

***Commodifying Human Body for the Life Survival in Islamic Legal Perspective:
The Case of Organ Purchase among Refugees.***

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The Asian Conference on Ethics, Religion & Philosophy 2019
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The commodification of human body for the life survival matter has been evident among some refugees who, out of desperate and dire situations, engaged in selling body organs to have better life for themselves and for others. The research examines the discussion on human dignity and the dignity of body to respond to human body commodification. In this regard, the research refers to the authoritative Islamic sources; early jurisprudential schools and the contemporary scholars discussing on the value and dignity of human, human body, and body commodification. In general, the Muslim scholars of both classical and contemporary times negate the idea of body commodification. Whether the concept of survivability permits buying and sale of body organs, is not the matter of objection of majority scholars in holding the prohibitive justification on buying and sale while some scholars see that dire necessity may compel some people to do things that are in general prohibited.

Keywords: commodification, human body, organs, life survival, Islamic, refugees

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Introduction

'I do exploit people', Abu Ja'far (a pen name) mentioned this to the BBC News journalist when asked about his activity. He regards himself as an organ broker of refugees working in the black market at Beirut in Lebanon. There are some refugees desperate to get money; they struggle for survival and thus, decide to sell their organs to earn a good sum of money. Abu Ja'far claims that he has already arranged 30 refugees within the last three years (Forsyth, 2017, BBC News). Confident in his action yet illegal, he views that his action is helping at least few refugees to find a way out of the extreme poverty in the crisis where there are no ways to get a job in Lebanon due to law restrictions. One of his clients, a 17 years old boy who left Syria to Lebanon after his brothers and father were killed in the war, sold his right kidney for \$8000 to survive and to cover the mounting debt of three years living with no work, and to provide for his mother and five sisters¹(Forsyth, 2017, BBC News).

Mahmood, another Syrian refugee who suffered in Sanliurfa, a place just across the border in southern Turkey, agreed out of the desperate situation to sell one of his kidneys in the underworld that controls the illegal trade in human organs. He just hoped to be paid \$10 000, in order get a better treatment for his siblings who had been suffering from genetic disabilities. Mahmood said to the journalist, "I can survive with one kidney. They won't live without the care they can only get in Europe" (John, 2018, ITV News).

The above mentioned two situations indicate the miserable self-sacrifice of some refugees to make some money for the survival, who, compelled to the crisis, are even willing with the consent to give their own organs to continue life. Some others beg on the streets, particularly the children while some shine shoes, dodge between cars in traffic jams to sell chewing gum or tissues through the windows or end up exploited as child labor, or turn to prostitution. Based on these grief-stricken conditions, the questions that can be raised are: how is human dignity discussed philosophically? On what basis does Islam discuss the dignity of the human body? How far can the human body be commodified for the survival cause? How does Islam view the concept of selling own body organ in the severe necessity that may befall a person's life?

The moral justification on organ selling and buying has been discussed among the contemporary Muslim jurists and scholars. The main factor debated among the scholars prohibiting and/or permitting the organ selling and buying center around the idea of intrinsic value of human being. Human is believed to be inherently sacred and, therefore, any mutilation for transpassing the ownership of organs through any means of monetary transaction violates the sanctities of a human being ²(Tantawi, 1987,

¹ Most refugees are not allowed to work under Lebanese law, and many families barely get by. Among the most desperate are Palestinians who were already considered refugees in Syria, and so are not eligible to be registered by the United Nation refugee agency when they arrive in Lebanon. Thus, live in overcrowded camps and receive very little aid. Almost vulnerable are those who arrived from Syria after May 2015 when the Lebanese government asked the UN to stop registering new refugee.

² The discussion focuses on the trading or transaction of human organ between the donor (due to his poverty) and the capable person (who is in search of organs from poor). However, the concept of donating organ under self-consent because of sympathy, compassion and love has been extensively discussed in Islamic point of view. In brief, donating part of human body or organ is encouraged which

IOMS). However, when forced with the severe conditions, some rather sacrifice themselves, whether for the betterment of their own life or of the others. Thus, the writer thinks that it is important to answer the issue as it would clarify the readers on the Islamic perspective regarding the dignity and the human body and some implications. More importantly, the article would answer the question on whether the human body can be commodified due to survival reason in Islamic perspective.

Refugees and The Multiple Displacement of Refugees.

Any refugee that meets the criteria of the UNHCR Statute, qualify for the protection of the United Nations provided by the High Commissioner, regardless of whether the refugee is in a country that is a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, Syria Emergency, 2018). Even, whether he or she has been recognized by the host country as a refugee under either of the instrument mentioned³ (Article 1(A)(2), 1951, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (OHCHR). If it is evident that there is protection and reception of humanitarian aid from the relevant nationality and internationally recognized institutions, the decisions of selling organ raise questions; why would they risk their lives and sell parts of the body, since there are organizations that could help them with incentives and aids?

The amount of aid compared to the overwhelming numbers of refugees is very less and is probably of some relief for them for merely few days. The dire necessity compels some of the refugees to end up taking serious decisions. Other possible justifications may also be drawn. However, for the case of those who are banned from the documentation, they could not access the aid. Statistically, there are data showing the deficiency of aid given to the refugees in general and particularly Syrian refugees (Eichner, 2017, Ynet News; Hamill, 2015, Correspondence).

Regarding the Syrian refugees, only 8 percent of them are settled in the refugee camps as opposed to the vast majority taking shelter in the neighboring countries and living in the urban areas. Lebanon for example is a place for more than a million refugees having a little or no financial resources. Approximately 70 percent of refugees live under extreme poverty. Most of the refugees there are scattered in many urban and rural communities due to the absence of formal refugee camp (UNHCR, 2018, *Syria Emergency*). In addition, legal restrictions are imposed limiting the refugees rights, which includes prohibitions to work in 39 professions, to own property, as well as to access to state-provided services such as health and education (UNRWA, 2017, *Employment*).

Those desperate refugees mentioned above are probably among the refugees in transit, who are temporarily admitted in the territory of a state under the condition

is Islamically altruistic, but most importantly, the treatment must not originally entail serious harm to the donor. The harm should not be eliminated by another harm, as claimed by Sheikh Gad al-Haq Ali Gad Al-Haq, the late of Sheikh Azhar.

³ The refugee, among those who owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. Article 1(A)(2), 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (OHCHR), Article 1A(2), as modified by the Protocol.

that they may be resettled elsewhere or maybe return back to their origin country (International Migration Law, 2011, p. 80). Meanwhile, their stay in the current territory prior to the destined country poses possibly a great challenge to continue their life and to survive. Some of the refugees may be among refugees in orbit⁴ or refugees in transit.⁵

The restrictions are certainly a barrier for many of them to lead their daily lives and provide for them and their families. The vulnerable situation makes them run out of many options and thus, consequently, some decide to sell organs hoping to make some money that can be useful to lead a normal life with families.

The inviolability of human body discourse in Islam: Scriptural discussion.

The first evidentiary source of sharia, the Quran mentions that all human beings irrespective of any race, creed, age are honored, as Allah says: “*And verily we have honored the children of Adam*” (al- Isrā’: 70). According to Hashim Kamali, this Quranic text recognizes comprehensively the dignity of human beings, without limitations or qualifications of any kind. He further clarifies that it is not the meritorious conducts that determine the dignity of the human but rather, it is God’s favor and grace bestowed on the human (2002, p. 1), since the moment of birth (Yusrī, 1993, p. 59). Moreover, such bestowed dignity on the human facilitates in recognizing a set of rights and obligations and assuring safe conduct by others including the society and the state (Kamali, 2007, p. 63-740). Therefore, any act of transgression on human such as killing without the legal right⁶ is forbidden and poses serious implications both in this world (al-Baqarah: 178) and in the hereafter (al-Nisā’: 93)⁷.

This inviolability is linked to human not only after his/her birth but also before his/her birth and thus harming that being (fetus) before his/her coming into the worldly existence imposes blood money (*ghurra*⁸) on whoever is responsible for such action as mentioned in the hadith (Sahih Bukhārī, Hadith no. 5759; Ibn ‘Ābidīn, 2000, p. 227). This inviolability is also existent after his/her death as prophetic tradition mentions that breaking the bone of a dead human is breaking it when he/she is alive and hence, respecting human dead body is also of utmost importance put forward by Islam (Sunan Abū Dawūd, Hadith no. 3207; Sunan Ibn Mājah, Hadith no. 1616).⁹

⁴ Refugees who, although not returned directly to a country where they may be persecuted, are denied asylum or unable to find a state willing to examine their request and move or are moved from one country to another in a search of asylum. International Migration Law, *Glossary on Migration*. 80.

⁵ Refugees who are temporarily admitted in the territory of a state under the condition that they are resettled elsewhere.

⁶ Death penalty is due to the transgression by Muslims for certain prohibitions in Sharia law such as the involvement of a married person in adultery or killing someone intentionally. Due to the universal ethical views, hudud’s application is not being applied in most of the Muslim nation-states today. Still some scholars define this kind of penalty due to its categorical nature.

⁷ The Quran mentions “Whoever kills a believer intentionally – his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally, and Allah has become angry with him and has cursed him and has prepared for him a great punishment.”

⁸ *Ghurra* is the monetary compensation valued for freeing a slave, male or female for the compensation of the fetus. The worth, which is conventionally set, is one-twentieth of the full blood money.

⁹ It is narrated from A’isha, Rasul (sm) told: “Breaking the bone of a dead person is similar to breaking it when he is alive.”

All these Quranic texts and prophetic narrations certainly uphold the significance of the principle of inviolability of human during his/her lifetime, before birth and after death. However, the question that arises is whether the concept of inviolability restricts any use of human organs for others and whether that usage can involve any monetary transaction for the purpose of survival.

Legal discussion: Classical schools and contemporary scholars of *Fiqh* on the commodification of the human body and organs.

All the classical schools of juristic methodology have agreed on the prohibition of any use of human organs for others involving buying and selling. Different schools had different reasons in prohibiting this. For instance, the Hanafi school opines that benefitting from organs is not lawful due to the dignity of human (*karāmah*) (al-Marghīnānī, p. 46, Ibn ‘Ābidīn, 2000, p. 338; Nizām al-Dīn, p. 354).¹⁰ The Mālikī school considers that such practice is prohibited because the life, the perfection of the intellect and the body are solely the right of Allah entrusted upon human, not human’s own right. Thus, cutting or omitting any organ of the body is not lawful for the human (al-Shātibī, 1997, p. 102; al-Qarafī, p. 141). The Shāfi‘ī¹¹ and the Hanbālī¹² schools also (in line with the Hanafī school) prohibit the proceedings on human body/organs due to the sanctity and dignity (al-Nawawī, 1991, 285; Ibn Qudāmā, 1968, p. 420).

Contemporary scholars also base their arguments on dignity and God’s ownership concepts. Among the opinions, the human body has intrinsic significance, not instrumental significance like other physical objects. Also, the human body is not a commodity that can be turned to commercial dealings or other advantages (Sachedina, 2009, p. 187). Additionally, one person cannot engage in the transaction of sale without first establishing one’s ownership in it. As pointed out earlier, there are jurists who maintain that human beings have no legitimate ownership over their body (Tantawī, 1987, IOMS).¹³

Therefore, it can be observed that the inviolability of the human body is given such emphasis that the usage of any human body or body parts (i.e. considering the human body as commodity) is prohibited and this is more reflected in the famous hadith narrated by Asmā’ bint Abī Bakr that the Messenger of Allah p.b.u.h. said: “Allah’s curse is on a woman who wears false hair (of humans) or arranges it for others,” (Sahīh Muslim, Hadith no. 2122). Imam al-Nawawī explains this hadith and says that: “If human hair is used, it is prohibited by consensus, irrespective of the hair of a man or woman, due to the general narrations that prohibit this. And also, it is prohibited to take benefit from the hair and all other organs of a human body due to

¹⁰ Al-Marghinani, a Hanafi scholar states regarding the sanctity of a human: ‘It is prohibited to sell the hair of a human, as it is prohibited to incur any benefit out of it due to the honour and inviolability and it is not permissible to disgrace any part of a human’s body.

¹¹ It is not allowed for a person cut for him from someone who is *ma’sūm* or to cut from himself for someone who is in dire necessity.

¹² Ibn Qudāma says: “Even if a person found only a human whose blood was permitted, it is consensually agreed that killing him and destroying any of his organs would be unlawful as he is like him. So, it is not lawful to make him remain by mutilating other.

¹³ Jurists refer to Chapter at-Tīn on the creation of man which implies that God owns His creation. “We have indeed created man in the best moulds” Quran 95:4. Moulding in the utmost just shape in creating man, perfecting his shape manifests a feature of divine providence, cared for man’s body and soul.

its sanctity. The hair and nails of a human, along with the rest body parts must be buried.” (1392, p. 103). Al-Nawawī means that any part of the human body cannot be used by another human.

Contemporary scholars who agree on the monetary value of organs to some extent.

Buying and selling of organs are permissible only when there is no other way to save the patient, therefore, the existence of dire necessity (*tazāhum*)¹⁴ would make the prohibited acts permissible (Muhammad, quoted from Sachedina, 2009, p.176). Sheikh Tantawi is apparently in favor of this position. For allowing the prohibitions, there must be objective and clear justification. Regarding the case of organ trading, jurists including the Sunni and the Shi'ite go back to the ruling of exceptional circumstances, which might necessitate overturning a prohibition (Sachedina, 2009, 185).¹⁵ Under the balanced framework between the harm and the benefit, the single objective can be pointed to, for organ sale; that is the preservation of health and well-being of the two parties involved in the transplantation without the rise of any other issues.

Theoretically, the soundness of that opinion, according to the researcher, can only be checked through meticulous assessment of the situation, i.e. the context of a case, a clear examination of harm and benefit, whether physical or emotional. It is noticeable that Islamic Sharia does not limit its emphasis of wellbeing only to single individual but looks also at all the people involved in the case; donor, recipient and their families. Moreover, Sharia extends to think beyond physical harm, (including psychological and social harm) that might be experienced by the close family.

Furthermore, the monetary advantage against organ is supported by some jurists. They argue that, according to Sharia, an injured or destroyed part of the body due to criminal violence necessitates monetary compensation (*diyyah*), which, therefore, validates receiving money for an organ removed for the sake of inheritor.¹⁶ However, cutting an organ in order to sell is still prohibited (Sachedina, 2009, p. 186). It can be perceived that monetary advantage against organ is allowed if the intention is not solely sale but helping others. Nonetheless, paying for donors became mundane practice, which is rapidly routinized (Hamdy, 2012, p. 210).

Legal discussion on the commodification of the human body for the life survival

Islam looks at human interest (*Maslaha*) and thus, overturn the prohibitive laws in dire necessities. The concept of life survivability is emphasized and can be found in many verses of the Quran such as, Allah, the Almighty says: “But whoever is forced by severe hunger with no inclination to sin - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving

¹⁴ *Tazāhum* concept could be applied if the transplanting of purchased organ is severely necessary.

¹⁵ Among Sunni and Shi'ite scholars who permitted the practise when necessary are Muḥammad Na'im Yaṣīn and Sayyid Muḥsin Kharazzi, respectively.

¹⁶ Some argued that the perfection of 'aql and the body is the right of Allah for human, not exactly the right of human himself. Based on the proof that human has not preferred oppression, thus getting monetary compensation of the destroyed part (*diyyah*) is due to the oppression of other towards the victim. It means, if the harm is caused by the others, then the victim has right to get *diyyah* or to forgive, not because he owns his body.

and Merciful” (al- Nahl: 115). Allah also says: “He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit] - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful” (al-Māidah: 3). He also mentions: “He has explained in detail to you what He has forbidden you, excepting that to which you are compelled (al-An’ām: 119).” All the verses indicate that human life is of great importance that must be preserved in a dire situation even if it requires eating the prohibited things to mitigate the hunger to the extent of life preservation.

There is no disagreement among the scholars that dire situation facilitates consuming the unlawful foods and drinks. Moreover, they have discussed whether the survivability concept can permit eating human flesh in a state of severe starvation. Ibn Abidin states that the flesh of human under all circumstances remains prohibited (Ibn ‘Ābidīn, 2000, p. 654). Al-Nawawī also mentions that it is not allowed for a person to cut for him from someone who is innocent (*ma’ṣūm*) or to cut from himself for someone who is in dire necessity (al-Nawawī, 1991, p. 1965; al- Sharibīnī, 1994). It indicates that any innocent human either Muslim or non-Muslim cannot be killed or cut parts of his body and consumed consensually.

However, if a human’s blood is lawful such as *ḥarbī* or apostate, killing and consuming him in dire necessity is permissible as there is no sanctity according to the Shāfi’ī school. Besides, eating from a dead human body is also permissible and rather preferred in the viewpoints of Shāfi’ī and some Ḥanāfi scholars as the sanctity of a living human is greater than a dead human (Ibn Qudāmā, 1968, 421). The Ḥanbālī school has two opinions in the case of dire necessity; the permission of consumption, according to the majority, if the dead person is an unbeliever *ḥarbī* or an adulterer and the prohibition of eating, to the majority, if the dead person is an innocent (al-Mardāwī, p. 376). Ibn Ḥazm, however, opines that all the things from foods and drinks that are prohibited by Allah are lawful in severe necessity except the flesh of the human body in all circumstances (p. 106).

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that human body is inherently sanctified and cannot be consumed in extreme situations according to the majority of scholars except if a particular human, according to some, is a *ḥarbī* or an adulterer whose blood is permitted to be shed. Therefore, if the consumption of human body part is not allowed in dire necessity leading human to expiry, can human body part be commodified for the life survival in dire necessity?

It has been already discussed that majority of the scholars opine that human body or body parts cannot be bought or sold due to the sanctity and dignity of human and Allah’s ownership. Another form of human body commodification that is evident in this era is a manifestation of women’s body. According to Dr. Sara Abdul Muhsin, the phenomenon of slavery market and trade is apparent nowadays but in contemporary fashion that is a manifestation of her body and turning it to the means of arousing lust and desire (al-Faqih, Musāwā). For marketing purpose, posing them with the inappropriate dress is unacceptable. While in the case of prostitution, commodifying human dignity for reason of survival is invalid in Islam due to the categorical ruling in Quran about adultery and the bad outcome of the practices to the preservation of the lineage. Is this ruling still applicable when a person wants to live

and survive by selling only what he has; one of his organs such as kidney in the case of refugee?

Dr Mokhtar puts forward a suitable context where he mentions that despite disliking the sale of human body as commodity, a person or his family member in dire need of kidney, for example, would not mind buying at any price from a donor and what if the donor is compelled to sell a part of the body to a non-relative due to the donor's son or any of the family members in deathbed, in severe urgency of money to afford the costs of the treatment. Both may have resort to the principle: "necessity knows no law". Mokhtar then comments that 'it goes without saying that there is no single case of transplant unless for dire necessity. Would such a principle be the exception or the general rule for those compelled to purchase kidneys?'(1987, IOMS).

Conclusion and Analysis: Can life survival be a cause for allowing refugees to commodify part of their body?

- 1) The concept of necessity (*darūriyyāt*¹⁷) in Islam certainly encompasses the requirement of basic things such as food, shelter, clothing in a person's life. A refugee who is forced to severe situations whereby he needs to provide for his family members in an unknown territory with no opportunities to work and in the verge of starvation, if selling an organ of his body is the only alternative to survive (and get to start for small business for example), such individual case may be acceptable. However, this practice cannot be the standard or norm for the public as the consequences are more detrimental than beneficial.
- 2) 'No harm' that has been proposed (by the contemporary scholars and jurists) not only in the cases of organ sale but also in entire organ transplantation discourse, Muslim jurists choose the maxim such as "The necessities sidestep the prohibitions" or "The hardship brings ease" which entails that if the procedures can occur without harming both the donor and recipient can resist this Sharia requirement. This is what is viewed by Abdulaziz Sachedina (2009, p. 66).
- 3) Dr. Mokhtar's presentation of a dilemma is suitable to the refugee, Ahmad's case whose siblings are sick and need treatment together with the whole family's maintenance and provisions. The context where he mentions that despite disliking the sale of human body as commodity, a person or his family member in dire need of kidney, for example, would not mind buying at any price from a donor and similarly, the same donor compelled to sell a part of the body to a non-relative for donor's son in deathbed, in severe urgency of money to afford the costs of treatment. The only maxim or principle that may come to their thought to justify their action is: "Necessity knows no law". Mokhtar then comments that 'It goes without saying that there is no single case of transplant unless for dire necessity. Would such a principle be the exception or the general rule for those compelled to purchase kidneys?'(1987, IOMS).
- 4) The role of relevant international and national organizations that have been involved in dealing with refugees, should address the problems and solve the issues of refugees. Programs and ideas should be scrutinized more not mainly

¹⁷ The three levels/sequences of the objectives of Sharia are *Durūriyyat*, *Hajiyyāt*, *Tahsīniyyāt*.

by the responsible body but also by the private, personal and individual and nations as a whole.

- 5) The concept of efforts and dependence (*tawaqqal*) on Allah in Islam indicates that humans will be tested and tried with calamities but they have to be patient and make efforts in their lives. However, the confrontation of severe situations may seem to a particular refugee that after all efforts only that the refugee can do and decide is selling an organ and making an effort to live afterward with family members. This may be the justification of that particular refugee.

Acknowledgments

I appreciate the help and suggestions given by Professor Ray Jureidini, all along with the research paper. Besides, my acknowledgment goes to Professor Mohammad Ghaly and Dr. Mu'taz al-Khatib for their advice regarding methodology on how to approach a contemporary case with the Islamic perspectives. Deep appreciation to my husband, Hamim Azad for the critical points, proofreading and suggestions for this topic.

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