectively were expected to die with their monarch husbands – a case of death trafficking!²¹. But Samuel Johnson controverts this. According to him, the whole of them (queens) were often spoken of loosely as "the king's wives because they reside in the palace, but

strictly speaking the titled ladies and the priestesses at least should not be included in the category"²².

Thus, not all the one hundred and above wives were the kings' queens. In Oyo kingdom therefore, according to Johnson, those women who culture trafficked to death with the king when he died were "Iya Oba (king's official mother) and all the powerful priestesses e.g. Iyale Mole (the Ifa priestesses) the Olorun-ku-mefun, the Iyamonari, the Iya'-le-ori (these are all priestesses)" from the male side, only the king's horseman died with him²³. A prominent traditional ruler, the Awujale of Ijebuland, testified to this in an interview he granted TheNews magazine in 2004. According to him, in Ijebu Ode when Oba passes on:

"you have to kill Eketa Oba straightaway. This is the first one that goes in. Others will follow; messengers who will minister to him in the great beyond; who will help him to carry his luggage from here"²⁴.

Recently, there were bizarre cases of molested corps of dead Obas e.g. Alake of Egbaland, Oyebade Lipele; Makun of Shagamu, Oba Efuwape Adetayo Ogunsowo; and Alaiye Ode-Remo in Ijebuland, Oba Sunday Olufunsho Adeolu. In the case of Olufunsho Adeolu, according to tradition, after his demise, his corps had:

"Rope tied on the neck of the dead king is meant to remove the head after several days when the body would have decayed on a tree they hang it. Other parts of the body would then be cut into pieces for various types of rituals while the heart of the king would then be removed and cooked"²⁵.

However, in 1858 "King Atiba influenced the constitution and inauguration of the Consultative Assembly that met in Ibadan" that year. This was attended by many Yoruba war generals and eminent citizens of the time²⁶. Among far reaching decisions taken at the conference were abolition of women trafficking to death with the king and also the cancellation of the tradition that the Aremo

²² Johnson S, (1921), *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Time to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, London: Lowe and Brydone. P. 63

²³ Ibid. P 56. See also *Tell* of May 2 2005, P 21; Faseke M, (1998), "The Role of Women in Traditional Yoruba Society: A Review" in Ogunremi And Adediran, *Culture And Society in Yorubaland*, Ibadan: Rex Charles Publication. P153. Daramola O. and Jeje A. (1967) *Awon Asa Ati Orisa Ile Yoruba*, Ibadan: Onibon-Oje Press. P154.

²⁴ *TheNews* of May 17, 2004, P.11

²⁵ Erelu Ode-Remo, (2009) "Cutting into Pieces Corpses of Kings for rituals still in Vogue: Says no tombs for late kings of Ode-Remo, Alake of Egbaland and Makun of Shagamu" in *New Focus* of December 27th. P 1. See also Adeoye A. and Agbro Jr. (2009) "They cut the Eleyinmi into bits and pieces" in *The Nation* of December 13th. P16.

²⁶ Alaafin of Oyo, (1994) "Alaafin in Intellectual critique of Political Evolution from Past to the Present, in a letter titled: Lest History Laughs at us" " to the then Head of State Gen. Sani Abacha" in the *Guardian on Sunday* of March 13.

¹⁷ *Osun Defender* of September 29, 2006.P 14

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ojo G.JA, (1966) *Yoruba Palaces*, London: University of London Press. P 63.

²⁰ Shoyinka W, (1975) *Death and the King's Horseman*, New York, W.W. Norton. P22. See also Aboyade B, (1984) *Wole Soyinka And Yoruba Oral Tradition in Death And The King's Horseman*, Ibadan: Fountain Publications. P3.

²¹ Aboyade B, Op cit. P5. See also *The Nation* of August 26, 2006. P34.

(crown prince) must die with his father Alaafin. The conference suggested that he “could succeed his father if he was found capable by the Oyomesi (Kingmakers)”²⁷. But as recently as 1946, this age-old custom was still steadfastly adhered to, prompting the colonial officer, Simon Pilkings to intervene in for its stoppage²⁸. Reasons why kings’ wives must traffic to death with them in those days, according to Johnson, were that they enjoyed great privileges during the kings’ lifetime. They could commit any crime with impunity. Criminals condemned to death and escaping to their houses became free. In any case, the contention here is that the institution of polygamy contributed in no small measure to the development of women and child traffic and trafficking.

VI. MARKETING

The development of market economy brought to the peak, the women and child “traffic” and “trafficking”. As in the case of polygamy, market economy also recorded impressive development of women and child “traffic”. As a matter of fact, it built on the foundation laid by polygamous institution. However, like in the institution of polygamy, it also recorded very low illegal women and child trafficking; although the period was also a period of great insecurity that irregularly threw up topsy-turvy situation. In the ensuing commotion, women and children trafficked to and from the market got disrupted and resulted in kidnapping and trafficking them to the slave market for sales as slaves.

As guild system began to develop in the market, traders in the market organized themselves according to commodity being dealt in. each guild had its leader called Olori (head). While the heads organized their members and led them to the markets especially long distance ones. According to Amadiume, the senior women administered the periodic market days of the week²⁹. When trafficking was becoming increasingly dangerous in the pre-colonial days, they (women traders) found solutions, which were aimed at protecting their traffic:

The women, like the men, traveled in caravan for protection. In 1833, Lander observed one hundred wives of the Alaafin trading at Ilora. Writing of Ibadan in the second half of the 19th Century, Johnson says: the women of those days were as hardy as the men and often went in a body of caravans to Ikere and Apomu for corn and other foodstuffs although the road was unsafe for the kidnappers³⁰.

²⁷ Johnson, Op cit. P 57. See also Alaafin, Op cit.

²⁸ Aboyade B. Op cit. P. 5.

²⁹ Ogunremi, Op cit. P 122; Osinubi, Op cit. P77;

³⁰ Faseke, Op cit. 153; Mabogunje, Op cit. P15; Hodder B.W, And Ukwu U.I, (1969) *Markets in West Africa: Studies of markets and trade among the Yoruba and Ibo*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press. P 27. See also, Ade-Ajayi J.F, And Smith R, (1964), *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Cambridge University Press. P3.

It is important to observe here that under market economy, women began to be conscious of their safety in the course of their “traffic” from one market to the other especially the long distance ones. They had begun to, for security reasons, “gathered at agreed times and places and trafficked together in caravan”³¹

VII. SLAVE TRADE AND SLAVERY

For more than four centuries, in the pre-colonial days, slave trade form the major form of trafficking in women and children that forcefully immigrated thousands of Yorubas across the Atlantic to the New World of the Americas. Perhaps more than any other ethnic group in Nigeria, Yoruba people experienced more triple heritage of slavery – indigenous, Islamic and Western³².

While those of the Western were as recent as three centuries ago, those of the indigenous and Islamic dated back to the birth of Islam in seventh century³³. Although the indigenous one, which started in the days of Oyo Ajaka (war-like) was slightly earlier than that of Islam, the operational levels of both were largely similar. Oyo Empire spanned three epochs: Oyo Ajaka (war-like) with the capital at Katunga; Oyo Ile (with the capital at Igboho area); and the latest Oyo Alaafin (with the capital at the present Oyo)³⁴. See picture below.

³¹ Ade-Ajayi J.F, And Smith R, (1964), *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Cambridge University Press. P 3.

³² Mazrui, A.A, (1994) “Global Africa: From Abolitionists To Reparation” in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 37, No 3, Atlanta Georgia: African Studies Association. P 1. See also *The Westerner* of August 6-12, 2006.

³³ Grayling A.C. (2003) “The new crusade for understanding” in *Sunday Times* of June 8, P23.

³⁴ Olanrewaju S. and Ajayi A. (2009) “Ooni replies Alaafin at Awo’s book launch: Your forebears never claimed to be superior to Ooni” in *Nigerian Tribune* of January 30. P 5.



The two foremost traditional rulers in Yoruba land in particular and in Nigeria in general: The Ooni of Ife (Oba Okunade Olubuse II) and Alaafin of Oyo (Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III)

With time, particularly under Oyo Ile, Islam and Oyo Empire found a common ground in slave driving moreso when the two had had nuptial tie. According to Ooni of Ife, Oba Okunade Sijuwade, the first wife of Alaafin Ajaka (war-like) "was Ibariba Aisatu"³⁵. Bishop Ajayi Crowther thus graphically put the slave-trade relationship between Islam and Oyo Ajaka and Oyo Ile this way:

"For some years, wars had been carried on in my Oyo country which was always attended with much devastation and bloodshed. The enemies who carried on these wars were principally the Oyo Mohammedans with the foulahs (Fulanis). They joined together making a formidable force of about 20, 000. They had no other employment but capturing and selling slaves to Spaniards and Portuguese on the coast"³⁶.

Again, while indigenous and Islamic types of slave trade and slavery were much smaller in scale and allowed for greater upward social mobility – from slave to Oba (king in Yoruba) and Sultan in the case of Islam, from peasant to paramount chief, that of Western types were not only on large scale but also social-mobility-zero³⁷.

Indigenous slave-system we have been considering in relation to women and child trafficking

would be incomplete if its nexus with Western slave-system is not explored. According to Atanda, from the end of fifteenth century to the end of eighteenth, "various European traders: the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, the Spaniards and the Swedes", had organized activities with the coastal peoples and those of the immediate hinterlands to collect slaves and other products like ivory in exchange for their own goods. Important slave markets where women and children were trafficked to for sales, as slaves, during this period were located in the following areas: Benin, Ode-Itsekiri, Ijebu-Ode, Porto Novo and a minor one in Lagos – all Yoruba speaking areas. Through out this period, i.e. 15th –18th centuries, they (European traders) relied on local rulers for the local organization and protection of their trade³⁸.

The following deductions can be made from this short extract (i) that traditional rulers who were then sole authorities in Yoruba speaking areas collaborated with the Whites in human traffic and trafficking that were essentially women and children; (ii) that trafficking in human beings of Yoruba stock was in exchanging for economic and technological advantages in terms of guns from European traders etc.³⁹ (iii) that the Whites needed these slaves not in their persons but cheap or free labor they would have to provide since they were in enslavement and in bondage⁴⁰; (iv) it is important to also

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ MegaForce, (2008) "How Yorubas sold themselves out to foreigners" in *Nigerian Tribune* of June 17. (See also letter written by Bishop Ajayi Crowther at Forah Bay, Freetown Sierra Leone to the Rev. Williams Jowell on 22nd February, 1837).

³⁷ Mazrui, Op cit. P. 1.

³⁸Atanda J.A, (1985) "Collision and coalition in the politics and society of Western Nigeria in the Nineteenth century" in Ade Ajayi and Bashir Ikara, *Evolution of Political Culture in Nigeria*, Ibadan: University Press Limited. P 93. See also Falola, Op cit. P.31.

³⁹ Atanda Op cit. P93.

⁴⁰ Mazrui, Op cit. P2.

observe the manner of traffic and trafficking between the traditional rulers and the European traders. While traffickers in pre-colonial traditional Yoruba society relied mostly on trekking and, sometimes, caravans, to move their 'wares' from hinterlands to slave depots, European traders during this time relied mainly on ships to transport their 'goods' from Yoruba coastal areas to Western metropolitan centers.

VIII. TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN PARTS

Trafficking in human parts for ritual purposes is a phenomenon common in the pre-colonial days but still predominant today. Human organs, of both male and female, trafficked by ritualists and traditionalists, include human head, eye, sex organs hearts etc. In Yorubaland, when a traditional ruler dies, important organs of his body, especially the heart, is removed and preserved for eating by the incoming traditional ruler, without which the incoming traditional ruler is not yet Oba. The words *je Oba* (become king) literally means eat king (*je* in Yoruba language means eat while *Oba* means king). Some communities in Yorubaland who did this (removed vital organs of the deceased Oba for preservation and intake of the incoming Oba recently, were Egbado and Remo⁴¹. This is still prominent in some other Yoruba communities today. Attempt by the wife of the former Alake of Egbaland, Olori Bimpe Lipede, to prevent removal of her husband's organs, by smuggling the corpse out of the palace, was met with stiff resistance from the traditionalist who forced her to return the body to the palace.

Kings, in those days and today, to please some deities, use human beings or parts as sacrifice for pre or post installation of a new king. Today the use of human parts by traditional rulers is not only for ritual purposes but for money making. On the 06/10/06, a traditional ruler in Delta state hunted for dealing in human parts absconded from the throne when he was about to be apprehended. However, instead, his queen was arrested and kept in police custody pending the apprehension of the fugitive and criminal traditional ruler. Ritualists on the other hand use some of these human parts for money and other purposes. It is disgusting and disturbing to note that modern day politicians and government officials, to demand for loyalties of their political subordinates, engage in oath taking that involve sucking of human blood. In the process their first-borns, be it male or female, is pawned to the point of death should they betray the oath of loyalty they had taken⁴². This is an age-old tradition that gathered higher momentum in the current fourth

republic. To date, especially in the present fourth republic, state governors who have been caught in this act of blood oath include the Governors Dr. Chris Nwabueze Ngige (of Anambra state); Chief Theodore Orji (of Abia state) and Gbenga Daniel (of Ogun state). Their various legislators and commissioners are not left out of this blood oath taking drama⁴³. Trafficking in blood is today a lucrative business not just among the traditional rulers, traditionalists, ritualists, politicians and government officials but also in both private and public hospitals where young boys and girls, masquerading as blood donors, go to sell blood at the price of three thousand five hundred naira (N3, 500.00) for four pints.

The international dimension of this horrible, terrible and primitive aspect of trafficking is what is giving the entire globe serious concern. What in the past, as Jide Osuntokin puts it, "One used to think organ snatching was the primitive preserve of shamans and Babalawos and Juju priests; apparently, the western world has taken it to another level"⁴⁴. They engaged in it for two purposes using two different strategies (Charity organizations and sports): organ transplant and rituals. For organ transplantation, continents and countries notorious for these are Americas (United States of America, Canada and Philippines) Western Europe (France); Asia (India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and China). In these places, human organs such as hearts, kidneys, eyes (corneal) are sold and said to be fetching traffickers millions of dollars⁴⁵. As recently as November 2007, French kidnappers nearly succeeded in trafficking one hundred and three (103) children from Chad to Paris for harvesting of their organs for sale. The clients of these traffickers are rich but sick Arabs, Canadians and Americans⁴⁶. In Philippines, according to Osuntokun, "the government wants to pass legislation to regulate the trade and not to prohibit it because it is now part of life".

As for ritual purposes, the notorious country for this is China. Here some people according to Igboke, believe raping a child brings good luck. Some others also believe it will cure them of HIV/AIDS. There, China, a former lawmaker and millionaire, having been told by fortune-teller that having sex with virgins would enhance health, had to rape not less than twenty young girls before he was caught, found guilty and sentenced to death. In the same country, two teachers were sentenced to death for forcing about 23 young girls into

⁴¹ *TheNews* of October 2, 2006. P 11.

⁴² Pallondium, (2009) "The oaths of Ogun" in *The Nation* of July 5, P 56.

⁴³ Odufowokan D, Owolabi K and Abiodun K. (2009) "How Daniel runs his oath shrine: By Ogun Speaker, others", "Nudity mess: Gov begs, faces expulsion from PDP" and "Echoes of Okija shrine" in *National Life* of July 4. P.5.

⁴⁴ Osuntokun J. (2007) "International trade in human organs" in *The Nation* of November. P50.

⁴⁵ Osuntokun, Op cit. See also, Adenle T. (2007) "It's 1884, again, and Africa is up for the picking!" in *The Nation* of November 18. P.11

⁴⁶ Ibid.

prostitution⁴⁷. Recently; a Stockholm newspaper accused Israeli troops of “harvesting the organs of Palestinians they killed”. Recently as well, an American Jew was suspected of illicit organ trafficking⁴⁸. The important message to be noted here is cross-continental connectivity of Africa, Middle East and Europe in women and child trafficking not only in the pre-colonial but also during the post-colonial period.

Today, the deceptive strategies being used by Europeans, as earlier mentioned, are charity organizations, NGOs and sport academies. As for charity organizations’ strategy, children ranging from three to ten years old from beleaguered nations such as Darfur in the western Sudan, Chard Republic and Liberia, who are “orphans with no relations and therefore were going to be adopted by families in Europe. The so called foster parents who had paid thousands of dollars for a child thus wait at the airport to seize the children on arrival from the departed nations⁴⁹. Trafficking children under charity organizations was initially a genuine one before it became abused. In the colonial period when it was a custom and tradition to throw away twin babies and left to die, Mary Slessor came to the rescue by taking these “babies to her home and nursed them to life”. “She adopted so many that sometime in 1888 when she was on holidays; she took some of the twins to Scotland. On her arrival, the white people were surprised to see her with such number of little black children. There, in Scotland, the Mission took over as they trained and educated the children. In later years while some returned, others remained in Scotland to savor the beauty of new life and civilization⁵⁰. As for sport academies, the entire west African countries are saturated with sport academies purported to train and recruit young children to Europe to play for such clubs as AC Milan or Paris St-Germain but in reality, on getting to the ‘promise land’ they find themselves “selling fake handbags on the street and, as economic conditions bite harder, they trade-off any of their needed organs. “Last year Sepp Blatter, President of FIFA, foot-ball’s world governing body, accused Europe’s richest clubs of ‘despicable’ behavior and engaging in ‘social and economic rape’ as they scour the developing world for talent”⁵¹.

IX. ABOLITION OR CURBING OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN TRAFFICKING

Today, combating the menace of women and child trafficking in Yoruba land and, indeed, the entire

country, has resolved into a three-pronged offensive; international, regional and national. At the international level there are the efforts of the United Nations. First, on October 4, 2006, it specifically called on the Federal Government of Nigeria to speedily arrest, investigate and prosecute traffickers in human beings in Nigeria⁵². In addition, it ordered the eradication not just of women and children trafficking but human trafficking in general through some of its (the UNs) agencies, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations High Commission For Refugees (UNHCR). As a commitment to putting an end to Child Labor in Nigeria, the Federal government has “ratified the two core ILO Conventions on the Elimination of Child Labor”. These are; Conventions 138 on Minimum Age of Employment and 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms Child Labor. This was informed by the discovery that Nigeria “is a sending and a receiving country just as she is a transit country”. The United Nations Children Fund Nigerian office had discovered some private transit camps for trafficking children located in Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers and Ondo States⁵³. The implication of this is that “children are sent out of Nigeria to work in other countries, while children citizens of her neighbors [Benin Republic, Niger, Chad and Cameroon] are also brought to work in Nigeria. In other words, as a transit point, children are moved in and out of Nigeria to other countries”⁵⁴.

The European Union is also lending support but arrangement toward concrete steps was expected to be finalized in September 20-22 when “immigration would be one of the main topics”⁵⁵. Meanwhile, Libya that shares Mediterranean border with Italy and through which most immigrants from Africa cross to Europe, had requested from the EU “helicopters, off-road vehicles, night vision equipment and speed boats”⁵⁶. Supporting the efforts of the UN is the United States of America’s Department of State Trafficking in Persons which issues an annual report urging national governments of mostly third world countries “to increase prosecutions and convictions of trafficking in persons”⁵⁷. For the efforts of the Nigerian government to successfully do this over the years, the United States of America “has just elevated Nigeria to Tier 1 status in the fight against trafficking in persons, having met the minimum standards for the third world countries “to increase prosecutions and convictions of trafficking in persons”⁵⁷. For the efforts of the Nigerian government to successfully do this over the years, the United States of America “has just elevated Nigeria to Tier 1 status in the fight against trafficking in persons, having met the minimum standards for the

⁴⁷Igbokwe C. (2008) “Raping young girls for rituals” in Sunday Punch of January 27. P17.

⁴⁸ Foreign (2009) “Netanyahu calls for condemnation of organ story” in *The Nation* of August 24. P. 37.

⁴⁹ Osuntokun, Op cit. P. 50.

⁵⁰Cover Story, (2009) “Battle for Mary Slessor’s grave” in *The Nation* of July 12. P. 14.

⁵¹Observer, (2008) “The scandal of Africa’s trafficked players” as culled from The Observer by *The Nation* newspaper of January 8. P. B7.

⁵² *The Nigerian Tribune* of August 22, 2006.

⁵³ *Saturday Vanguard* of September 16, 2006. P16. See also *The Punch* of August 21, 2006. P 9.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *The Guardian* of August 13, 2006. P.26.

⁵⁶ *The Guardian* of August 22, 2006. P 10.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

elimination of severe forms of trafficking”⁵⁸. There also exist sub-regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), who have signed bilateral and multilateral agreements to combat the trafficking in persons in West Africa⁵⁹.

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia has joined in this effort of finding solution to the phenomenon of human trafficking although she limits herself to trafficking in children beggars. The kingdom has established Anti-Beggary Department in Makkah, where those child beggars caught are detained but properly treated in terms of feeding, clothing and other forms of care. The manager of the Department, Mansour Al-Hazmi, suggested that, to curb incidence of beggary, “If people have money to give in charity they should make it a point of giving it to registered organizations rather than beggars”⁶⁰.

At the national level and, in Nigeria in particular, at the prompting of the United Nations and the US government, the Public Affairs Section of the US embassy, inaugurates a national task force on human trafficking and regularly organizes a forum for stakeholders: government agencies and NGOs on what to do to combat human trafficking⁶¹. In response to these efforts, on 19 November in (2004), the high court in Benin City, Edo State, handed down the first conviction under the 2003 anti-traffic law. The convict, Mrs. Sarah Okoya, was sentenced to a three-year jail term “for trafficking six girls to and deceiving them into prostitution in Cotonou, Republic of Benin, enroute Spain. This year as well, 28/09/06, a 35 year old commercial motorcycle rider and father of five children, Mr. Constance Omoruyi, was sentenced to two years imprisonment and a fine of one hundred and fifty thousand naira (#150, 000.00) for organizing foreign travel for two young girls⁶². Added to this was the rescuing of 35 victims of trafficking, opening of 27 investigations and arrest of 40 suspected traffickers⁶³. In Ogun state as well, two persons were last December convicted for contravening the law in human trafficking. In all, according to Mr. Godwin Morka, the head of Lagos Zonal office of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP), “no fewer than 700 had been arrested and eight prosecuted for offenses relating to human trafficking and child labor across the country⁶⁴. Related

to this is the Child’s Right Act passed by the National Assembly in 2003. To date, no less than nine (9) States Legislatures have equally passed the bill.

Non-governmental organizations are not left out of the effort to solve the problems of child forced labor, trafficking and orphanage. For instance, Italian volunteers medics, nurses and other skilled volunteers such as electricians and builders etc. in collaboration with Catholic Diocese of Orlu in Anambra State have opened up dialogue with government leaders, parents and children on the importance of educating children instead of forcing them to work. In Oyo state as well, there is the existence of Galilee Foundation with focus on a set of three projects: caring for orphans and vulnerable children, widows and aged women⁶⁵. In Lagos state is another international charity organization known as Hope Worldwide. Its own project focuses on beggars and children. For the beggars, periodically, the organization distributes raw food to them on the streets of Lagos, and for the children, “some homes” were adopted where “volunteers met and have monthly breakfast with children in these centers”⁶⁶. Edo state is not left out of effort to stamp out women and child trafficking, being the state accountable for 99 percent of girls often repatriated from foreign countries⁶⁷. A non-governmental organization, Idia Renaissance, set up by the wife of the former Governor of the state, Eki Igbinedion, had, to date, “handled over 350 cases of trafficked victims”⁶⁸ (TheNews, 2006:66).

The efforts of these governmental and non-governmental organizations resulted in “withdrawing and rehabilitating of 3,000 children in Child Labor in the period between 2000 to 2002” alone. Between year 2002 and year 2006 additional 200 trafficked children had been “undergoing counseling and rehabilitation”⁶⁹ (Saturday Vanguard, 2006:16). In 2003 Federal government facilitated repatriation of not less than 1,800 migrants from the kingdom of Morocco. Significant improvements are also been made in tracking and bringing to justice of traffickers in human trafficking. In year 2004, 42 cases of human trafficking were reported while 27 suspects were interrogated. In 2006 alone, 8 human traffickers were jailed, beside 18 other cases pending in court⁷⁰.

X. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper examined various dimensions of women and child trafficking as an integral part of human

⁵⁸ Josiah O. (2009) “Human trafficking: US elevates Nigeria to tier one status” in The Punch of June 17, 2009. P. 56.

⁵⁹ The Guardian of September 7, 2006. P. 26.

⁶⁰ *Osun Defender*, Op cit. P14

⁶¹ *The Nation* of August 26, 2006. P. 43.

⁶² *The Sun* of August 30, 2006. P10.

⁶³ *The Guardian* of August 30, 2006. P.

⁶⁴ *The Sun* of September 28, 2006. P. 10

⁶⁵ *The Nigerian Tribune* of October 6, 2006, P. 5.

⁶⁶ *The Sun* of September 6 2006, P. 15.

⁶⁷ *The News* of October 2, 2006, P. 66.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Saturday Vanguard* of September 16, 2006. P. 16.

⁷⁰ *Saturday Vanguard*, Op cit; *The Punch*, Op cit; and *The Guardian*, Op cit.

trafficking in general, not just for labor but immoral and criminal acts of harvesting and trafficking human organs and blood for sales to sick business barons. It also examined anti-social behaviours such as beggary prevalent among youth and elders of both sexes. Also explored is the fact that trafficking in women and children could be legal or illegal depending on the circumstances in which they were trafficked. In the pre-colonial Yoruba land, women and children trafficked into slavery, serfdom, semi-serfdom constituted illegal trafficking. Attempt at comparing trafficking in pre and postcolonial Yoruba land also engaged our attention. Equally explored in the paper are the various moves or attempts being made to stem the tide of human trafficking generally and women and child trafficking specifically?

Of importance to note however is that trafficking in women and children in the pre and post-colonial days has its unintended benefits. In the pre-colonial days one of the most important unintended benefits of trafficking in women and children through slave trade was the spread of western education among the Yorubas. Samuel Ajayi Crowther aptly demonstrated this in the way he singularly translated the Bible into Yoruba, "and, thereafter, working with others to achieve similar feat for the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria"⁷¹. In the post-colonial women and child trafficking on the other hand, the United Nations' "State of the Population Report 2006" states that "female migrants are more likely to remit larger amounts to their families back home than males, and that such remittances are becoming an increasingly vital source of empowerment to the recipients. Such women also make vital contributions to the countries that host them as well, through the cost-effective and efficient provisions of vital services"⁷². But the hazards involved in this venture of trafficking far outweigh the benefits derivable from it.

The paper thus concludes that women and children trafficking in Yoruba land is as old as Yoruba society and what led to these criminal acts of trafficking human beings or parts (e.g. organs such as the hearts, kidneys eyes etc.) was a combination of economic and financial hardships on one hand, and social and political problems on the other. Amazingly, those who engaged in women and children trafficking were elites that did not exclude ruling ones. Looking at women and children trafficking in modern day Nigeria, it would be seen that elites are the one behind it as well. Those caught and punished for it are often proxies while the real barons are often faceless.

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