The Cultural Realms and Their Implications for Development: A study of Abubakar Adam Ibrahim’s Season of Crimson Blossoms

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Traditions are very important for a community, society, family or organization. They are like glue that holds people together and continues to do so for generations. Although it is beneficial to man there are some aspects of tradition that are actually harmful and even dangerous. In this study of Season of Crimson Blossoms by Abubakar Adam Ibrahim we see some of these traditions and the effect they have on the characters. The Objective was to show that literature helps us become aware of harmful traditional practices and even positions us to make interventions. The paper also notes how these traditions are mainly targeted at women and girls. The methodology was largely qualitative.

Keywords: Harmful traditional Practices, Community, Society, Family, Organizations

INTRODUCTION

Traditions are generally defined as the transfer of customs, beliefs and behaviour from one generation to another within a community or society. The word is said to derive from Latin meaning something to be handed over. Included in tradition is language, objects, beliefs, practices, institutions, music, dance, art, sculpture. They are usually developed over a long time sometimes even centuries and they keep on evolving. For some, tradition is simply a collection of time-honoured customs, accepted, not on critical grounds, but merely because things have always been so or have always been done that way. Any attempt at improvement is opposed in the name of tradition.

We can also speak of the traditions of an organization for example traditions of educational institutions, the military or church or mosque or even of families. There are also national and regional traditions. Tradition is also regarded as being more than mere conservatism. It includes the continual presence of a spirit and of a moral attitude.

Africa has a lot of traditions and Africans pride themselves in their traditions which are expressed in music, art, dance and sculpture. These traditions have been passed from one generation to another through oral traditions. Music and poetry in African traditions is very important and are often sung in call and response form. Songs regularly accompany marriage, birth, rites of passage, farming, hunting and even political activities. Music is often
used in different African cultures to ward off evil spirits and to pay respects to good spirits, the dead and ancestors.

African tradition is also seen in dance which utilizes symbolic gestures, masks, costumes, body painting and props to communicate. The dance movements can be simple or complex with intricate actions including fast rotation, ripples of the body and contraction and release. Dance is used to express emotion, whether joyful or sorrowful and it is not limited to just the dancers. Often spectators will be encouraged to join in. Another area of African tradition is in the arts and in Nigeria every part of the country has historical art works. For example the Nok culture with their terracotta, the bronze work of the Igbo Ukwu and metal art works of Ile-Ife.

Traditions being an integral part of human society are important for a number of reasons

1. They reinforce values like respect for elders, hard work, integrity, faith etc.
2. Tradition contributes to sense of belonging and enhances community spirit as well as giving people a sense of identity.
3. They contain knowledge collected over the years.
4. Tradition helps mould and develop positive attitudes and characters.
5. Teaches the next generation about a particular or shared past.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

With over 350 ethnic groups, Nigeria has a plethora of traditions. One thing about the traditions however is the fact that they are skewed in favour of men. For example the traditions about what parts of chicken should be exclusively reserved for the men. The traditions also place more burdens on the women than the men. In Southern Kaduna for example, in the past, if a woman offends her husband the penalty could range from slaughtering a chicken to a goat in addition to making large quantities of local brew and beans. However no penalty is ordered for men who offend their wives. Some of these traditions are quite harmful and as stated earlier women and girls bear the greatest burden. In Nigeria these harmful traditional practices include; widowhood rites, wife inheritance, women disinheritance, early and forced marriage. Others include female genital mutilation, discrimination against the girl child or preference for male child, and food taboos. Although these practices differ from one community or ethnic group to another they are most prevalent in the rural areas and are usually enforced by relatives, community members or religious leaders under the pretext of culture or religion.

The case of widowhood rites in some communities is the most obnoxious of them all. The widow sometimes is accused of killing her husband and must prove she didn’t by submitting to certain traditional rituals. Other practices include shaving of the hair, wearing of clothes of a particular colour, sleeping and sitting on the floor or mat, not bathing for a number of days and seclusion among others. Another one is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which is practiced in some parts of Nigeria. In fact Nigeria is said to have the highest absolute number of cases of FGM in the world, accounting for about one-quarter of the estimated 115–130 million circumcised women worldwide (Okeke et al 70). This horrific practice is said to preserve the girl’s virginity and prevent promiscuity.

While the two briefly mentioned above are prevalent in the South, early and forced marriage is more prevalent in the North where it is said to be as high as 76% in the North West. Although the Nigerian constitution provides 18 years as the legal age for marriage it is largely ignored in the
north. Again this practice is encouraged because it is said to prevent promiscuity.

**SUBJECT MATTER**

Season of Crimson Blossoms is a story of forbidden relationships in a conservative Muslim northern community. It tells the story of Binta Zubairu and opens with the statement “Hajiya Binta Zubairu was finally born at fifty five when a dark-lipped rogue with short, spiky hair, like a field of miniscule anthills, scaled her fence and landed boots and all, in the puddle that was her heart” (Ibrahim 3). What does it mean that a fifty five year old woman was reborn? Hajiya Binta was a widow who lost her husband to one of the incessant religious and ethnic crisis that characterises Northern Nigeria. He was killed by the very boys he was helping. Munkaila her son moves her to Abuja away from the crisis in Jos but they end up with another crisis. It started when Hassan ‘Reza’ Babale a twenty six year old thug and weed dealer breaks into her house. She reminds Reza of his mother and he reminds Hajiya Binta of her dead son Yaro. Binta had been married off to a man she barely knew when she was just fifteen years and sexual relations with her husband was a duty to be performed as a wife. Hassan stirred up something in her which was culturally forbidden. However her passion got the better of her and she started an affair with a man thirty years younger. Reza would meet her at her house when her granddaughter and niece had left for school. However Hureira her daughter arrived suddenly having separated from her husband. This presents the lovers with a major problem. Hajiya Binta tries to get Hureira to go back to her husband’s house and clear the coast for her and Reza but she refuses. Finally they resort to using Shagali (enjoyment in Hausa) hotel. This step is what leads to their exposure. Malam Haruna, Hajiya Binta’s suitor coincidentally sees her and Reza arriving and leaving the hotel. He makes the right connection and conclusion and goes on to tell Uztaz the Islamic teacher. Unfortunately Uztaz’s wife overhears the conversation and the issue becomes talk of the town such that Hajiya Binta is derided at the Islamic school. Meanwhile her relationship with Reza begins to unravel as seen where he almost slapped her and he begins to compare her with Leila the young lady they had kidnapped. Things come to a head when Malam Haruna reports her to Munkaila her son. He comes to the house and meets Reza there confirming what he was told. In the end Reza, in a bid to escape, strikes Munkaila and he dies in the process.

The book centres on the affair of fifty five year old Hajiya Binta and twenty six year old Hassan ‘Reza’. This kind of relationship is regarded as taboo in virtually every culture in Nigeria. However it is more so in conservative Muslim northern Nigeria. The irony however is that what is regarded as taboo for women is a regular practice by men. Society tolerates a fifty five year old man who has an affair with a twenty something or even less year old lady but changes the rules when it comes to women. Related to this is the issue of sexual repression among women. Hajiya Binta wanted more out of her sexual relationship with her husband but is restricted by a culture that regards women who do so as wanton or promiscuous. Note Dijen Tsamiya’s lecture to a teenage soon to be bride about sex, it’s all about the man (51). Sex is therefore exclusively for the man’s satisfaction and the wife’s feelings are immaterial. One can therefore see why Hajiya couldn’t stop once she started the affair with Reza. She continued even after she knew that their secret had been exposed when the other women in her Islamic school began to insult her.

Another unwholesome tradition that the book addresses is the issue of early marriage. The 2003 Child Rights Act sets the age of marriage in Nigeria at eighteen.
years, however only twenty three states have taken concrete steps to implement it. Thus in Northern Nigeria particularly in the rural areas, girls are married off before their eighteenth birthday. This is the reason for the high cases of Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF) in northern Nigeria. Hajiya Binta is lucky to have escaped this traumatic and humiliating condition. However as she told Reza love had no place in her relationship with her husband. She hardly even knew him before their wedding (186). Early marriage is actually forced marriage because the girls cannot refuse. Hajiya Binta dared not refuse to marry Zubairu although she clearly wanted an education. Some teenagers who are bold have rejected these marriages with grave consequences. A case widely reported in both local and foreign media was that of fourteen year old Wasila Umar in Kano state. She killed her husband and three other guests when she concealed rat poison in their food. Her father had forced her to marry the thirty five year old man. The book accurately portrays issues that women in Nigeria’s Muslim north contend with and that limit their self-actualization. Traditions ought to serve society and therefore should be dynamic. Holding unto discriminatory and harmful traditions as we have seen in the book does not do society any good. In the end there will always be some form of revolt as Hajiya Binta did with rather grave consequences.

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