

Where are her body parts?

• *The burial ceremony of Biakpara became not of mourning but grisly revelation*

RITUAL killings are growing into a weird routine in the country. Just a few weeks ago, in Anambra State, over 20 persons lost their lives to a haze of bullets from a cult when families and friends gathered at a funeral to bury one of their own. Some observers believe it had daredevil features of a bloodthirsty rite.

1 In Ogbe-Ani, Ubulu-Uku community, Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State, another drama has joined the deadly narrative. A woman, Comfort Biakpara, died and the corpse was brought to her maiden family in Aniocha south local government area in the state. But her body did not come whole and intact. Her eyes, tongue and other parts had been excised from her body.

"As they laid our sister on a bench in the canopy and family members and other people were going to see her, unfortunately, we first discovered that cotton wool was put on her eyes," narrated one of the family members.

"When we raised the alarm and enquired further, we discovered that there were no eyes and that was when youths revolted and started scattering everywhere. Some sustained minor injuries in the process.

"The husband's family members who brought the corpse ran away because we were angry over the development. Later, we found out that even her tongue was also removed," the source said.

The story did not identify the name of the husband or any member of the family. It however stated that the deceased

was living with the husband at Ubuluku at the riverine area of the state, which is Burutu local government.

The absence of the vital parts of the body is curious. The family members evidently felt guilty and, by their flight from the scene, they might have admitted they had violated the corpse of their in-law.

Was the woman, who was 50, killed by the husband and/or family members and deposited cynically for the in-laws in Aniocha? In many cases, bodies tend to be covered with cotton wool to stave off cadaverous smells. But this is often restricted to the nostrils.

What happened to the body parts? Where are they? It is not yet clear that the matter has been handled or handed over to the police or any relevant law enforcement agency. The youths in the Aniocha community did not succeed in doing harm to members of the family, and that could have escalated the matter both legally and culturally.

Many of the stories about ritual killing, or killings of this sort, tend to be from an assailant to a total stranger. They happen to those kidnapped on highways, in odd corners in the town, in bushes, on back alleys. But the Anambra incident brought it to a fellow member of a cult rather than a member of another or rival cult, that is intra-cult violence. Biakpara's is a more portentous case. It concerns a member of the family, a wife. Bringing such savagery to the family is suffocating, to say the least.

We have stated in earlier editorials on

this subject that the practice needs urgent attention of state and federal governments. We need the secret service to track those who ask them for these human parts, nab and prosecute them. We need to educate our citizens that we live in a scientific era and there is no correlation between wealth and the savagery of dismembering human parts.

Few persons speak of the herdsmen violence these days. This is because since the decision by southern governors to ban open grazing, the kidnap tales have now revealed that many of the abductions were performed by the ritual hunters.

It is a moment not only in savagery in Nigeria. It is an opportune time for enlightenment.

Meanwhile, the security agents should investigate what happened to Biakpara's body parts said to be missing. If laws had been broken, the perpetrators should be arrested and made to face the law.

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