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From Donkey to Lab Rat: The Slave Trade, the Body Trade, and African Writers.

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Abstract

The paper examines the African person in relation to an expanding global market – the body trade. The paper notes the relative scarcity of African literature on this topic, and states the need for African writers to educate their people on the ethics of the body trade and its foreseeable impact on the continent. Johns Hopkins Berman Institute, Ann Santori, and Christopher Muscato, provide the concept of bioethics which the paper adopts. It begins by analysing the African person during the slave trade using the image of a donkey. The paper then analyses the African in the body trade using the image of a lab rat. Comparison of the two images connotes that the body trade is a scientific variant of the slave trade. Based on the recurring tendency for Africans to be exploited in global economies – in the “brawn drain” of slavery, and the recent “brain drain” – the paper predicts an imminent “body drain”: another siphoning of human resources out of the continent, but this time in the form of human organs and tissues. The conclusion is that the body trade is too lucrative and too essential to the global populace to remain in its present covert and contained form, but its expansion will inflict tangible harms on Africans. Consequently, African writers must disseminate more information on the body trade and bioethics to prepare the people for the realities of the global body market.

Keywords: donkey, lab rat, slave trade, body trade, bioethics

Introduction

Tanure Ojaide describes Africa’s literary artists as the “cultural standard-bearers” of the African people (qtd. in Andrew). He places literary artists at the forefront in a parade of African culture, a position which confers upon them prominence and responsibility. This paper evaluates the artist as a standard-bearer in unusual areas: “the cultures of biomedical science and technology and the clinic” (“For Authors”). These cultures are in the domain of bioethics, and have reference here to organ trafficking and the body trade. The literary artist, as a focal point, a leader, and an expert with words, is uniquely endowed to harness and mentor the people’s perceptions of the body trade and its potential dehumanization of African individuals.

The Body Trade

The body trade is the trade in all or parts of the human body. It began in the 1800s as a trade with dead bodies only (Pacholski). Body brokers supplied cadavers, or body parts from cadavers, to medical institutions, so that medical students could have specimens to learn dissections and surgical procedures. Since the mid-20th century, advances in medical science and organ transplants have resulted in a demand for bodies that outweighs the supply. A black market in living human bodies has grown up alongside conventional cadaver-brokering (Pacholski). The black market trades with the human tissue, organs, and blood products of donors who voluntarily or under duress sell their body parts. Some of the goods in the black market can be exchanged legally in a given context, such as the “donation” of human eggs. However, the quantity, methods, and compensations involved in the majority of human-egg donations divorce them from legality (“Inside Nigeria’s Unregulated Human Egg Industry”). The sale of human kidneys and other body organs is criminalized outright (Mesko). The body trade in this paper refers to the buying and selling of body parts and blood products from living donors, whether legitimate or criminalized, as well as the market in living persons for scientific research.

Bioethics

Where there are transactions with human bodies, bioethics is vital. An online platform of Johns Hopkins Berman Institute replies to the enquiry, “What is bioethics?” with the frank answer, “It’s complicated.” Bioethics has to do with ethical controversies surrounding innovations in medicine, biomedical procedures, and biotechnology. The innovations pertain to both plant and animal life, and benefit millions of people, but also “have the potential to bring harms or to raise other kinds of ethical questions about their appropriate use. **Bioethics is the multi-disciplinary study of, and response, to these moral and ethical questions**” (emphasis in the original). Ann Santori and Christopher Muscato define bioethics as “the application of morality to issues arising in scientific research and medical practice.” They delineate some of the core issues: cloning, stem cell research, physician-assisted suicide, the use of life support, human longevity or immortality, and research on human subjects. Santori and Muscato claim that while scientists and healthcare professionals work to further science and technology, bioethics ensures that the professionals “consider how their work will impact humankind.” Bioethics, as indicated in the definitions of the Berman Institute and Santori and Muscato, is the study of, response, and application of moral yardsticks to issues in the life sciences, biotechnology, and healthcare. This approach will guide the forthcoming analysis of the African person and the body trade.

African Bioethics

Bioethics is multidisciplinary, as the Berman Institute notes. It is also of global interest. On both counts, it embraces Africa’s literary artists, but they seem hesitant to join the discussion despite its relevance to their crusade as cultural standard-bearers. K. G. Behrens, a specialist in African bioethics and law, points out a significant link between African culture, bioethics, and social progress. Behrens adopts Chinua Achebe’s rhetoric for his argument: “[T]here is a need to seek ways to restore the dignity of the African people, whose values, beliefs and culture were denigrated in the past. One way is for African bioethicists to begin to apply indigenous African philosophy, thought and values to ethical issues.” Behrens observes that social issues tend to be ethical issues. For example, corruption, oppression, and similar social injustices in Africa emanate from a deeper “moral crisis” in the populace, and “many of these social problems and moral failures are closely linked to human health.” Behrens calls for “a new bioethics,” Afrocentric instead of Eurocentric, to which Africans can resort to solve their peculiar ethical and social dilemmas.

Mbih J. Tosam, in concurrence with Behrens, observes “a conspicuous dearth of African perspective in the global bioethics discourse” (208). The situation is undesirable because global bioethics does not cater adequately for African values. As Tosam remarks, “health, the good life, justice, harm or injury [have] diverse interpretations.... Bioethics presents challenges that are specific to regions and to cultures” (208, 209). Africans must improve their investigation of morality and

human health challenges within their own regions and cultures. Tosam's mandate encompasses African writers and literary critics.

Africa is a sizeable continent, but Behrens and Tosam presuppose some degree of unity in African bioethics. Behrens clarifies: "I do not claim that a single African worldview exists, nonetheless some salient characteristically African conceptions are shared by many sub-Saharan Africans." The characteristic conceptions (and common history) shared by sub-Saharan Africans may allow a region of the sub-Sahara to represent the whole. In this study, the representative region is Nigeria. Using Nigeria as an object lesson, and the Nigerian writer as an anchor, the study makes inferences about the African person and the body trade which pertain to sub-Saharan Africans widely.

Nigerian Writers and Human Health Challenges

A brief survey of Nigerian literature reveals that although Nigerian writers have not wholly neglected bioethics, their preoccupations have been one-sided. For instance, moral questions bordering on African personhood, a fundamental aspect of bioethics, have been paramount in African literature from the early slave narratives (Ogude, *Genius* 119-48). In comparison, questions on human health have been subsidiary. An international journal, *Literature and Medicine*, outlines four groups of topics which it deems pivotal to literary artists engaging with human health matters: "disease, illness, and health; the cultures of biomedical science and technology and of the clinic; disability; and violence, trauma, and power relations" ("For Authors"). The last of these four groups has perhaps received the greatest attention from writers in Nigeria. Depictions of violence, trauma, and power relations abound in Nigeria's modern literature in portraits of colonialism, neocolonialism, civil war, terrorism, and genocide. Chinua Achebe (1958), T. M. Aluko (1964), Festus Iyayi (1986), Isidore Okphebho (1976), and Wole Soyinka (1967) are inaugural writers in this group.

Disease, illness, and health, often sub-topics in first-generation literary art, are increasingly becoming primary. Freudian psychology underlies much of the writing in mental disease and health. Emmanuel Omobowale, a pioneer in the study of literature and medicine in Nigeria, and Stephen Kekeghe name a host of writers producing works on mental illness and health; including James Ene Henshaw, Anezi Okoro, Eghosa Imasuen, Femi Eromosele, Tracie Chima Utoh, Ezenwa Ohaeto, Marthin Akpaa, Wale Okediran, E. E. Sule, Okey Ndibe, Sola Owonibi, and Omobowale and Kekeghe themselves (Omobowale and Kekeghe 55-63). Many of these writers double as literary critics. Depictions of physical disease and health, also sub-topics in first-generation literature, are likewise concretizing. Ecocriticism provides a framework to analyse physical disease in conjunction with environmental pollution, demonstrated in the prose of Kaine Agary (2006) and Helon Habila (2010), the poetry of Nnimmo Bassey (2002) and Niyi Osundare (1986), and the drama of Tess Onwueme (2003) and Ahmed Yerima (2011). A recent spate of writings on physical health concerns the COVID-19 pandemic, such as an anthology edited by Ikechukwu Egbuta and Nnenna Chukwu (2020), and an unprecedented children's book by Raquel Kashan Daniel (qtd. in Obiezu).

Disability is a third pivotal topic outlined by *Literature and Medicine*. Reconstructions of disability in Nigerian literature are slow in contrast with the reconstructions of disease, illness and health. Undoubtedly, disability has inspired some classic portraits: blindness in Cyprian Ekwensi (1960); the abiku phenomenon – "spirit children" – in Ben Okri (1991) and Soyinka (1967); impotence in J. P. Clark-Bekederemo (1961); and allied stigmas. But broadly speaking, in most texts, disability appears in the margins: albinism in Achebe (1961); demonization in Gabriel Okara (1964), Elechi Amadi (1966), and Buchi Emecheta (1979); and more. Literary critics specializing in disability studies have begun to emerge. Olalere Adeyemi (2023), Joseph Ayodabo (2014), and FO P-Ibrahim (2022) are disability specialists who employ an ethical slant to study disability, its representations, and the attitude of writers and readers to disabled persons.

The body trade falls under the group, "the cultures of biomedical science and technology and of the clinic." Omobowale and Kekeghe merge the topics into two themes, "medical ethics and biomedical facilities" (81). Neither theme has much authorship in Nigeria. Omobowale attempts to fill the gap with his own compositions. His play, *The President's Physician*, describes the dilemma of a physician who is bound by the Hippocratic oath to preserve a callous and autocratic President.

A reviewer of the play, Joseph Mayaki, states that it “aims to help budding medical doctors rightly inculcate the principles of medical ethics – autonomy, beneficence, competence and power – by providing a fictional platform to investigate difficult issues that can arise in clinical practice.” Kekeghe is of the impression that *The President’s Physician* “celebrates the ethics of medicine through appropriation of incisive dialogues and socially convincing characters and situations” (“Emmanuel Omobowale”). Kekeghe also critiques “Canadian Blues,” a short story by Omobowale, remarking that it “focuses on the health industry and on issues ... that impact positively on medical practice” (“Emmanuel Omobowale”). In summary, Omobowale’s objective is to instill humaneness in medical doctors and institutions. His texts and the reviews have no relation to organ trafficking.

The study of literature and medicine in Nigeria, as curriculumed by Omobowale and Kekeghe (“ENG 801”), discloses a leaning towards health and wellness rather than biomedical science. Literature which breaks the general rule, and ventures into biomedical science, does so sparingly. Chris Abani’s *Graceland* devotes several pages to organ trafficking, sketching it as one of multiple vices in the slums of Lagos. Abani’s text will be mentioned later in the essay. It has been critiqued as a bildungsroman (Hodge: 2021), a postcolonial satire (Phillips: 2012; Harrison: 2012; Krishnan: 2011), a trope of urbanity (Mason: 2014) and of neurological disorder (Ohwovoriole 2009), but not from the perspective of the clinic and bioethics.

According to Oluwole Coker, third-generation Nigerian writers have “an abiding commitment to socio-historical issues” (193), sustaining the legacy of first- and second-generation writers. Coker concludes, “the third-generation Nigerian novel is an amalgam of intertextuality, Diaspora consciousness, gender and a re-engineered depth of socio-historic commitment that emphasize[s] refractive aesthetics” (198). The culture of biomedical science is not a motif in Nigeria’s novels or major print genres.

The sprawling nature of the preceding review of literature reveals a chief drawback in interdisciplinary studies, which is the scope of citations involved. Consequently, even though the review cannot pretend to be comprehensive, it aspires to be acceptable in terms of background research. Nigerian writers are evidently backbenchers in the discourse on biomedical science and technology. On this score, they are not capitalizing on their position of prominence to unveil, respond, or apply moral yardsticks to issues surrounding the global market in living human bodies; in particular, living African bodies. “From donkey to lab rat” is a synopsis of the living African body dehumanized first in the slave trade then in the body trade. This paper argues that Nigeria’s literary artists must increase their production of literature connected with bioethics and the body trade, in order to minimize African harms and a probable “body drain” from the continent.

Brawn Drain – Brain Drain – Body Drain

The body market will not be the first to bring harms on Africans, or to drain the continent of resources. On at least two prior occasions, global markets have moved Africans en masse from the shores of Africa to the West and beyond. A first movement was the Transatlantic slave trade, the “brawn” drain (Ogude, “English Literature” 42). A second movement is the current jakpa syndrome, popularly referred to as “the brain drain.” The body drain is upcoming. It anticipates the drain of all or part of the living human body from Africa to the developed nations to advance science, medicine, and healthcare. A prevailing factor in the three markets is African exploitation, but the brain drain is milder in that it markets cognitive/psychomotor skills. The slave trade and the body trade market physical bodies. The latter two are therefore predisposed to de-person the individuals being marketed; that is, to reduce them to a lesser status than a person. Either an animal or an object. The reduction to animal status is more expressive of the de-personed African because an animal, unlike an object, is sensitive to injury. Two animal images habitually used to depict de-personed individuals – the donkey and the lab rat – have peculiar reference to the African in the respective global markets of slavery and organ trafficking. The images tie the markets together, and underline recurrent harms to Africans.

“The African in the Slave Trade Is a Donkey”

A simple metaphor conveying two elementary facts. It tells us what the African is – the African is (like) a donkey; and what the African is not – the African is not, literally, a donkey, but only resembles one. The two facts are a continuous statement on the de-personed African in the slave market.

In the first place, the slave and the donkey are both deprived of choice. A historian, Afua Cooper, estimates that “between 1444, when the Atlantic slave trade began in earnest, and the 1860s, when it ended, at least 15 million Africans ... were *forcibly removed from the continent* and sold as slaves in the Atlantic world and elsewhere” (35; emphasis added). These Africans were young and virile, for the most part, and sold for the express purpose of servitude. Many of them wound up labouring on the plantations, hence their affinity in countless literary texts to donkeys, oxen, or buffaloes. The donkey is apt for the present analogy since it is both a drudge animal and a pet, symbolically spanning the preeminent domains of slavery – the plantation and the home. The drudge animal speaks of hard labour and the plantation slave, and the pet speaks of moderate domesticity and the house slave. Neither the domain of the drudge animal nor that of the pet suggests independence or guarantees safety. House slaves, like plantation slaves and donkeys, were subject to abuse and experimentation, especially in reproduction.

The analogy can be stretched to describe a temperament imputed to the donkey and the African alike, but slanderous of both. The donkey was notorious for moral and intellectual defects italicized in similes, metaphors, idioms, and curses. Hence the expressions, “as stubborn as a donkey,” “legless donkey” (implying its uselessness apart from its capability to move burdens), “genitals as large as a donkey” (Ezek. 23: 20, referring to its inordinate sexual drive), “as stupid as an ass,” “dumbass,” “laughing jackass.” Colonialist literature attached duplicate traits to the slave and slave descendants. The donkey’s stubbornness was replicated in the African’s reputation for obduracy (Cooper 172-73); the donkey’s sexual excess in the “myth of black sexuality” (Ogude, “English Literature” 24); and the African, like the donkey, was for many years deemed “stupid” (Bruner 241). Current data disproves the stupidity of the donkey (Heimbuch), as the brain drain does the stupidity of Africans, but this is poor consolation for Africans who have suffered in lineages from the donkey stigma.

The African is not, literally, a donkey. The second aspect of the metaphor, the dissimilarity, is in opposition to the similarity, but an extended comment on Africans in the slave trade. The trade in essence demanded something higher than a donkey. It demanded a precise cadre of person: a human stop-gap. Slavery was not a mere economic enterprise, but had biological undertones.

There was no shortage of drudge animals in the Atlantic world and the West between 1444 and the 1860s, but European peoples bought millions of Africans. One reason was that Africans bridged the gap between the Europeans and their labour problem which the donkey could not. There were tasks the European indigenes were reluctant to perform, or were too few or too weak to perform, and which their animals were incapable of performing on their behalf. In other words, there were tasks with requirements that were beneath the European but above the donkey. These requirements were met in the African. Because the African was not, literally, a donkey, the African was the needed missing link in a biological chain; a crucial filler between the human and the animal world suited to the maintenance of European civilization. Enslavers considered the African body not just a source of brute strength, but also of commensurate rationality, fertility, erotic pleasure, and scientific invention. The enslavers milked the total package. Slave breeding experiments with stockmen (studs) and “breeding women” were customary (Sublette and Sublette 49). On a more professional scale, physicians used slave women to conduct experiments in gynecology (Manke). The point of relevance is that the African, as a living organism, was as much a biological as an economic investment. The slave trade bartered the African’s muscle, brain, hands, feet, sperm, eggs, and reproductive organs. Cooper, cited earlier, captures the spirit of the trade when she labels it “a commerce in human flesh” (24). The label stresses the tie between the slave trade and the body trade. The next metaphor expounds.

“The African in the Body Trade Is a Lab Rat”

A lab rat, also known as a laboratory rat, is specifically bred for scientific research in a laboratory. Sam Schipani tells us that the typical lab rat is the species *R. norvegicus*, the Norway rat, an albino strain, and one of several animals used in the lab. Others are lab mice, guinea pigs, domestic pigs, rabbits, monkeys, dogs, and cats. About 95% of all lab animals are rodents, either lab mice or lab rats. Schipani claims that rodents are considered ideal for biomedical research, but the rat has the advantage over the mouse because it is big enough for organ transplants.

As with donkeys and humans, lab rats and humans have similarities expressed in everyday figures of speech. It is not abnormal to hear the complaint, “They made me feel like a lab rat.” In addition, rats and humans have physiological and behavioural traits which have intrigued scientists for decades. “Laboratory Rats,” an e-article, notes that the rat’s nervous system, genomes, hormone regulation, and immune system resemble those of a human being. Rats are also social animals, living in communities and capable of learning tasks, which means that their cognition corresponds in some measure with human intellect. These are universal rat/human parallels. An area where the lab rat has striking reference to the African is the rat’s paradoxical status of being necessary, yet expendable. Necessary for development, expendable on account of numbers.

Lab rats have enabled scientists to make tremendous leaps in research, but outside the research room, rats are regarded as a pest. Schipani informs us that lab rats, like gutter rats, are “scourges of the city and [thus] the perfect scientific guinea pigs, so to speak.” On account of the rat’s status as a pest, it does not enjoy the legal covering of more-valued lab animals. Animal rights’ activists, without raising an eyebrow, will permit lab rats to die in multitudes. Schipani maintains, “In the USA approximately 100 million lab rats and mice are killed every year in the cause of experimentation.” Significantly, in certain opinions, Africans are likewise scourges of the global village. The American business tycoon, Bill Gates, in a 2010 TED Talk purportedly said that in order to depopulate the globe, “at least 3 billion people need to die,” beginning in Africa (Swenson). Gates denied the accusation but it resurfaced during the 2019 COVID pandemic, where he was charged with wanting “to use mandatory vaccines as part of his plan to eliminate billions of people” (Swenson). According to Robert O. Young, Gates’s accuser, Gates targeted Africa for human experiment and elimination because he esteemed Africa “worthless... deplorable... and not part of the world economy.” Gates again denied the accusation. Innocent or not, the tenor of his hypothesis places the African population on the level of the lab rat population: as a nuisance element. Unfortunately, opinions of his type are familiar. In such circumstances, the harms against Africans are those of hate speech, granted that the de-population policy has not already been launched, and the myriad rumours of scientists using Africans as guinea pigs are false.

The African is not, literally, a lab rat. At the end of the day, a rat is a rat, and an African an African. This means that despite the lab rat’s boast as the superlative animal testee, it falls short of the complete requirements for research in medicine and human healthcare. Human healthcare requires human research subjects, and no animal can be a bona fide substitute for a person. This should be a warning for Africans, judging from the precedents set by the slave trade. Like the donkey, the lab rat cannot bridge the biological gap between the animal and the human world. Contemporary experiments with animal subjects are expensive, protracted, and rigorous, but never foolproof (Schipani). History teaches us where relief was sought in the past.

“The African in the slave trade is a donkey/in the body trade is a lab rat.” The harms in the first are a token of the harms in the second. Africans have the prerogative of choice in the second trade, and the hope of payment, although “in most cases they receive a smaller amount of the money than had been agreed ... and in some cases they may not get any” (“North and West Africa”). The cloak of “donation” does not conceal the predatory streak of the body market. Slaves in the Transatlantic trade were victims: the bulk of donors today in North and West Africa are “victim-donors” (“North”). The slave trade comprised African traffickers in league with Arab nations and the West (Behrens 1865). The body trade runs a complimentary network: African traffickers in league with “a wide spectrum of actors ... in [Europe], Asia and the Middle East” (“North”). The damage

to African personhood is synonymous: infringements on liberty, stigmatization, physical and emotional torture, exploitation, dehumanization, and death.

African Literature and New-Millennium Science

“Poacher of Organs”
Poacher of organs
Evil merchant of human flesh
Your cup of blood fills. (*Mixed Legacies* poem 43)

The above is a haiku verse by the Nigerian female poet, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. The persona’s moral posture is explicit – the organ-dealer is a “poacher” and “evil,” a merchant in blood. The idea is that organ transplantation might be evolutionary, but its feeders can be sinister. The poet evokes in 18 syllables (one syllable on top of the strict 17 in Japanese haiku verse), the details of theft, human flesh, blood products, commerce, and lack of scruple which are the signature of organ trafficking in Africa. Poetry exploring new-millennium science, and in haiku form, is rare. Africa’s contemporary standard-bearers seem reserved concerning the good or bad of the science of their era. During the slave trade, this was not the case. Francis Williams, James Albert, Phyllis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho, and other pioneer African writers, were slaves or freed slaves. They were faced with the formidable task of adjusting from an oral to a “book culture” (Ogude, *Genius* 2), and were limited in education, time, and ability (23-143). Growing up outside the continent, they had scant knowledge of Africa, and they lived under the shadow of the “donkey” stigma: stupidity. Irrespective of these handicaps, they produced poetry, memoirs, narratives, and letters which proclaimed black consciousness and ethics.

Nigeria’s digital writers have made effort in this direction. They produce regular e-literature evaluating the position of Nigerian citizens in relation to biomedicine and healthcare. For instance, a black market of human kidneys in Abuja (Sadiq), and Nigeria’s rank as the largest egg harvesting operation in the world (Idong). The effort is commendable, but requires support from the print genres, which have a tradition of research and documentation that makes their contributions permanent and erudite.

It is not compulsory that writers provide solutions to the controversies of bioethics. Ruth Chadwick, a bioethicist, says: “In at least one conception of the field, the main task of bioethics is *not so much to provide answers as to identify where the problems lie*” (emphasis added). This essay concludes with excerpts from two narratives that identify problems in organ trafficking, but leave the readers to provide answers: Abani’s *Graceland*, and Sophia Akhuemokhan’s “King of Africa.”

Graceland reenacts the Africa-Asia-Europe network of global actors in the black market. In the novel, an army Colonel recruits Elvis, the protagonist, and his friend, Redemption, to “escort” six runaway minors back to their fathers in Ghana. Elvis and Redemption, travelling in a van with the Colonel’s men, pick up the minors from a hut deep in the bush. The supposed runaways are handcuffed and apparently drugged, obviously kidnap victims. Elvis and his friend escape when a crowd intercepts the van at a motor park. Redemption later explains to Elvis:

“American hospitals do plenty organ transplant. But dey are not always finding de parts on time to save people life. So certain people in Saudi Arabia and such a place used to buy organ parts and sell to rich white people so dey can save their children or wife or themselves.”
[Elvis protested,] “They can’t do that!”
[Redemption said,] “Dis world operate different way for different people.” (265)

The episode demonstrates that the world operates differently for the ignorant (exemplified by Elvis), the desperate (exemplified by Redemption), and the poor and undefended (exemplified by the six minors). All these at-risk groups in the text are African. Outside the text, they are also frequently African.

The novella, “King of Africa,” concentrates on human cloning. Venunye is a pastor, biotechnologist, and the first-person narrator. He and his female assistant, Duyen, have cloned an industrial model called a “Little Simba,” a five-year-old boy who is both human and AI. Simba is cloned for deployment to the enemy camp as a human grenade, a sort of suicide-bomber. His deployment raises cardinal issues in the debate on human cloning: whether a clone has human rights, has a soul, can be patented, whether humans should be cloned at all. In the forthcoming passage, Duyen has just put Simba to bed and his humanity is creating a moral deadlock:

I said [to Duyen], “I can see you’re getting along with Simba. That’s splendid, but maybe you should go slow on the bonding. Don’t lose focus.”

“He’s so human,” she said.

“The contractors invented him to be human, that’s why they’re selling packs of Little Simbas. You’ll make things hard on yourself if you’re over-attached.”

“It’s under control,” she said.

“For your own sake, keep it that way.” I smiled to temper the authority in my voice [and told her], “We’ll meet here tomorrow morning by eight.”

“Okay.” She walked away through the plantains looking vaguely agitated. (160)

Conclusion

Nigerian writers must step up their exposition of the body trade, a market which threatens to de-person Africans and drain the continent of resources. At present, comparatively few texts spotlight the ethics of the body trade or its effect on Africans. The omission is disturbing in view of the fact that history registers exorbitant transfers of African resources to the Northern hemisphere in line with global markets. This paper posits that the body market will reiterate the pattern if African writers do not intervene quickly.

African writers entered with determination the discourse on the slave trade and imperialism, and through their art successfully interrogated the principles governing these institutions. The imperative is now to interrogate the body trade. This paper employs the donkey and lab rat metaphors to illustrate, conservatively, the predictable harms of the trade on Africans. It concludes that the eventuality of a body drain will inflict fewer injuries on Africans, who are willing or unwilling players in the market, if African literature stocks them with clear visuals of emerging trends in the global arena of medicine and healthcare.

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