

CHILD TRAFFICKING, A NEW SLAVE TRADE: WHY IT THRIVES IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Child trafficking is comparable to the Trans Atlantic slave trade during which able bodied young men and women were chained and transported like cargoes to the New World to work in plantations, mines and to scavenge the deep seas for pearls. Even though slave trade was abolished formally in 1807, slavery has continued in African continent in the form of child trafficking, a phenomenon whereby persons under 15 years of age are exported to other countries for prostitution, domestic servitude and for work in agricultural and industrial settings. This paper reflects on why human trafficking prevails in Africa, and attributes it to greed, ignorance, selfishness, spiritual backwardness, culture of violence and poor self-efficacy expectancy. The paper concludes with recommendations on how to halt the dehumanizing practice, which includes, re-directing young people to humane values through holistic education and reinforcement of appropriate behavior.

Keywords: Child trafficking, slave trade, greed, ignorance, selfishness, value re-orientation

Introduction

Some eminent psychologists such as Piaget, Freud, and Kohlberg observe that a human person goes through stages in the process of development. Each stage of growth and development is quantitatively and qualitatively different from the one before it with the result that as one grows and matures, one becomes more refined, sophisticated and more responsible. This is equally applicable to societies.

Most societies started in a somewhat primitive manner, with rudimentary social organization and social structure, which with experience and passage of time developed and became more sophisticated. For instance, most societies passed through the “dark ages”.

Slavery is one of the characteristics of dark ages that were experienced by most societies but which most societies out grow with enlightenment and as consciousness becomes more evolved. Just like religion that Sigmund Freud termed the “neurosis” of human kind, slavery is another form of “neurosis” of human kind. It is due to misperception of reality in the area of interpersonal relationship. It is a social problem. Most societies seem to have outgrown this “neurosis” called slavery. Africa presents a peculiar case of slavery becoming fixed, and resistant to extinction. Even though slave trade was abolished in the 19th Century – thanks to the efforts of philanthropic British citizens such as William Wilberforce, Henry Thornton, James Fox, Granville Sherp and so on (Coupland, 1964) – slavery continues to exist in Africa in disguised forms. For example economic slavery whereby Africa is over-dependent on the West for survival, giving rise to debt crisis, mass exodus of intelligent young men and women to the West in search of a greener pasture, resulting to brain-drain, and the migration of young people and sometimes whole families to the U. S. through American Visa lottery in search of a better standard of living, and so on. Whereas the aforementioned faces of slavery are bad enough, a peculiar form of slavery is in vogue now. This is a situation whereby children are kidnapped or with the consent of one or both parents sold to an agent who carries them off to a foreign country for prostitution, as domestic servants, for ritual purposes and the like. This is termed child trafficking.

Child trafficking is the latest form of slave trade and just like the slave trade of old; it has as its source Africa, and destinations include Europe, America, Asia and other parts of the world. The question is why does slavery thrive in Africa? This paper gives an over-view of slavery, child trafficking and its causes, and makes recommendations on how to halt the dehumanizing trend.

Slavery: An Over-View

Slavery may be seen as the ownership and use of human property. The master inherits, buys, sells or bequeaths his slave as he does his other material possessions. The master's treatment of a slave may be controlled, like the usage of other possessions, by the custom or law of the society to which one belongs, but in general the slave's life and labor are as much at the master's disposal as those of his beasts of burden (Coupland, 1964). Basically, a slave is a property in the master's possession. According to the Encyclopedia Americana (Vol. 25, 1996), people have enslaved one another for two main reasons: first, as a form of punishment, either for transgressors in social behavior or for vanquished warriors; second, as a response to the demand for men and women to serve as laborers. A slave is totally at the mercy of his master, thus –

As with a beast of burden, the slave's health and happiness depend on chance – on the character of his master and on the nature of his work. He may be well cared for; he may even sometimes seem better off than if he had never been enslaved; or he may be cruelly treated, underfed, over-worked, done to death. But slavery stands condemned on moral than on material grounds. It displays in their form the evils which attend the subjection of the weak to the strong. The slave's soul is almost as much in bondage as his body. His choice of conduct is narrowly prescribed. He cannot lead his own life. He can do little to make or mar his fate: it lies in another man's hands... enslavement inflicts a moral injury (Coupland, 1964, p. 7-8).

From Coupland's reflections on the life of slavery, a slave, though a human being by virtue of his/her possession of human characteristics e. g., ability to reason, communicate and self-direction, is reduced to sub-human existence, he/she live according to the master's dictates. It is an inhuman existence.

Slavery has been in existence since recorded history (about 2,000 B.C) in ancient civilizations of Sumeria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, India, Greece and Rome. The slaves were usually obtained in two ways, "internal" and "external". Within a society, one might be enslaved as a punishment for crime or a man might sell himself or his children into slavery to pay a debt.

From outside the society, slaves were acquired by the capture of enemies in war, for example, the enslavement of Hebrew people in Babylon. Also traders kidnapped and purchased slaves from defenseless people and sold them in the markets of Europe and America. There are two kinds of slavery: Domestic slavery and large scale/gang slavery. In domestic slavery, slaves are employed to work in gardens, small farms, shops, household or run errands for the master. This type of slavery was the universal type and it was relatively mild. The domestic slave could achieve a personal relationship with his master, develop an individuality of his own, he might even become a member of the family. In large-scale/gang slavery, a large number of slaves are employed in gangs for large-scale industry or agriculture. This was the type or practice for about 4 centuries (15th – 19th centuries) whereby large numbers of able-bodied young men and women were obtained by force from Africa (mainly) and sold in Europe and America. These were forced to work in plantations in the New World (America) under the intensive heat of the sun, and under harsh conditions with little food, poor accommodation and under inhuman/cruel condition.

Slavery was practiced in Africa, as in other parts of the world. Domestic slavery was more common in Africa before the advent of western imperialism. Slaves tended to form part of the extended family system, sharing the duties of other members of the society and having their children accepted as free and equal members of the community. In Africa, slavery served as a viable way of acquiring new members of the group rather than the means of distributing labor functions or of increasing property assets. It was the Europeans that opened Africa up for gang slavery – exporting large numbers of people to the West (Knight, 1996). As soon as Africa was initiated into the slave trade, the trade persisted.

Uchendu (2002) observed that the Igbo country was one of the areas in West Africa seriously affected by the slave trade. Before the Trans Atlantic slave trade, domestic slavery was an indigenous institution in the West Niger Igbo area. Acquisition of slave was a mark of distinction and slave owners were regarded as wealthy men. When the Trans Atlantic slave trade was superimposed on the Igbo country, it became a thriving business. Uchendu noted that people of Igbo origin, and other non-Igbo communities in the hinterland and along the coast were exported as slaves throughout the entire duration of the slave trade and the Bight of Biafra emerged as a major source of slaves from 1730 until 1841 when the Atlantic traffic was at its

peak. The slaves were acquired chiefly as a result of the activities of the foremost slave dealers in the Nigerian interiors; namely, the Aro in the Southeast and the Aboh in the West Niger Igbo area.

Once captured as a slave, life of misery and torture begins. As Davidson (1992) recorded, seized in their villages, once able-bodied men and women were dragged to slave prison on the coast, infamous barracoons where, well guarded by their captors, they linger for weeks, even months, until a slaving ship bound for the Americas arrive. Once they were aboard the ship for the Americas, their misery became worse. Mortality was very high, about one (or more) in seven died before they reached the Americas, and many were maimed or disabled due to dense packing of slaves on board the slave ship. When they reached their destinations, they were auctioned or sold. They joined older slaves and began a new life of servitude in the harsh environment of the plantations, and in the tedious task of mining in the New World. In the Spanish American possessions, these slaves were involved in the hazardous task of deep sea diving in search of pearls (L.B. Rout, as cited by Uchendu, 2002). Some were kept as domestic servants, women, especially when they are not working in the plantations were kept as concubines. At a point when there was need for internal breeding of slaves, female slaves were encouraged to procreate, to have as many children as possible so as to enrich their masters who later sold the offspring of the slaves to other slavers. Generally, mortality rate for slaves were very high (Coupland, 1964; Uchendu, 2002).

It is important to note that Africans cooperated fully in the slave trade. Although slavery in Africa was confined to domestic slavery, when Europeans emerged at the African coasts and indicated interest in Africans as commodities of trade, Africans entered the trade with full force. The chiefs were enticed by bottles of gin, whisky, gun, gun powder, cloth, etc. to the point of selling their subjects at the slightest misbehavior, or a powerful chief may wage war on neighboring villages so as to procure captives for sale so as to get those coveted goods. Parents sold their children at will to make money or to procure those goods. Slave traders/agents from the coast who were Africans traveled far into the hinterland to kidnap unsuspecting, defenseless citizens and force them into slavery. Even oracles, religion played a significant role in the trade. Religious leaders maliciously condemned those who consulted their oracles to slavery on the pretext that they were guilty of one crime or another. The point is that slave trade was not

imposed on the Africans; they were lured into it by the material things they gained from it such that for a few pounds sterling or a bottle of whisky, they sold their own kith and kin. Even though large scale slavery was formally abolished in 1807, Africa continued to be in bondage in different forms – economic, political and intellectual bondage culminating in the new form of slave trade commonly termed child trafficking.

Child Trafficking

Child trafficking is a phenomenon whereby some adult members of society – “middlemen” – with or without the consent of parent(s), exploit children for personal gain. It is a transaction or trading in children. Victims of child trafficking are persons under 15 years of age. It is estimated that about 27 million people around the world are victims of human trafficking, with approximately 50% of these victims being under the age of 18. Trafficked persons are often enslaved or in situations of debt bondage that are fraudulent and exploitive: traffickers will take away or abuse the basic human rights of their victims, who have most likely been tricked and lured by false promises or physically forced into their situation (Urban Ministry.org., 2008).

According to the United Nations (2006) report, countries high on the list of "origin countries" – source of victims of child/human trafficking - are Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Lithuania, Nigeria, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Thailand and Ukraine. High on the list of destinations are Belgium, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Thailand, Turkey and the United States. Some regions are predominantly destinations for trafficked victims - Western Europe, North America, Western Asia and Turkey, while the Commonwealth of Independent States is largely an origin region. Africa, Asia, Central and South Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean are significant regions for both origin and destination (United Nations, 2006).

Like slave trade, child trafficking is business that has internal and external dimensions. In internal form of child trafficking, children are procured to work as domestic servants. These domestic servants are commonly called house helps in Nigeria. Children in domestic servitude tend to be poorly paid. They are mostly from poor families, and their parents, uneducated. These parents give their children up for domestic servitude with the hope of making extra money,

which is not generally commensurate to the job done by the children. Their masters set the terms and conditions of their work as it suits them or according to their level of generosity – as slavers do. Some parents give children up for domestic servitude on condition that they will be well fed, clothed and trained in school. Although their masters/mistresses, desperate to get a domestic servant, agree to take care of them well and train them, rarely abide by the contract. Most of the time, these children are deprived of affection, play, social activity and schooling. Even when they are sent to school, they are sent to afternoon or evening school at poorly equipped schools. Like slaves in domestic servitude, they are vulnerable to physical, sexual and psychological abuse.

Some of the children involved in internal trafficking work in agricultural and industrial settings. They toil in plantations under harsh conditions, some work in mining operations that would be considered too risky for adults – just like slaves of old times. These children are vulnerable to respiratory infections such as bronchitis, asthma, tuberculosis and the like.

In external trafficking persons less than 15 years are exported to places in Europe, the Middle East and other African countries for prostitution. This is child prostitution – children engaging in sexual act in exchange for money. However, whereas in adult prostitution, the prostitute earns money for her services, in this form of child prostitution, the child has been bought, so she belongs to her master/mistress and as such gets little or nothing for her services. These children are exposed to physical and emotional abuse. They are also exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. In most cases they are maimed for life; some, if not many, die in the process. Those who survive the ordeal find it difficult to live a normal life in marriage, some graduate to become adult prostitutes.

Some of the children involved in either internal or external trafficking become victims of ritual murder. In Nigeria, hawking – a practice whereby children carry goods around for sale – is very dangerous. They are often seen along motor parks, markets, high ways carrying their wares, e.g. pure (sachet/bottled) water, groundnuts, soft drinks, etc. Sometimes these children are kidnapped by agents of ritual killers and used for ritual. Those of them sold to foreign countries

could equally be used for such inhuman purposes. It is estimated that as many as five million children are smuggled within and across borders every year (Johnson, 2004).

In every sense of the word, child trafficking is comparable to slave trade. However, unlike slave trade of old that trafficked on older youths, this new slavery focuses on children, showing that while the former slave trade was abhorrent, the new slave trade is abominable. Slavery suggests society that puts little or no value on human life or sacrifices human life on the altar of personal interests. Slave trade was stopped officially nearly three centuries ago, and many nations enacted laws that makes it possible for not only human beings but animal to be treated with sensitivity and respect. Yet, Africa, as in many other areas of development, lags behind, why? Why do child trafficking/ slave trade thrive in Africa?

The Reason why Child Trafficking/Slave Trade Thrives In Africa

It has been shown in this paper that slavery has been practiced in antiquity until modern times culminating in the large-scale slave trade of the 15th century that was officially abolished in Britain in 1807. In all these, Africa was at the centre of slave trade. It would be recalled that the most popular (perhaps, the first of its kind) large-scale slavery was the enslavement of the Hebrew people for about four hundred years by the Egyptians – Africans! Although other races for example, Asian countries, Middle Eastern countries and the Arab world, bought and sold slaves, their activities are not comparable to the magnitude of the slave transactions that engulfed black Africa for nearly four centuries. Today, when slavery is rarely talked about, it rears its ugly head in another form – child trafficking. One wonders why Africa provides such a fertile ground for human trafficking. The writer attributes the reason to greed, ignorance, shallow spirituality, selfishness, a culture of violence and learned helplessness.

Greed: Greed means being controlled by material things, be it money, food, clothing, power, prestige, and possession of all sorts. Researchers (Diaz, 1995, Okpara, 1995 and Vinolia & Fubara, 1995) seem to agree that the reason for all sorts of inhuman treatment of children is poverty. According to Diaz (1995)

Marked structural inequalities in the distribution of resources and development benefits, prevalence of diseases, drought and armed conflicts combine to bring abject poverty and misery to Africans. Abject poverty, in turn, leads to several dehumanizing paths for children. The first part is the merchandization of children. This can take many forms. Sheer abduction of children can take place. This is the case of babies who are snatched away from their mothers and sold through clandestine channels (p. xxiv).

Whereas child labor which is prevalent in many African cities today may be attributed to poverty resulting from poor economic realities of most African nations and poor educational background of parents, “merchandization of children” may not have direct link to poverty. Slave merchants and merchants of children are not poor. These are traders who are looking for lucrative business, and found sale of babies and children profitable. As long as profit motive is there, it does not matter what article of trade one is involved in. These people see no difference between fake drugs, nuclear materials and human beings as long as one makes profit. They are like armed robbers who kill or maim their victims for money or material good; or like ritual killers who use other human beings to make money. The driving force here is not poverty but greed. Money or what money can buy is the god they worship. This god blesses its worshippers with power to influence others in society, and prestige that comes with wealth. The tribal chiefs of old did not sell their citizens into slavery because they were poor, they did so because of greed; they wanted luxury goods, as a result, they ignored the values for life for which Africa is known and shed innocent blood. Fathers who sold their so-called “lazy” or “disobedient” child into slavery were not forced to do so by poverty, they wanted a life of luxury.

Even in the new era of child trafficking, parents do not sell their children because they want to “escape starvation” (because there are sincere persons – relatives or others – who would love to have a helper, and are ready to take care of those children), they sell their children because of greed. There are reported cases in our Nigerian national dailies of parents, especially, young fathers, who abduct their own babies without their wives’ knowledge because someone promised to buy the child at an apparent huge sum of money. Perhaps, such fathers need such money to buy cars or other luxury items. Although poverty is a reality or a soul mate to Africa, it is not directly responsible for child trafficking. Since the days of slave trade, African leaders (chiefs

and elders) sacrificed African traditional value for life on the altar of the new god – money, power and prestige – and since then Africa has never been the same.

Ignorance: Ignorance has to do with lack of knowledge. It is as if Africa is enveloped in a shroud of darkness, an impenetrable darkness - socially, culturally, politically and the like. Socially and culturally Africa is in darkness. The social institutions – family, education, health and political institutions are in a mess because Africans worship authority figures and elders and submerge individuality in the sea of mass mindedness. In the family, the man of the house is always right. Consequently, many men maim and kill their wives and children and dispose them at will for material or social gains without repercussion, and women and children in an attempt to retaliate adopt passive-aggressive stance and the result is a cycle of violence and abuse of the integrity of the human person. In Nigeria, for instance, education institution, civil service, and health sectors and political institutions have collapsed because those at the helm of affairs cannot be challenged to be accountable. African social system is community oriented, a system whereby everybody is carried along in decision-making process starting at the family, clan, village, town even to the highest levels. Actually, democracy is a native of Africa. It went into exile and was reintroduced to Africa by the West. In the era of slave trade some authorities claim that African people were forced into the trade, that the Europeans over-powered the people by their superior weapon. It is not exactly true. There was little or no recorded case of an African tribe or community fighting to resist slavery. The people were lured into the trade by material things because of their greed and ignorance. They sold members of their families to procure gun and gunpowder that they in turn used to kill and enslave their brothers and sisters. Today, owing to the same ignorance, African leaders literally sell Africa to the highest bidder; hence African countries are controlled by external forces the U.S., Britain, France, and so on. Africa cannot boast of selecting her leaders and as a result when the “ruler” finally finds his way to the top, he owes allegiance to the person that gave him his mandate. Nationally, policy – where there is a policy - is dictated by the power worshipped by the ruler. Internally, the one who wields power is above the law. He can afford to engage in drug trafficking, deal in contraband goods, fake drugs, etc. and no one could challenge him. The former Director-General of NAFDAC has been working hard to free Nigeria of fake drugs; the majority of the people and the international bodies were excited about it, yet some influential persons want to block the process. How can

child trafficking be stopped when eminent African citizens control the syndicate? For instance, Italians do not come to Nigeria and abduct Nigerian girls, Nigerian citizens send them to Italy and they, in most instances, pass through immigration checkpoints. African society, through lack of knowledge, gives unlimited power to a few people who acquired money through fraudulent means, and they sell African children into slavery - a second slavery.

Superficial Spirituality: The worst aspect of the darkness that seems to envelop Africa is spiritual darkness. Africans are known for their religiosity. Three major religions in Africa are African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam. Every Sunday churches of various denominations are filled with worshippers; on Friday afternoons Mosques are filled with worshippers. Yet in society evil abounds. Despite verbal profession of faith in God, and ardent church/mosque going, evil abounds in Africa. Why? Spiritual darkness envelops the people. African religiosity does not seem to penetrate the depth of the spirit. For instance, one goes to church on Sunday, and at night practices black witchcraft, in the cover, poisons one's brother or sister who comes to share a meal, or one may block the progress of one's neighbor. In this superficial religiosity, all sorts of evil thrive – ritual murder, cannibalism, armed robbery, prostitution, political murder, ethnocentrism, injustice of all sorts, and human/child trafficking. The writer has a hunch that there is a positive relationship between spiritual enlightenment and positive social outlook – justice, equity, respect for life, human freedom, and so on; and challenges social scientists to conduct researches investigating the relationship between index of spiritual enlightenment (depth of spirituality) and positive social outlook. Africans in general, despite profuse religiosity, is spiritually backward, and this accounts for the prevalence of slavery and child trafficking. Spiritually enlightened societies have high regard for life in general (human as well as animal life). This was obtainable in ancient traditional cultures that were matricentric (Christ, 1997), but with the invention of iron and the rise of patriarchy, with attendant war of aggression, values for human life became gradually eroded. However, recently, advanced countries are retracing their steps. There is more sensitivity for not only human life but also for lives of plants and animals as well.

Selfishness: “Me and my family first” seems to be the philosophy of life that pervades the people's psyche. Once I am in great form and my family is taken care of to the nth generation,

others can die and rot. This is seen among people occupying public offices. They put their sons, daughters, and relations or people from the same ethnic group in important positions of authority and others pick up crumbs that “fall from the master’s table.” The school system at all levels are dysfunctional, unlike leaders in developed countries who invest a major proportion of budget on education, knowing that it is the bedrock of any society, African rulers pretend that they don’t know the value of good education. Since they have unlimited resources, they send their children to expensive, well equipped private schools locally or to schools outside the country and watch other children to suffer in the impoverished system in the country. That is selfishness. Concerning human trafficking, these agents or middle men, no matter how greedy they are value their own lives and those of their children as such do everything possible to preserve their own and their children’s lives; they would rather abuse other people’s children in an attempt to preserve what belongs to them. Men and women join secret cults in an attempt to secure their own lives, live longer and/or enrich themselves. In the process, they sacrifice other people, other human beings. The list could go on. Child trafficking borders on lack of sensitivity to other people’s needs and feelings. This calls to question one’s morality, religiosity, and conscience. “Do to no one what you would not want done to you” or as Juan Arias put it “I am free when nobody and nothing tries to take the place of my conscience, which is the Creator’s final word to me.” A selfless, deeply spiritual person is characterized by empathy, love, justice, mercy, caring, altruism, etc. These are humane values and no depth of poverty could deprive one of these. Human trafficking prevails in Africa because the agents/middlemen and those who have power to stop them are not sensitive to other people’s needs and feelings. The writer asserts then that no nation can develop or move ahead unless it is populated by people who are willing and courageous enough to transcend the self. It is through self-transcendence that one reaches out to others in harmony.

Culture of Violence: It may seem as if Africa’s evolutionary process was somewhat “arrested” at a point in history. Anthropologists would have us believe that apes were distant ancestors of humans, and that the first evidence of homo sapiens were found in Africa. Over the years as the evolutionary process continues, homosapiens become more sophisticated and moved further away from the apes. For example, lower animals are largely controlled by instincts. They

respond to their environments and adapt or perish, hence the Darwinian survival of the fittest. Lower animals struggle for survival. Strong ones prey on weak ones.

Human beings not only adapt physically to their environments, they evolve mentally (intellectually) and in consciousness, hence evolution of consciousness. Human beings are controlled by reason, will, emotion, as well as their environments. Like apes, humans have aggressive tendencies, however, unlike the apes, human action is mediated by reason, judgment and emotion/feeling such that even when one is motivated to aggress one has to consider certain things and make a decision whether to fight or dialogue (communicate).

Conflict is part of the human condition – it may appear – consider, for instance, the world wars, Gulf wars, strike on Baghdad, bombing of the World Trade Center and other terrorist acts world wide. However, a cursory look at the world history in recent times spotlights Africa as a cauldron of violence, genocide, war of aggression; consider the story of Liberia and the way Liberian dictator Samuel Doe was destroyed, the civil war in Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi (Tutsi vs. Hutu), the Nigeria vs. Biafra war and continuing unrest in the mind of the people, violence in day-to-day life in South Africa and general state of strife where students, workers, trade unions go on public demonstration, sometimes violent. Other nations passed through this orgy of violence and now they resort more to dialogue to settle their differences but in Africa dialogue don't seem to work. It is force, violence, and aggression.

In Nigeria, for instance, marital violence is common. When violence prevails in the family, it has long-lasting effects on the children. Adolescents who are violent grow up to become violent adults. Staub (1996) observed that when there is large-scale violence in a society, either cultural characteristics, societal conditions or, most likely, a combination of the two are exerting influence. For example, Staub noted that genocidal violence – the attempt to eliminate a whole group of people, whether defined by race, religion, ethnicity, or political beliefs - is a societal process. The widespread violence in Africa may not be unconnected with the level of violence in religious circles as parents, teachers, traditional and political rulers and religious leaders model violence for children who grow up to be violent. Such culture of violence has given rise to the use of force in interpersonal encounter resulting in fighting at slightest

provocation, armed robbery, abduction of innocent children and selling them into slavery, raping of young girls and forcing them into prostitution, drafting under age youths into the armed forces, ritual killings, and religious wars. Persons who have not imbibed the culture of violence can hardly harm innocent children, not to think of abusing them or exposing them to abuse.

Learned Helplessness: “There is nothing we can do about it, the problem is complex.” This reflects people’s negative self-statements when it comes to facing problems that impinge on individual and corporate well being. No situation is beyond solution. When one believes that his/her effort does not count, one becomes depressed and fatalistically submits to evil in one’s physical, social and religious environments. This has been the problem in Africa and it is maladaptive. The people have passively allowed evil in various forms to take root and thrive in African soil, and overshadow beautiful humane values for which Africa is known. When the Trans Atlantic slave trade was at its peak, most people believed that the enslavement of the black race would be permanent. But with the hard work and self-sacrifice of eminent British citizens, like William Wilberforce, and eventually with the cooperation of British government, slave trade was abolished. If foreigners could sense the inhumanity in enslaving people of different race from themselves, even when their own people were benefiting from the trade, and decided to stop it, I don’t see why Africans could not see the absurdity of child trafficking and do whatever it takes to stop it. What it will take is sincere belief that it could be halted, readiness to face the facts of child trafficking in Africa, and willingness and courage to actually wage war against the evil trend.

Recommendations

Child trafficking, like the Trans Atlantic slave trade, can be eradicated. However, for this to happen, certain things need to be done, namely:

1. **Value Re-Orientation:** Africa value system has been eroded by greed and selfishness such that young people hardly know what African values are, therefore, there is need to go back and retrieve the things that are of value from the dust bin of history. These includes values such as the sacredness of life, value for hard work, respect for other people, what Igbo people call “Egbe belu, Ugo belu” philosophy, “live and let live,” justice, love for harmony and so on. Younger and older people could be made to

internalize these values through seminars, workshops, radio and television programs that highlight those values, and in practice rewarding and reinforcing selfless, altruistic behaviors, honesty, efforts at establishing and maintaining justice and harmony.

2. **Holistic Education:** Education will be made compulsory and free for all children up to Junior Secondary level, and after that anyone who wants to go further strives to pay for it. Education from day one will include political awareness, for example, the value of good leadership, voting and being voted for, free and fair elections, etc., human rights, its abuses and how to seek redress; self-esteem, self-knowledge and courses in peace and conflict management as well as etiquette and civil responsibility will be part of curriculum at all levels of education. As part of political awareness and civil responsibility, students should be taught in a manner that they understand that they can shape their own destiny; they are not hapless victims of uncontrollable forces.

3. **Power Must Change Hands:** The problem with Africa is leadership – so one hears people talk about here and there. Since the populace is aware that the leaders have failed in their responsibility, why do we allow them to continue to mess things up? All those “elders” whose hands are soaked with blood and whose hands are full of corruption must give way to younger people who have demonstrated in their businesses and professions high ethical standards. Younger people who are ready to SERVE must be given the opportunity to cleanse Africa of blood, evil effects of slavery, corruption and build her up to stand tall among other nations of the world.

4. **Fund Meaningful Research:** UNICEF, UNESCO and other funding agencies, including African governments, well-to-do individuals and corporate bodies to fund meaningful researches that would illumine the problem of human trafficking. The findings of the researches will be very useful to child activists who will base their actions on empirical data.

5. **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to be selfless in their work:** These days, Non-Governmental Organizations sprout like mushrooms. One wonders, if they are really motivated to transform the social system for better or is the formation of an NGO another opportunity to make money? If the motive is to transform the social outlook of African children, it is a laudable move, and these should be encouraged and supported.

Conclusion

It is time Africans rise to the challenge of ridding the continent of the spectre of slavery. If Africans are incapable of freeing themselves from the shackles of slavery, especially in its contemporary form – child/human trafficking, then it is proper to welcome, and collaborate with other well meaning citizens of the world for the abolition of the new slavery – child trafficking – as was done during the Trans Atlantic slave trade. Success in the abolition of child/human trafficking in Africa is one way for Africans to show that they are now mature enough for equal relationship with free and responsible citizens of the world.

“I am free when I feel ashamed at the enslavement of my neighbor” Juan Arias.

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