

The Culture of Reincarnation: An Obstacle to Organ Donation in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Organ transplantation is a life-saving treatment for patients with organ failure. The need for organ transplantation has been increasing daily but the numbers of patients who need organs far exceed the supply. The rationale for the non-availability of organs is due to the belief in reincarnation among Nigerian citizens. Reincarnation is a religious belief both in Asia and Africa that humans are reborn as human beings or animals, depending on their previous lifestyle. Reincarnation is also the belief that the human soul or spirit reincarnates after death, to begin another life in a new body, either in human form or in animals, depending on the moral actions of the previous life. This belief affected organ supply in Nigeria because of thinking about what could happen to their organs after rebirth. Using the method of philosophical analysis, this study suggests the implementation of cultural hybridization by policymakers for the expansion of the organ donation pool. Hybridization is a strategy of synthesizing and accepting new ideologies or cultural differences aimed at producing a new identity for the common good of humanity. Cultural hybridization is plausible through the reorientation of potential organ*

donors to register for the expansion of the organ donation pool.

Keywords: *Reincarnation, Culture, Organ, Donation, Cultural-Hybridization.*

Introduction

Organ transplant is a life-saving treatment for patients suffering from organ failure. The need for organ transplantation has been increasing daily, but the numbers of patients who need organs far exceed the supply. The demand for organ transplantation has rapidly increased all over the world during the past decade due to the increased incidence of vital organ failure, the rising success and greater improvement in posttransplant outcome (Abouna, 2008). Now, we may not have the current data of patients on the organ waiting list in Nigeria, but it is believed in some quarters that more than 10 million people are suffering from organ failure and will need organ replacement.

While some have opined that educational and social prejudices and mistrust of medical professionals or hospitals are the reasons for organ shortages, the major cause of organ shortages in Nigeria is the cultural belief in reincarnation among citizens. "Social values, death taboo, ignorance, and procrastination are often issues that can influence the act of organ donation" (Petru, 2019). Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in the United State of America have a high need for organ transplantation, but the rate of organ donation is low due to cultural belief in reincarnation (Cedars, 2020). Cultural beliefs play a significant role in organ donation and convincing people to accept organ transplantation. The culture of reincarnation is an important reason why potential organ donors decline organ donation in Africa (Michael et al., 2011).

Cultural Beliefs are Important

Culture is the knowledge of people or groups (Oruka et al., 1983). It is a way of life. Culture helps to interpret realities. Culture helps to identify people of a particular community. It involves the beliefs, language, and social behavior, which define a group of people or community. It influences the way people communicate and see each other. Cross-cultural communication entails shared values and cultural hybridization between people of different origins or worldviews (Zhang & Xu, 2007). Culture is "*communalis*", which means shared or owned in common. In French, *commune* means to share. By implication, community means a group or persons involved in sharing or reasoning together along the same thought. Communalism is neither a social movement nor a behavioral pattern of the masses but a network of interests, capable of uniting a whole but it has negatively affect organ donation in Africa. There are many challenges to the decline in organ donation, including family, fear, mistrust, religion, and bodily issues. The study recommends cultural hybridization for the expansion of the organ donation pool.

Methodology and Methods

This study adopted the approach of philosophical analysis. The philosophical analysis would help to gain an in-depth understanding of terms and concepts employed in the study of the culture of reincarnation; a barrier to organ donation in Nigeria.

What is reincarnation?

The idea of reincarnation permeates the history of both African and western philosophy. Pythagoras (570 BC – 495 BC) Pythagoras discussed the transmigration of the soul, popularly referred to as Metempsychosis or reincarnation.

The transmigration of the soul originates from the religious doctrine of the Orphic (Omorogbe, 1999). Pythagoras, just like Orphism, maintained that the human soul could transmigrate even at death. The human soul transmigrates from one body to another, including that of animals.

In most African community, the birth of a child the next task becomes to find out who reincarnated the baby (Umezurike, 2022). Africans believed that the soul and the body are two separate entities. At death, the human soul goes out to the spirit world to perform the duties of an ancestor (Idjakpo, 2015). "Reincarnation" literally means, to take on the flesh again after death (Anil et al., 2013). It is a religious or philosophical orientation or belief transmitted by myths or stories that the human "soul or spirit, after biological death, begins a new life in a new body either in human form, animal or spiritual, depending on the moral quality of the previous life or actions. Reincarnation is metempsychosis of death and rebirth. It is governed by the moral principle of karma, which is referred to as "*Samsara*" (Anil et al., 2013).

Reincarnation simply means that human beings leave one life and go into another life. The rationale for the belief in reincarnation is spiritual growth, for the development of the soul. The human soul may take a different form during reincarnation, either in animals or in plants, depending on the judgment of the previous life (Anil, et al., 2013).

The Effects of Reincarnation on Organ Donation

Philosophical and religious beliefs about the existence or non-existence of an unchanging self have a direct bearing on organ donation (Umezurike, 2022). The unchanging self or the "eternalists" has led to organ shortage crises. In the United States, for example, the number of patients on the waiting list in the year 2006 had risen to over 95,000, while

the number of patient deaths was over 6,300. This organ shortage crisis has deprived thousands of patients of a new and better quality of life and has caused a substantial increase in the cost of alternative medical care such as dialysis (Abouna, 2008).

Organ crisis is obnoxious and capable of reawakening posttraumatic disorder. People on the organ waiting list suffer emotional, physical, and mental health due to misconceptions about reincarnation (Ottuh & Idjakpo, 2021). Cedars (2020) argued that the belief in reincarnation is bondage for patients suffering from organ failure. The implications of religious beliefs such as reincarnation are death among patients on the organ waiting list. We maintain that the belief in reincarnation is surrounded by myths and superstitions. Cultural hybridization is employed for organ donation (Idialu, 2012).

The lack of organ donors has led to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD reawakens traumatic memory linked to shortages of organs, which creates depression and anxiety among patients suffering from organ failure (Monday, 2020). The memories of organ failure are an analyzable fragment linked to organ shortages and trigger PTSD, a common problem for candidates on the organ waiting list. "In rare circumstances, a person with severe PTSD may attack oneself, insult oneself, or engage in extreme violence" (Monday, 2020). We maintain that it is morally unjustified to hold deceased organs due to a belief in reincarnation.

Arguments on Reincarnation

Conservatism is a political and social philosophy debates promoting ancient establishments within the context of culture. The creed of conservatism embraces tradition. "Conservatism" is a philosophy of natural inclinations, to

protect or safeguard what is already established. This view, of course, opposes changes or modernization (John, 1997). African culture must be intact without proliferation. For the conservative scholars, it is unethical to abandon already established custom or traditional beliefs in the name of modernization or globalization (Ikeke, 2007). The belief in reincarnation is not a designed to halt patients suffering from organ failure or demoralize them or neither to impoverish or oppress them. It is an age-long tradition intended for the overall good of African society (Tasie, 2013).

Organ donation is intercepted when people begin to think about their death and what will happen to their body during reincarnation, especially if their organs are donated. Reincarnation has a metaphysical link with the sensitive world of the ancestors. It is believed among Africans that reincarnation enhances successful transition of the dead into the land of their ancestors (Mbiti, 1959; Oruka, 1991). In Africa, it also believed that the spirit of the living dead has the power of mediation between the living and the Supreme Being. The ancestral spirits are the spirits of families or community members who once lived among us (Oruka, 1991). The belief in reincarnation has a cultural significance in cleansing the community (Taise, 2013). The question is, how can cultural worldviews be harmonized for patients suffering from organ failure?

African cultural values are vital instrument for communal life. The rising trends of cultural difference, modernism, globalization, neo-colonialism, individualism, and capitalism as values remain a negation of African cultural values and identity (Ottuh, 2021). The ability to deal adequately with cultural changes could save individuals suffering from organ failure. Although reincarnation is currently challenged by survival hypothesis which asserts that the human soul will continue to exist after the death.

This belief constitutes the problem of mind-body and personal identity in philosophy. The mind body problem is concerned with how the mind and body are related to each other; many theories have been proposed to solve the mind-body problem (Umezurike, 2022).

Plato's dialogue entitled "*Phaedo*" discusses the immortality of the soul. In *Phaedo*, Plato maintains that the human body is a parasite to the body and a source of evil to man. The human body is a prison house for the habitation of the soul, which will be free at death. The soul once lived as a separate entity, before its fixation with the body. The fixation of the soul is by accident, and both are to be separated only at death (*Phaedo*, 83D). The soul is immortal and does not perish in death. Aristotle contributed to the idea of the soul, using the law of the opposite. The soul is the principle of life. Whatever has a soul has a life. The soul is the potency of the body. The body is the matter while the soul is the form (Omorogbe, 1999). Aristotle differs from Plato in that the human soul is inseparable from the body; there was no time; the soul first existed before the body; one component cannot exist without the other and both cease to exist at death (Omorogbe, 1999). In the above assertion, we maintain that the immortality of the soul is defeated. The conservation of African traditional belief in reunion seems plausible, but it appears that reincarnation and its process are beyond scientific explanation and logical reasoning. We maintain that thinking of what will happen to the body parts during or after reincarnation is a superstition that lacks logical reasoning. This worldview should be primarily concerned with a compassionate engagement to saving lives on the organ waiting list. It is a metaphysical process which involves the spirit and the ancestors, not the body reincarnation (Ottuh & Idjakpo, 2021)

Cultural Hybridization for Organ Donation

The belief in reincarnation is founded on a metaphysical inclination that links divinities, ancestral worship, and a reflection of culture. Although "philosophical review of African religion and their beliefs contradict the belief in re-incarnation "over the whole of Africa, creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God... that God created all things, hence giving Him the name Creator (or molder, maker)" (Mbiti, 1959 p. 39). This assertion does not give creation to reincarnation but to a Supreme Being popularly known as the molder maker. We argue that the organ donation process should not incorporate religious and cultural practices. Culture should be seen from the sociological worldview of man, is dynamic and subject to change for the common good of society. Organ donation in Nigeria is challenged by attitudes and beliefs in reincarnation. This study recommends a paradigm shift from reincarnation to cultural hybridization.

Cultural hybridization is an emerging trend in social political philosophy, law, ethics, sociology and many other disciplines. It is a philosophical synthesis that encourages the exchange of values between two cultures or individuals, to the formation of cultural identities, aimed at the common good of a whole. The implication of cultural hybridization is improper assimilation of cultures. Improper assimilation of cultures is cultural genocide. Hybridization is a strategy for synthesizing cultural differences or worldviews among people. Enculturation resonates from globalization or a critical worldview, which helps to establish a common ground among the people of a community (Beamer & Varner, 2009). The inability to form a common ground is cultural Conservatism, which presents organ donation as a complex exercise. Cultural transformation is transcultural

flows and entanglements resulting in transformative powers to feature of cultural change (Philipp, 2012).

In this era of globalization, cultural hybridization is essential because it allows individuals or communities to key in with contemporary events in their society. Cultural hybridization would help to link human beings and the global community or nations to interact positively without being left behind, although cultural hybridization affects conservative worldviews (Beamer & Varner, 2009). Nevertheless, it would significantly foster and save patients who will benefit from organ donation. Cultural differences are a challenge to the expansion of the organ donation pool, and the continuous belief in reincarnation is an obnoxious practice if thousands of patients continue to die on the organ waiting for a lack of donors. We maintain that cultural hybridization, if implemented by policy makers, will lead to surplus organ donation in Nigeria (wiredu, 1985).

The paradox of culture is the removal of the shaft and retention of the kernels of culture for the restoration of human dignity (Idialu, 2012). It is wise for us to move with the dynamic nature by synthesizing some inimical African cultural practices and embracing multiculturalism. Cultural hybridization would help to retain an authentic African identity. We maintain cultural hybridization and interconnect culture for an inclusive worldview.

Conclusion

This study showed that there is an influence of reincarnation on organ donation. A philosophical analysis of reincarnation, it is necessarily argued that reincarnation is a barrier to the expansion of the organ donation pool. Although there are a lot of myths which have led to a decline in organ donation, the biggest one is the myth of

reincarnation. The assertion that organ donation would interfere with the lives of the reincarnated is a misconception. The idea of reincarnation deals with metaphysical, not empirical science. We posit that there is no strong objective evidence to prove that people who believe in reincarnation are actually reincarnated. This study suggests a cultural hybridization for the expansion of the organ donation pool. Cultural hybridization is a philosophy of social change. It is a globally informed methodology to close various gaps between the demand and supply of organs. Cultural hybridization discourages cultural dislocations. It encourages integration despite cultural diversities. We conclude that organ donation is encouraged to save candidates on the organ waiting list through cultural hybridization.

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