



# The Harvester's Garden: Females as Body Parts in Nigeria

Jessica Ojiugo Chinonye\*

University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, USA.

**\*Corresponding Author:** *Jessica Ojiugo Chinonye, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, USA.*

**Abstract:** *The sinister and illicit harvesting of human organs is a new normal in Nigeria, where a coalition of socioeconomic strains, political tensions, and economic desires fuel predators dubbed as 'body hunters.' Females are prime targets, and their harvested parts feed into the Red Market or serve in economic rituals. This study argues that such acts, particularly the extraction of female reproductive organs and fluids, are gender-motivated, and with products of death, it is a Femicide. Whether consensual or forced, intentional or accidental, these deaths are Femicide and the ultimate act of violence against womanhood. Focusing on cisgender victims, I analyze real cases from social media and a journal article using Galtung's Violence Triangle to reveal that Femicide transcends direct perpetrators.*

**Keywords:** *Illicit Organ Harvesting, Femicide, Nigeria, Direct Violence, Cultural Violence, Structural Violence*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

While illicit organ harvesting has existed for decades in Nigeria, it has become a 'new normal' in recent years. Scholars attribute the prevalence to exacerbated socioeconomic challenges and political tensions (Adeyemo, 2022; Salihu et al., 2019). 'Body hunters' primarily prey on females because they consider them "soft targets...with intrinsic 'enriching' value" (Nwakanma & Abu, 2020, p. 15447). Their parts are traded in the Red Market<sup>1</sup> (Martin, 2012) or used for economic ritual purposes. I argue that the demand for and the illegal extraction of female genitalia and bodily fluid from the reproductive organs in contemporary Nigeria is, in fact, gendered. In cases where such illicit extractions produce death, whether intentional or unintentional, consensual or non-consensual, it is a Femicide (killing of a female because of her gender<sup>2</sup>). This study focuses on cisgender individuals. That is, Nigerian victims whose identities conform to their assigned sex at birth and the socially constructed roles and behaviors of that sex. Also, I use Johan Galtung's Violence Triangle framework to analyze five reported cases of gender-motivated organ harvesting on social media and a journal article to emphasize that Femicide goes beyond those who commit direct acts of violence. It is also structural violence — now Feminicide because the state fails to protect its citizens and is legitimized by cultural violence. Therefore, it is crucial to consider direct, structural, and cultural violence dimensions to tackle Femicide.

UN Women (2022)<sup>3</sup> defines Femicide as "an intentional killing with a gender-related motivation. Femicide may be driven by stereotyped gender roles, discrimination towards women and girls, unequal power relations between women and men, or harmful social norms." A general definition is intentionally killing females because of their gender. A limitation across countries, including Nigeria, is defining the motivation behind the killing to prove that it is, in fact, gendered. This is why many

<sup>1</sup> Red Market is the human parts market.

<sup>2</sup>The World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) defines gender as "the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other." Therefore, every society upholds unique gender constructs (WHO, 2022). Sex and gender are disparate terms but interact with each other (WHO, 2022). Sex is an individual's biological or physiological characteristics (WHO, 2022) assigned based on the genitals and chromosomes at birth or after biological reconstruction surgeries to change reproductive characteristics. Gender encompasses social identities that may or may not conform to innate biological characteristics and socially constructed behaviors of the sex assigned at birth.

<sup>3</sup> Accessed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023 (see references section for citation)

female gender-motivated killings in Nigeria are charged as homicides rather than as 'Femicides.' Some are never criminalized.

I agree with Hefti (2022, p. 2) that Femicide's definition should extend beyond the 'direct' killing of "women and girls" due to their gender "because it is more complex in reality." Hefti (2022, p. 2) "conceptualizes Femicide in broader terms to cover the many other human rights violations, such as the right to access to justice, the prohibition of torture, and other rights, aside from killings." However, I expand Hefti's (2022) definition of Femicide to suit my context. Femicide begins with the demand for female body parts and fluids from the reproductive organs (the process), involves illegal extractions producing death, whether intentional or unintentional, consensual or non-consensual (death itself), and society's reactions/actions after her death. My definition exposes several perpetrators — structural failures that propel organ trade and harvesting, cultural structures that tolerate human rights violations, individuals who commit the direct act of killing, and state actors' and society's reactions/responses after her death.

Human parts (organs, blood, blood tissues and fluids, gametes) donation, transportation, and transplantation are legal medical processes in Nigeria that require several ethical considerations (Emmanuel & Nabena, 2020). The parts can be harvested from living or dead donors. However, it becomes 'illegal' under Nigeria's National Health Act when conducted in unauthorized medical facilities without the written consent of donors and medical practitioners overseeing the clinical facilities (Obani & Okunrobo, 2020). Also, financial compensations for donors attract a jail term except "reimbursement for the reasonable cost incurred by the donor in connection with the organ donation" (Emmanuel & Nabena, 2020, p. 132). While several scholars discuss the loopholes in Nigeria's organ harvesting laws (Adeyemo, 2022; Bakari et al., 2012; Emmanuel & Nabena, 2020), I adopt the law's prohibitions to ground two illegal categories of organ harvesting: organ trafficking and ritual killings.

I define organ trafficking as having at least one of the following characteristics:

- Transporting people under proscribed conditions with intentions to sell their body parts/including bodily fluids (Uwaoma et al., 2011), whether consensual or non-consensual
- Extracting and/or transporting the parts of cadavers under proscribed conditions with or without the written consent of their authorized living representatives
- Financial compensations with exceptions to the law's provisions for such cases in exchange for human parts
- Illegally killing people to harvest their organs.
- All activities that facilitate the illicit commercialization of human parts (Adeyemo, 2022).

Rituals, on the other hand, are "a series or chain of actions that involve the use of gestures, specific words (with intonation and syntax), objects (including roots and herbs), and animals or human body parts as materials for sacrifices" (Salihu et al., 2019, p. 34). In the pre-colonial era, although now illegal, human parts sacrifices were carried out 'communally' (required 'communal consent' and inferred 'communal killing') for the benefit of the community. In contemporary Nigeria, ritual harvesting is motivated by evil intentions for fame, wealth, power, protection, and favor. *Juju*<sup>4</sup> priests and occultic leaders demand human parts and/or fluid to aid the potency of their customers' spiritual sacrifices or requested potions. This study focuses on economic-motivated ritual killings. Therefore, I define ritual harvesting as the extraction or mutilation of human parts, tissues and/or fluids for spiritual economic prosperity sacrifices and preparing magical wealth potions. I emphasize that organs can be trafficked, and individuals may purchase trafficked organs from the Red Market for ritual purposes.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Organ harvesting dates to Nigeria's pre-colonial era. This was when communities sacrificed human parts to deities for protection, cleansing, appeasement, and restoration during misfortunes like epidemics, paramount rulers' deaths, incessant child mortality (Aghawenu & Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020; Salihu et al., 2019), and during inter-community wars. Communities in this era valued the philosophy of 'being our brother's keeper' and so preserved and protected the lives of their own. Their victims were usually slaves, outcasts, captives, and community members who were

---

<sup>4</sup> Spiritual belief requiring objects, liquid, and powdery substances for magical spells

criminal offenders or committed 'abominable' acts like incest (now considered 'strangers') (Aghawenu & Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020; Salihu et al., 2019). However, private sacrifices of 'strangers' or 'community members' outside stipulated 'communal rituals' were prohibited (Salihu et al., 2019), including self-harm.

The colonial era introduced new religions that condemned 'barbaric acts' associated with harvesting human organs, and its government institutionalized laws prohibiting human sacrifices. By 1916 (colonial era), human parts sacrifices, whether for appeasement, protection through magical powers, *juju*, or cleansing, were criminalized under Nigeria's Penal Code (Oyewole, 2016). After independence on October 1st, 1960, Nigeria adapted the colonial law with considerations for existing native laws. Over various periods, the law was amended<sup>5</sup>, and the latest criminal laws are codified in the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990.

Section 210(f) of the Nigerian Criminal Code Act of 1990 criminalizes individuals who "makes or uses or assists in making or using or has in his [or her] possession anything whatsoever the making, use or possession of which has been prohibited by an order as being or believed to be associated with human sacrifice or other unlawful practice" (Nigeria Criminal Code Act, 1990; Oyewole, 2016, p. 37). Section 210(e) outlaws the "possession of human remains which are used or are intended to be used in connection with the worship or invocation of any *juju*" (Nigeria Criminal Code Act, 1990; Oyewole, 2016, p. 38). Yet, human parts harvesting is still carried out in discreet locations.

Though traditional organ ritual practices dominant in the pre-colonial era may still exist today, illicit organ harvesting has evolved into a 'lucrative' adaptation mechanism to Nigeria's socioeconomic challenges. Scholars report that such challenges include multidimensional poverty, insecurity, unemployment, poor/limited infrastructure, unfavorable business environments, and weak educational systems (Adeyemo, 2022; Salihu et al., 2019). Social acceptance in the country is highly dependent on "properties, luxuries; excessive acquisition of wealth," and the mode of wealth acquisition is too often unquestioned (Salihu et al., 2019, p. 35), especially for 'generous' individuals. Making 'money' becomes the channel for socioeconomic liberation (affording expensive schools, installing security devices in homes, living in neighborhoods with good roads and efficient power supply) and inauguration into the powerful and revered social class. Therefore, one's socioeconomic status is not different from one's social class.

These economic and societal pressures have conscripted many Nigerians into the 'Get-Rich-Quick' force that has fueled illegalities such as internet fraud, drug trafficking, misappropriation of government funds, human trafficking, and armed robbery, amongst others. Illicit organ harvesting is taking dimensions of organ trafficking traded in the Red Market or ritual harvesting. Recorded patterns of operations are kidnapping, human trafficking, sex to have contact with reproductive fluid and organs (Adeyemo, 2022; Aghawenu & Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020; Oyewole, 2016), on-spot murders, using diabolic charms like powders and 'touch & follow'<sup>6</sup> to hypnotize people into organ harvesting locations or to force consent. Even when there is 'informed consent' (void of any direct coercion, manipulation, deceit, or exploitation), I refer to such individuals as 'victims' because they are vulnerable to structural failures, which I will argue Galtung calls '*structural violence*'<sup>7</sup>.

Months to days leading to festive celebrations such as Christmas, Easter, yearly religious pilgrimages, New Yam Festivals<sup>8</sup>, and local festivals are believed to be the apogee of illicit human parts harvesting (Aghawenu & Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020; Uwaoma et al., 2011). This is because of extreme pressures to share gifts, buy new clothes and shoes, travel to be with family, and meet financial obligations. However, in the last few years, it has reached an alarming rate with little or no effort from the Nigerian government to mitigate the trend (Nwakanma & Abu, 2020). Every other day, newspapers, television stations, and Nigerian social media handles seek information about missing persons and report mutilated bodies found on streets and in hotels.

Some scholars attribute the prevalence to the nation's economic decline and increased poverty levels (Adeyemo, 2022; Salihu et al., 2019), worsened by the pandemic. The profitable business has attracted large sums, between \$2000 to \$3000 US dollars (Adeyemo, 2022). Other researchers allude

---

<sup>5</sup> Accessed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2023 (see references section for citation)

<sup>6</sup> Touch & Follow can be powdery or solid substances used to hypnotize people, typically to make them do things they would ordinarily not do.

<sup>7</sup> Accessed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2023 (see references section for citation)

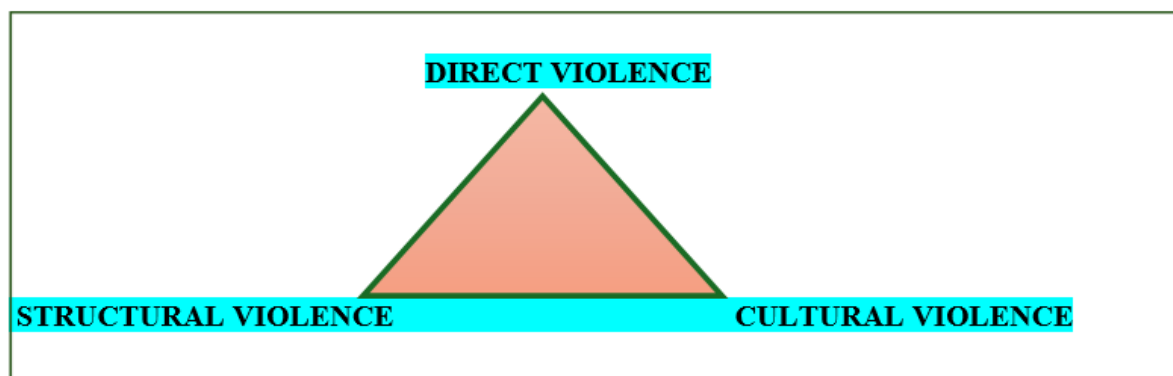
<sup>8</sup> Yam festivals are celebrated to mark the end of the farming/harvest season.

to political tensions and election cycles (Aghawenu & Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020). I maintain that concluding on the exacerbating factors is risky because there are no official government records on illicit organ harvesting, especially for ritual harvesting (Salihu et al., 2019). The difficulty in connecting the cases to supernatural, diabolic, or magical forces that request the organs in exchange for wealth may be a reason. Also, sustained impunity has further limited the documentation of such data.

Irrespective of the lack of systematic data, the point is that we hear and, in some cases, may have seen victims (dead or alive) of illicit organ harvesting in the past seven years more than in previous years. It may be attributed to more visibility in the media or the presence of exacerbating factors. Recent circulated incidents include the February 28th, 2023, case of suspected ritualists who killed and removed the fetus of an unnamed mentally ill and pregnant woman in Benue State, Nigeria (Nigeria Watch Database<sup>9</sup>). On March 21st, 2023, in Ondo State, Nigeria, suspected ritualists murdered an unnamed male driver and mutilated some of his parts (Nigeria Watch Database<sup>10</sup>). Also, on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024, “Adebayo Azeez invited Sulaimon Adijat on a date to Sunshine Hotel, Atan Ota [Ogun State, Nigeria]. She was later taken to Abidemi Moses’ shrine at the Igbo Olomi area of Atan Ota in Ogun State, where” Moses and his accomplice killed her, and harvested her “head, breasts, private part and wrists” (Adesanya, 2024<sup>11</sup>).

While the examples show that illegal organ harvesting cuts across genders, females are primary targets because body hunters consider them soft prey. Also, “largely because of what was described as the potency of the breasts, genitals, and bodily fluids in bringing luck and prosperity” (Nwakanma & Abu, 2020, p. 15449). I argue that the demand for and the illegal extraction of female genitalia and bodily fluids from the reproductive organs in contemporary Nigeria is gendered. In cases where such illegal extractions produce death, whether intentional or unintentional, consensual or non-consensual, it is a Femicide (killing of a female because of her gender). I use Johan Galtung’s the Violence Triangle framework to analyze five reported cases of gender-motivated organ harvesting on social media, and journal article to emphasize that Femicide goes beyond those who commit direct acts of violence. It is also structural violence — now **Femicide** because the state fails to protect its citizens and is legitimized by cultural violence.

#### The Violence Triangle as a Framework for Femicide



Galtung exemplified violence as three arms of a triangle: direct, structural, and cultural. Direct violence includes activities that threaten life or kill or maim individuals, constituting all forms of violence, such as physical, sexual, emotional, and economic violence. It has direct subjects (the perpetrator) who commit instant and visible acts and victims who experience it. The subjects are also identifiable such that we can infer an identity. For example, Man A (wife) raped Woman B (partner), suspected gangs brutalized Woman A, and suspected ritualists killed and dismembered some children’s body parts. This violence is criminalized under Nigeria’s laws.

Structures, including institutions, infrastructure, and state actors, characterize social systems. The state is the central custodian of its citizens’ rights. Its failure to protect human rights and lackadaisical attitude after crimes of direct violence are committed produce structural violence, which marginalizes certain groups of people.

<sup>9</sup> Accessed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023 (see references section for citation)

<sup>10</sup> Accessed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023 (see references section for citation)

<sup>11</sup> Accessed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2024 (see references section for citation)

Cultural violence includes “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence — exemplified by religion and ideology, language and arts, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) — that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (Galtung, 1990, p. 291). I focus on cultural violence, not violent cultures (an entire culture considered as propagating acts of violence). The legitimization makes “direct and structural violence, look, even feel, right — or at least not wrong” (Galtung, 1990, p. 291).

The triangle indicates a causal relationship that can begin and end at any side of the triangle (Galtung, 1990). Unlike direct violence involving defined perpetrators inflicting harm on other individuals, structural and cultural violence is systemic and thus embedded within systems and beliefs that initiate or facilitate violence. I use the Violence Triangle framework to analyze five reported cases of gender-motivated organ harvesting to emphasize that Femicide goes beyond those who commit direct acts of violence.

### 3. THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF ‘HER’ GENITALIA AND FLUIDS FROM HER REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS

Several scholars have used the Objectification Theory (patriarchal societies that degrade their females to mere ‘objects’) to justify Violence Against Women (VAW), including illegal organ harvesting in Nigeria (Adeyemo, 2022; Balraj, 2015; Bartky, 2015; Oyidiran&Isiugo, 2005). I argue that it is ‘cultural exaltation’ not ‘cultural subordination’ that makes females primary targets for illegal organ harvesting, especially for ritual harvesting. I emphasize that Nigeria’s laws equate gender and sex.

Females are biologically structured to reproduce, and Nigerian cultures have adjudged them with the exclusive power of not just childbirth but motherhood (the element of ‘nurturing’ biological and/or non-biological children). In fact, “the fundamental purpose of womanhood in society is motherhood” (Nduka & Ozioma, 2019, p. 278). Motherhood in Nigeria holds the supreme symbol of shelter and solace because when “there is misfortune and sorrow, a man (symbolizing all gender) finds refuge in his motherland” (Umeh, 1982, p. 1).

Chinua Achebe, the renowned Nigerian author (1958, p. 78) said,

*It is true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life's sweet. But when there's sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your Mother is there to protect you ... And that is why we say that Mother is Supreme.*

Females are, therefore, not “an object on which society heaps its ‘unfair’ practices and demands” (Nnoromele, 2002, p. 182) but the ‘subject’ in her ‘nurturing’ roles. In most cases, she is an active security agent, creatively protecting her offspring with some exceptions.

The Nigerian Mother is esteemed as an epitome of love, comfort, strength, affection, dignity, and a self-sacrificing persona (Umeh, 1982). These perceived nurturing characteristics make her a ‘soft’ target for illicit organ harvesting, not because she is a cultural object and has limited agency, but because she is perceived to be easily forgiving. In other words, there are likely to be lesser spiritual repercussions, especially in cases where she is murdered or dies from complications of illegal harvesting. It is believed that a mother (considered a mother to all) will never go after her own, so her ‘unhappy’ ghost will less likely haunt or punish her perpetrators for mutilating her organs.

In 2014, Nigeria’s Vanguard Newspaper reported that female reproductive organs and fluids are in higher demand because of their perceived validity for prosperity (Nwakanma & Abu, 2020). Biological (excluding medical constructions) features exclusive to females (since Nigeria’s laws equate sex and gender), such as her reproductive organs (breasts, uterus, vulva, clitoris), products of her reproductive organs (breast milk, vagina juices, menstrual blood, fetus), and her pubic hairs are channels to the perceived potency of her nurturing characteristics.

In some cases, there are additional criteria. For example, the potency of her reproductive organs and fluids may depend on blood ties and relationships. *Juju* priests may request her reproductive organs for wealth potions because their ‘customers’ suckled on her breast (Mother, partner), were delivered vaginally (biological mother), shared the same womb with her (sisters), or were nurtured by a non-biological mother. In other instances, her motherly or romantic love (partner) validates the potency of wealth sacrifices. I emphasize that the examples do not exclusively denote men as the perpetrators and women as victims. Females have also conspired to extract reproductive organs and fluids from fellow females illegally. A good instance is the case of Taiwo Olutufese Ajalorun, his wife Salawa Oyenusi,

and six others who kidnaped, killed, and dismembered a 26-year-old mother of two, Oyindamola Adeyemi on December 28th, 2022 (Guardian Nigeria,<sup>12</sup> 2023).

Irrespective of who commits the direct act of killing, the point is that the demand for and illegal extraction of reproductive organs (vagina, breasts, uterus) and products of the organ (breast milk, vaginal juices, menstrual blood, fetus), whether through coercion (kidnapping, killing), having sex to access her vaginal fluids, or stealing her worn panties, is gender-motivated. The cultural exaltation of Nigerian females as 'nurturing' beings increases the demand for their reproductive organs and fluids (biological features peculiar to females in Nigeria's laws) for wealth sacrifices. Similarly, one may argue that extracting male genitals and fluids (sperm) is gendered because these biological features are peculiar to men. In such cases where the illegal extraction of male reproductive organs produces death, it is androicide — killing males because of their gender.

#### 4. THE VIOLENCE TRIANGLE FRAMEWORK: CASE ANALYSIS

##### Case 1, Obi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria: Instagram ([guardiannigeria](#),<sup>13</sup> 2022).

At about 11pm on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022,

*Some bandits attacked Gidan Ityotyev, a Tiv community in Obi Local Council of Nasarawa State, killing two persons and injuring scores of others... A resident of Gidan Ityotyev, Mr. Ukpuu Teryila Abaa, gave names of those killed during Friday's attack including Moses Saaku and Aondofa Saaku. Abaa said the attackers also chopped off the breast of one of them, Kwaghdoos Saaku.*

The story begins with a clear act of direct violence — bandits (identifiable subjects) attacked and killed (verb) some of Gidan Ityotyev's community members (victims). There are real perpetrators, and one of the attacks is a Femicide because the breast (female biological characteristic) was extracted. However, if we listen to the silent messages of this act, we will hear the drums of underpinning structural failures. These attacks are not new in the region. In fact, The Gidan Ityotyev bandit attack happened barely two weeks after suspected herders attacked Gidan Sule, a Tiv farming community in Keana Local Council of the same state, killing about ten persons ([guardiannigeria](#), 2022). There are several questions: Why will citizens hunt down their fellow citizens? What is the government doing to prevent future attacks? What was the government's response after the attacks?

The President of the Tiv Development Association (TIDA) in Nasarawa, Comrade Peter Ahemba, blamed the Gidan Ityotyev attack on "a 'conspiracy of silence' fashioned against the Tiv people of the state by some tribal politicians in Obi and Keana Local Councils" (Guardian Nigeria, 2022). The government has responded with 'silence,' and it projects a failure of the state to protect its citizens. Worst off, security operatives (state actors) have not arrested anyone in connection to the attack. It creates room for impunity to thrive — a breakdown of law and order exacerbating structural violence. While not considered 'real' perpetrators because they do not commit the direct act, state actors are also perpetrators because of their 'silence.'

This post had 14 comments in 2023. 9 mentioned or discussed structural failures, 1 expressed pity, 1 shock, and 3 had funny comments/emoji. There was no trace of cultural violence in the comments because there were no perceived cultural justifications to self-blame victims of the attack. For example, the woman whose breast was harvested was not in her romantic lover's house or alone in the street at night when the attack happened.

##### Case 2, Surulere, Lagos State, Nigeria: Instagram ([instablog9ja](#),<sup>14</sup> 2022)

*A receptionist was attacked by a yet-to-be identified man when he visited her company to submit his curriculum vitae (CV) for a job. It was gathered that the incident happened on Monday, November 28, 2022 around 2pm at the company's office located at Surulere, Lagos. It is reported that the suspect walked into the office's complex in search of a job and the receptionist told him there was a vacancy.*

*She told him to drop his CV, and he did. So, as she was going through his CV, he quickly blew a powdery substance into the air, and she lost consciousness for a bit. Then, he proceeded to cut off her nipple. She screamed for help, and he ran but was chased by people who heard her cry for help. The suspect bolted into a nearby canal and refused to come out until the police operatives came to the scene and he was subsequently arrested. The lady was rushed to the hospital for medical*

---

<sup>12</sup> Accessed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023 (see references section for citation)

<sup>13</sup> Accessed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023 (see references section for citation)

<sup>14</sup> Accessed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023 (see references section for citation)

*treatment...his family is trying to sweep the case under the carpet, a source familiar with the incident said.*

While it is not stated if the victim survived the attack, such a violent act is a notorious indicator of a possible Femicide because the perpetrator cut the nipple of the victim (nipples are exclusive to females under Nigeria's laws). In other words, based on the assumption that she received medical care, it is an attempted Femicide. If she died from direct or indirect (bleeding or other complications that lead to death) health complications, it is a Femicide.

Though the police (state actors) perform their duty by arresting the suspect, the attack denotes elements of structural failures. First, there is a high possibility that the illicit organ harvesting was for an economic purpose (wealth potions or for sale in the Red Market) fueled by unemployment. Also, the confidence to walk into an office during the daytime to harvest an organ indicates structural violence because others who had committed similar acts had probably not been arrested or imprisoned, portraying a lawless society. In addition, his family's efforts to cover up the case depict a society that has, at least in the past, protected perpetrators.

The post had more than 100 comments in 2023, and commenters condemned the attack. Many pointed to structural failures like insecurity and poverty. One commenter said the problem is the myth of the potency of human and animal parts for wealth sacrifices. He said, "Our traditional leaders need to come out to dispel the myths that human and/or animal parts can make you rich somehow" (instablog9ja, 2022). Another sums up the concept of cultural violence in Nigeria with this comment,

*If it was a lady that went to visit a man, they would say the hookup girl deserves it and start condemning her. Just like when a girl who dresses so called "indecently" is raped they would say, why did she wear that? Forgetting that children are raped on a daily basis, and you don't need to do hookup to be a victim of ritualists. People ignorantly blaming victims and not realizing that people are who they are regardless of what you're putting on or where you are. Just pray to God to keep you safe and stop throwing unnecessary blames to what you don't understand (instablog9ja, 2022).*

### **Case 3, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State: WhatsApp Status (Kanyidaily.com,<sup>15</sup> 2022)**

According to a source, "Ezinne went to see a guy that invited her to a hotel at Presco Junction. Fast forward to the next day, she was found dead in the hotel room. Her two hands were tied to the back, her legs were also tied and her face was blindfolded. Her private part was cut off. The culprit is nowhere to be found but the police are on the matter." The Police Public Relations Officer in the state, Loveth Odah, who confirmed the development, said investigations are on to uncover the circumstances that led to the untimely death of the young lady.

The WhatsApp status that first announced her death had a beautiful picture of the victim with the inscription, "Still can't believe you're gone. U wanna follow big boys, see were it landed you." A WhatsApp private chat posted on Kanyidaily.com (2022) showed people's response to the direct act of Femicide. One said, "This fine girl just waste for street...Lord have mercy. Girls pls learn to hustle legit way and stop risking..." Another added, "she wan chill with the big boys nah."

Instead of focusing on the socioeconomic challenges (structural violence) that motivated the murder, the commenters used cultural ideologies of a 'good' and 'bad' female to validate and condone the behavior. The comments devalue the victim because she is perceived to be among the category of 'greedy girls' who follow rich men (big boys) and loose women who go to hotels. Even suspected perpetrators are discussed as passive participants, "she wan chill with the big boys," and she, the subject, who causes her misfortune by desiring to chill with the big boys. One of the commenter's references to 'wasting in the streets and learning to hustle legit' implied the victim was a commercial sex worker — a job that justifies the consequence of brutal death. I call this mindset **Cultural Femicide**.

### **Case 4: Journal Article (Adeyemo, 2022)**

It is challenging to find evidence of consensual illegal harvesting because 'victims,' like I would argue they are, fear the consequences of confessing. However, it exists and happens every other day in the Nigerian society. In this section, I emphasize that I focus on 'informed consent' (void of coercion, manipulation, and exploitation at the time of consent).

---

<sup>15</sup> Accessed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023 (see references section for citation)

I have heard several stories of women consenting to donate their breast milk and vaginal fluids to their romantic partners for wealth sacrifices to have better lives. It is the effect of love and motivated by socioeconomic challenges. Though the stories lack empirical evidence, Adeyemo (2022) discusses another form of consensual illegal organ harvesting in a famous conventional Red Market in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Some victims whose organs were traded in the market “admitted they consented without any form of coercion but also expressed deep regret in the aftermath of several medical complications post-removal and receipt of payment” (Adeyemo, 2022, p. 209). A ‘popular’ Nigerian response to the confession will be that the medical complications are a consequence of their decision. The illegal donors are perceived as perpetrators and victims, what I call self-victims. A missing puzzle from this popular Nigerian ideology is the undertones of structural failure.

The victims reported consenting because of economic hardship exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak (Adeyemo, 2022). Although not evenly distributed, the pandemic was an unexpected universal disaster with global implications. However, it does not excuse preexisting strained national services, natural resources, and local infrastructure that have kept a good percentage of Nigerians below the poverty line. Illegal consensual organ harvesting becomes an adaptation strategy for many. The illegal consenting donors are, therefore, not ‘self-victims’ but ‘structural victims’ because of structural inequalities. In such cases where the consensual donation of female reproductive organs and fluid directly leads to her death (such as death from medical complications and biological changes) or indirectly (biological changes from the harvesting that may have caused or exacerbated other health conditions leading to death) or whether the death was unintentional (harvesters had not planned for her to die), it is **Structural Femicide**. Now, what gender rights activists call **Femicide**— structural inequities and the failures of the state and its actors to protect and provide for its citizens that plunge females into death.

### **CASE 5: Port Harcourt Rivers State, Nigeria: Instagram (Instablog9ja, 2023)**

On 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023, Collins – a suspected yahoo<sup>16</sup> boy slaughtered his girlfriend, Justina Tiffany Otuene, a Biochemistry student of the University of Port-Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State, Nigeria, in his house and harvested her eyes and breasts for ritual purposes (Instablog9ja 2023<sup>17</sup>). The victim was a 300-level (equated to a college ‘junior’ in some parts of the world) biochemistry student at the University of Port-Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State, Nigeria.

Justina’s case is a Femicide because one of the biological formations (breasts) that characterizes her as ‘female’ under Nigeria’s laws was harvested. There is a high tendency to curse the direct perpetrator, her boyfriend, Collins. True, “Collins is wicked!” Galtung (1990) will categorize Collins’s act as ‘direct violence.’ However, many, as usual, have blamed the victim for her death. Some comments on the Instablog9ja (2023) post about Justina’s murder include: ‘*Ladies will never learn o... 🤔*’, and ‘*I’m sure the victim is one of those women who constantly talks about standards.*’ Another bragged on Facebook, “*Every time a girl is killed by her Yahoo boyfriend, and it makes rounds on social media, there’s this unexplainable joy I feel in my heart that money cannot buy*” (Instablog9ja<sup>18</sup> 2023). Through the comments, Justina is murdered a second time – **Cultural Femicide**.

I consider numerous hypothetical situations: Justina may have been unaware that Collins was a Yahoo boy because he was still ‘toasting’ her (asking her out). That may have been Justina’s first visit to Collins’s house. Possibly, Justina knew Collins engaged in illegal activities and continued their relationship to meet her economic needs. Cultural violence advocates will call it ‘greed.’ But look beyond the surface and see perceived ‘greed’ as the desire to quell economic hardship or the fear of tasting financial deprivation. The puzzling omission is the contemporary social fabric that either creates and validates structures promoting economic inequality or equates acceptance and reverence to wealth. We ignore the foundations while castigating the wrong enemy — Justina and every other female who has been a victim of **Cultural Femicide**. Justina is a ‘structural violence victim’ of strained national services, natural resources, and local infrastructure that have exacerbated poverty

---

<sup>16</sup> Typically, males within 13 – 40 years who use human parts, fluids, and objects like female panties as sacrifices for wealth spells and prosperity potions

<sup>17</sup> Accessed on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2023 (see references section for citation)

<sup>18</sup> Accessed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2024 (see references section for citation)



and inequality. Her death is married to cultural, religious, and social institutions that worship wealth and inculcate attitudes and behaviors that revere material commodities. She is a structural Femicide victim, representative of the state's failure to protect its citizens from harm. Justina is a victim of weak justice systems that only answer the wealthy and ignore the calls of others.

### Conclusion

Festive periods such as Christmas, New Yam Festivals, and other religious and cultural festivals were perceived as the time frame for body part harvesting. Now, beyond other security threats Nigeria is grappling with, its citizens live in fear every second of the year because of consistent media announcements of missing persons and mutilated bodies. Females are prime targets of body hunters because they are soft targets (Nwakanma & Abu, 2020), and their reproductive organs are believed to possess intrinsic value for wealth sacrifices. Harvesting her reproductive organs happens in the domestic/private (home) and public spheres (hotels, streets, places of worship). Therefore, everywhere is a potential danger zone for her (Ogunlana et al., 2021).

Femicide as a human rights violation is not believed to be widespread in Nigeria because its universal definition (the intentional killing of a female because of her gender) does not adequately reflect the social realities of many Nigerian females, especially with the abolition of honor killings in the country. The paper situates Femicide within an ongoing menace (illicit organ harvesting) in contemporary Nigeria to prove that the reason for killing a female can be gender-motivated. I first argue that the demand for and the extraction of female genitalia and bodily fluid from a female's reproductive organs in contemporary Nigeria is gendered. In cases where such illegal extractions produce death, whether intentional or unintentional, consensual or non-consensual, it is a Femicide. Then, I use Johan Galtung's Violence Triangle framework to analyze five reported cases of gender-motivated organ harvesting to emphasize that Femicide goes beyond those who commit direct acts of violence. It is also structural violence (the failure of the state and its actors to protect its citizens) and cultural violence (ideologies used to justify direct acts of violence). Thus, with the alarming rate of illegal organ harvesting in Nigeria (Direct Femicide), the state's silence' to the menace (Structural Femicide), and cultural ideologies used to justify direct violence (Cultural Femicide), Femicide is widespread in Nigeria.

While Nigeria has several laws criminalizing illegal organ harvesting and homicide, the absence of a Femicide law obscures the social processes leading to her death and the actions and reactions after her death. There is an urgent need for the state to name the problem by instituting a Femicide law that incorporates both preventive (examining and addressing the causes of Femicide) and punitive measures. I recognize that the existence of a law does not necessarily translate into implementation, so Femicide preventive and responsive budgeting is a step in the right direction. In cases of Femicide, females are not self-victims<sup>19</sup>, nor are they architects of their misfortune, irrespective of the circumstance leading to death. 'Greed' in quote (Cultural Femicide) — choosing to date a wealthy male is not a justification for her death because many poor males have murdered their female lovers. Deciding to see a romantic partner she met on Facebook in a hotel (Cultural Femicide) is not a validation for her murder because several Nigerian relationships and in fact, healthy marriages are products of social media connections. In other words, there is no hard and fast rule to being a victim. Nigerians must purge themselves of these ideologies instituted by cultural inscriptions of a 'good' and 'bad' female.

### REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. William Heinemann Limited.
- Adesanya, A. (2024, February 16). Ogun Police Arrest Seven Over Murder of 35-yr-old Woman. Premium Times Newspaper.
- Adeyemo, D. D. (2022). Organ Trafficking: An Emerging Dimension of Illegal Trafficking in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa. *University of Port Harcourt Journal of Private Law*. <http://ir.library.ui.edu.ng/handle/123456789/7724>
- Aghawenu, G., & Baptist Theological Seminary (2020). A Socio-Ethical Appraisal of Ritual Killings in Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research*, 8(1), 121.

---

<sup>19</sup> Perceived as perpetrators and victims – see the Case Analysis, with title, CASE 4: JOURNAL ARTICLE (ADEYEMO, 2022, P.11)

- Bakari, A. A., Abubakar, M. A., Alhassan, S. U., & Nwankwo, E. A. (2012). Organ Transplantation: Legal, Ethical and Islamic Perspective in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Surgery*, 18(2), 53-60. <https://doi.org/10.4103/1117-6806.103103>
- Balraj, B. (2015). Understanding Objectification Theory. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 3(11), 70–74.
- Bartky, S. L. (2015). *Femininity and domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203825259>
- Emmanuel, E. H., & Nabena, I. F. (2020). Legal and Ethical Developments in the Regulation of Organ Donation and Transplantation in Nigeria. *Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence*, 11(1), 122-126.
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), 291–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>
- Hefti, A. (2022). Conceptualizing Femicide as a Human Rights Violation. In *Conceptualizing Femicide as a Human Rights Violation* (pp. 240–268). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803920443.00019>
- Instablog9ja [@instablog9ja]. (2023, October 26). #JusticeforJustina: Lady who was Reportedly Killed and Slaughtered by her Yahoo Boyfriend, Died 14 Days After her Birthday in Rivers State [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy2h4BWtybx/?igshid=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng%3D%3D>
- Instablog9ja [@instablog9ja]. (2023, October 28). #JusticeforJustina: There's this Unexplainable Joy I Feel in my Heart Every Time a Girl is Killed by her Yahoo Boyfriend [Photograph]. Instagram. [https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy9JnY7MQiZ/?igshid=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng%3D%3D&img\\_index=2](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy9JnY7MQiZ/?igshid=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng%3D%3D&img_index=2)
- Instablog9ja [@instablog9ja]. (2022, December 6). Man Arrested for Posing as a Job Applicant to cut off the Mamilla of a Lady's Bazooms in Lagos [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/C10Oc8uMpuX/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY%3D>
- Martin, D.E. (2012). The Red Market: On the Trail of the World's Organ Brokers, Bone Thieves, Blood Farmers, and Child Traffickers. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 9, 205–207. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-012-9361-3>
- Nduka, U., & Ozioma, N. G. (2019). Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and the Role of Women in Igbo Traditional Religious Culture. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(12), 272-289. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2019.712020>
- Nigeria Watch. (2023). Sorcery [Advanced Search]. Nigeria Watch Database. <https://www.nigeriawatch.org/>
- Nnoromele, S. C. (2002). Representing the African Woman: Subjectivity and Self in The Joys of Motherhood. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 43(2), 178-190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111610209602179>
- Nwakanma, E., & Abu, O. P. (2020). Cultural Issues in Violence Against Women and Ritual Killings in Nigeria: Assessing the Implications for Sustainable Development. *Gender and Behavior*, 18(2), 15447-15457. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-genbeh-v18-n2-a24>
- Obani, P., & Okunrobo, H. (2020). Critical Reflections on Combating Trafficking in Human Organs in Nigeria. *Nigerian Current Law Review*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4269681>
- Ogunlana, M. O., Nwosu, I. B., Fafolahan, A., Ogunsola, B. F., Sodeke, T. M., Adegoke, O. M., Odunaiya, N. A., & Govender, P. (2021). Pattern of Rape and Femicide During COVID-19 Lockdown Content and Discourse Analysis of Digital Media Reports in Nigeria. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 33(1), 58-71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.2012134>
- Olaposi, I. (2021, June 8). The History and Sources of the Nigerian Criminal Laws: How we Ended up With Two Codes. *Legal Naija*. <https://legalnaija.com/the-history-and-sources-of-the-nigerian-criminal-laws-how-we-ended-up-with-two-codes-inioluwa-olaposi/adedunmade/>
- Oyediran, K. A., & Isiugo-Abanihe, U. C. (2005). Perceptions of Nigerian Women on Domestic Violence: Evidence from 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 38-53. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3583461>
- Oyewole, S. (2016). Kidnapping for Rituals: Article of Faith and Insecurity in Nigeria. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9(9), 35–52.
- Salihu, H. A., Isiaka, M., & Abdulaziz, I. (2019). The Growing Phenomenon of Money Rituals-Motivated Killings in Nigeria: An Empirical Investigation into the Factors Responsible. *UKH Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2), 32-44. <https://doi.org/10.25079/ukhjss.v3n2y2019.pp32-44>
- The Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1990). Criminal Code Act, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Refworld Global Law and Policy Database. <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/rwmain/opensslpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=54f975004>

- The Guardian Newspaper [@guardiannigeria]. (2022, October 23). Bandits Invade Nasarawa Community, Severe Woman's Breast, Kill Two [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkDLEtaofpX/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D>
- The Guardian Newspaper [@guardiannigeria]. (2023, January 6). Police Arrest Couple, Six Others for Dismembering Mother of Two [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CnFGPgloXC2/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY%3D>
- Tobias, S. (2022, May 5). Nigerian Lady Found Dead with Her Private Part Allegedly Missing in Ebonyi Hotel. Kanyidaily.com.<https://www.kanyidaily.com/2022/05/nigerian-lady-found-dead-with-her-private-part-allegedly-missing-in-ebonyi-hotel.html>
- Umeh, M. A. (1982). The Joys of Motherhood: Myth or Reality? *Colby Quarterly*, 18(1), 5.
- UN Women. (2022, November 25). Five Essential Facts to Know About Femicide. UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/11/five-essential-facts-to-know-about-femicide#:~:text=Defined%20as%20an%20intentional%20killing,men%2C%20or%20harmful%20social%20norms.>
- Uwaoma, N. C., Osita-Njoku, A., Nkwam-Uwaoma, A. O., & Udeagha, C. F. (2011). Organ Laundering in Nigeria, Socio-Psychological Implications. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(3). <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2011.v2n3p384>
- World Health Organization. (2022). Gender and Health. World Health Organization. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1)

### AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Jessica Ojiugo Chinonye is a Ph.D. student specializing in Disaster and Space Anthropology at the University of Kentucky, USA.

**Citation:** Chinonye, J. O, "The Harvester's Garden: Females as Body Parts in Nigeria." *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, ), vol 11, no. 8, 2024, pp. 43-53. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.1108006>.

**Copyright:** © 2024 Author. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.