



THE PHENOMENON OF FEMALE CULTURE IN SEASON OF CRIMSON BLOSSOMS

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Abstract

The greatest changes have been occurred to the condition of women in past few decades. Their status has been declined from the ancient to the medieval times but there was dramatic upliftment in it with the demands of equal rights in twentieth century. Feminist Movements speed up the betterment of the females throughout the world. Cultural Feminism advocates the respect of female values like caring and nurturing, and also works to balance a culture that overvalues the male virtues like aggression, and undervalues the female virtues of kindness and gentleness. It also supports female sexuality that is based on the equality of power, based on mutuality rather than control. In season of Crimson Blossoms, Mallam Haruna, an old man already having two wives, gets attracted towards much younger Binta and pursues to marry her. It was acceptable by the society. But when lonely Binta chose a man younger than herself, as her lover, it became a sin in the eye of her conservative community. A weed dealer and street-gang leader, devoid of motherly love comes close to a woman who is symbol of tenderness, delicacy and maternal love. The criminal underworld and corrupt politics shows it's beastly face to them. Reza seems to be forever longing for reconciliation with a lost mother. There is a psychoanalytical implication of the relationship between Reza and Binta, as he seems to be longing for reconciliation with a lost mother and she sees the glimpse of her eldest son Yaro in him. The theory of Oedipus Complex and Jocasta Complex leaves it's traces on their relationships.

Key words : Cultural Feminism, women sexuality, Conservative community, Oedipus Complex, Jocasta Complex.

Abubakar Adam Ibrahim is a Nigerian creative writer and journalist. He was described by German broadcaster Deutsche Wells, as a northern Nigerian "literary provocateur" amidst the international acclaim his award-winning novel Season of Crimson Blossom received in 2016. Abubakar Adam Ibrahim was born in Jos North - Central Nigeria and holds a BA degree in Mass Communication from the University of Jos. His debut short-story collection The Whispering Trees was longlisted for the inaugural Etisalat Prize for Literature in 2014, with the title story shortlisted for the Cain Prize for African Writing. Ibrahim has won the BBC African

Performance Prize and the ANA Plateau/Amatu Braide Prize for Prose. In 2014 he was selected for the Africa 39 list of writers aged under 40 with potential and talent to define future trends in African literature and was included in the anthology Africa39: New Writing from Africa South of the Sahara. He was a mentor on the 2013 Writivism programme and judged the Writivism Short Story Prize in 2014. He was chair of judges for the 2016 Etisalat Flash Fiction Prize. His first novel, Season of Crimson Blossoms, was published in 2015. Season of Crimson Blossoms was shortlisted in September 2016 for the Nigeria Prize for Literature,

Africa's largest literary prize. It was announced on 12 October 2016 that Ibrahim was the winner of the \$100,000 prize. Ibrahim is the Features Editor at the Daily Trust newspaper. He lives in Abuja, Nigeria.

A woman is different from man on the biological ground. Women are considered as more kind - hearted, soft - spoken, caring, nurturing and decision making with a calm mind in comparison to the men. The traditional men are aggressive, competitive and dominating. So the female's cooperating behavior egalitarianism and kind nature would benefit society and make a better world. Cultural Feminism attributes to these differences distinctive and superior virtues in women. Cultural Feminism has been linked with a growing consciousness of lesbian identity. The Cultural Feminists value the female connectedness, women - centered relationships and a sisterhood. It seeks to understand women's social locations in society by concentrating on gender differences between women and men. This type of feminism focuses on the liberation of women through individual change, the recognition and creation of "women-centered" culture, and the redefinition of femininity and masculinity. Cultural feminism utilizes essentialist understandings of male and female differences as the foundation of women's subordination in society.

Motherhood and child-bearing is another popular topic in Cultural Feminist theory. Adrienne Rich theorized motherhood as an institution, constructed to control women, which is different from authentic, natural motherhood. Cultural feminists declare the relationship between mother and daughter, and therefore all women, has been destroyed by patriarchy and must be repaired.

The novel *Season of Crimson Blossoms* opens when the protagonist Hajiya Binta is reborn at the age of fifty-five. She had been living a life controlled by others till now. She was neither happy nor unhappy. She was behaving as the society expected and doing works which her children expected. When her husband was alive, she always obeyed him. It was not allowed in her community to call her eldest child by name, so she never called her son by his name Yaro. Binta has now aged, but has an unfulfilled inner desire of love and a sexual

relationship she never had in all her life, but she is confronted with a cultural dilemma by the conservative society she lives in. At the age of fifty-five, she felt real happiness, when a twenty - five year old stranger came to her house secretly. That morning as soon as she woke up, she started feeling that something inauspicious is going to be happened. It was the same feeling when her father suddenly announced that she was going to be married soon. She also felt it when her husband was murdered in a communal riot and her elder son was shot dead by the police. Last time she had this feeling when her daughter Hureira came to her after divorced by her first husband. But this time the matter was different, as this inauspicious event made her happy. She saw herself being rebellious but didn't want to pull out. She knew in the eyes of society, it was a sin but she chose to do it and continued her secret meetings with Reza. Reza is a drug dealer and the chief thug at the San Siro, a local hideaway for petty thieves involved in mugging and drug dealing. They are also hired as political thugs for a dishonest politician, Senator Buba Maikudi, who uses them at political rallies and to intimidate opposition candidates.

Cultural feminism refers to a philosophy that men and women have different approaches to the world around them, and that greater value should be placed on the way women approach the world. In some cases, cultural feminism argues that a woman's way of looking at the world is actually superior to men's. This perspective aims to unite all women, regardless of ethnicity, race, class or age. In an interview with Elizabeth Olaoye, Abubakar Adam Ibrahim says about Binta and her sexual desires, "If she had been wealthy, that wouldn't have happened. If she had been male, that wouldn't have happened. What this shows, for me, is that people are often their worst enemies, and that society that shamed, the individual members of that community that participated in this primitive melodrama, are not without their own indiscretion... If you change the names of the characters involved in this incident, and change the locale, it could fit perfectly into any place in Nigeria, irrespective of religious inclination. This is not about the unconscious mind of the Hausa people. This is about the prevalence of these

practices across ethnic and religious lines on the continent. The suppression of female sexuality has been one of the greatest psychological accomplishments of all time"(Web).

Binta had been living with her niece, fifteen year old Fa'iza and eight year old granddaughter Ummi. She is known by the local community for her adherence to the Islamic faith. Her husband was dead and the three children were married. Her caring son Munkaila arranged everything for her to lead a comfortable life, but she took the work of sewing ladies clothes to occupy her time. Earlier she had a fixed daily routine. She also had been going to madrasa daily, where the aged women were taught the matters of faith. That day when she returned from madrasa, Reza, the rogue, was already in her house to rob her valuables. He caught Binta and made a cut on her neck with his dagger in the process of looting her. But he looked at her face, he immediately felt sorry for the wound, as it was unintentional and went off. "He took her things and left, having sown in her the seed of awakening that would eventually sprout into a corpse flower, the stench of which would resonate far beyond her imagining" (Ibrahim,14). Binta began to love a man younger than herself. It was not so that her second marriage would be considered as an offence in their community. Hadiza, her daughter talks to her only living brother Munkaila, about their mother's second marriage and argued that she needs a man around.

Binta was born in 1973 in Kibiya, Nigeria. As customary, her mother rarely acknowledged or called her by her given name. "She would have given anything to hear the sound of her name on her mother's lips" (Ibrahim, 24). Binta was told by her teacher that she is smarter than other students. She began to dream of becoming an officer after her studies but his father decided that she is going to marry at the early age of 16 or 17, as she was not sure of her age. Binta pleaded to her mother, but it was of no use she was married off to Zubairu. Even after marriage she never got freedom to express her desire.

Zubairu was a practical man and their intimacy was an exercise in conjugal frugality for

him. He didn't like the silly ceremonies which Binta once tried to do with him after their second child. But her husband's scornful scold on this, struck her like a blow. She never tried it again. She knew that the females of her community are not considered as human beings to desire anything, but they are only supposed to fulfill male's needs quietly. But when she met Reza, she came to realize that she is also a living creature who can desire anything and it would not be suppressed. He made her happy by fulfilling her long awaited secret wishes. There occurred something magnetic between them in their first meeting, which made Binta hide about him from everyone. She told that she did not know who the thief was. It also drove Reza to bring back the most of the things which he kept secretly in front of her doors. No one knew what happened exactly. But Fa'iza, Binta's niece, began to suspect on her, for once after the event, she saw a pair of men's shoes outside the front doors, when she came back from school. And to her extreme amazement it was disappeared on the next day while Binta was indifferent to all these incidents. She also noticed some changes in her aunt as she was taking bath third time within few hours and continuously lit the incense sticks in the corners of the house. She told this to Binta's daughter Hadiza, who had come to pay a visit. Both the girls were surprised and began to contemplating over something Binta was trying to enshroud in the folds of fragrance and numerous baths. Fa'iza plays an important role in the novel, as it's title relates to her paintings which are the reflections of her brutal past. Her beloved father was killed in a riot in Jos. Later her mother married to a man whom she didn't like and came to live with her aunt Binta on the fringes of Abuja, in the sprawling suburb of Mararaba. She often woke up in the midnight sweating and shivering with fear after the horrible dreams of bloodshed and killing. The bits of memories of the day when her father was butchered in front of her eyes were not allowing bits of mental peace. "Bright, red blood, warm and sticky, splashed across Fa'iza's face and dotted, in a fine spray, the shell- pink nightdress that her father had brought her" (Ibrahim, 76).

She could not stand the scene of blood, and began to whimper and scream. Through out the

novel, she kept on trying to paint something but unable to figure out. Once she pays a visit to Munkaila's house with other family members in the season of crimson blossom. The courtyard of his apartment was strewn with the red crimson blossoms, of the lone flame tree. Fa'iza was moved by the sight of bloomed flowers and related it with blood. She always desired to daub the canvas with the colours of her dreams. Now she found the colour of her painting, that was the colour of her dream, blood and sepia. She took her fears and nightmares and made them into a beautiful painting. "The canvas was dominated by shades of reddish - brown and, in the middle, a shocking violent splash of red, the colour that had often startled Fa'iza out of her nightmares" (Ibrahim, 288).

The Oedipus Complex is a concept of psychoanalytic theory. Sigmund Freud introduced the concept in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). The positive Oedipus complex refers to a child's unconscious sexual desire for the opposite sex parent and hatred for the same sex parent. The negative Oedipus complex refers to a child's unconscious sexual desire for the same-sex parent and hatred for the opposite-sex parent. We can relate this theory with the relationship of Binta and Reza. For Reza instantly recalled his mother, when he first saw Binta and later whenever he noticed the gold tooth in her mouth, he remembered his mother, who also had same golden tooth. His mother abandoned him in his childhood leaving him with his father. "He watched her laughing, and wondered what her mother's laughter would sound like, or if she ever laughed like this... he wondered why he was sexually attracted to a woman who was older than her mother" (Ibrahim, 59).

In psychoanalytic theory, the Jocasta complex is the incestuous sexual desire of a mother towards her son. Raymond de Saussure introduced the term in 1920 by way of analogy to its logical converse in psychoanalysis, the Oedipus Complex, and it may be used to cover different degrees of attachment, including domineering but a sexual mother love, something perhaps particularly prevalent with an absent father. We can get a glimpse of this theory in Binta's attraction towards Reza. Because whenever she is with Reza, the

marijuana smell coming from him reminded of her eldest son Yaro. But this feeling never stopped her from making love with him. She always yearned for caressing him and calling him by his given name Yaro. "She knew then that her search for Yaro in the eyes of a stranger had unshackled her long-suppressed desires and left the objectionable stench of fornication clinging to her" (Ibrahim, 54). Apart from loving, she often tried to pursue him for further studies, doing his prayers daily and opening a bank account. He once irritated on it and said that she was not his mother. She felt hurt at first but cannot stay away from him for more than few days. "... thinking how insane it was that she had just slept with someone who reminded her of her first son, who was probably younger than Yaro had been when he died." (Ibrahim, 58)

Binta found herself in a state of shame, when her neighbours began to taunt her fornication. She felt that her sin is pursuing her everywhere she goes. She caught the gleams of disdain in her fellows' eyes at madrasa. She wished it had all been a dream, that she did with Reza. Mallam Haruna spied on her, and told everyone that she goes to the hotels with Reza. Binta had been unable to to lock eyes with anyone she met. She wanted to bury herself in a cave and die. She talks to Reza about a flower that waits a lifetime to bloom almost thirty years and when it does, after all those years, it smells like a corpse. She says, "I was just thinking how much like that flower I am. I have waited my whole life to feel... as I do when I'm with you, ... No one has ever made me feel this way. But like that flower, after all those years waiting, when I bloom, it doesn't feel right" (Ibrahim, 178).

When Munkaila came to know of the murmuring about his mother and Reza, he became furious with rage. Consequently Reza was attacked by angry Munkaila. Although he tried to avoid fight, but Munkaila did not stop and Reza had to blow him hard. It was unintentional but Munkaila was killed in front of his mother, by her lover. Reza took refuge in his boss, Senator's house. Earlier Reza was given a work of kidnapping a rich man's son. Reza went to perform this task with his gang. But they couldn't do it properly and the young man escaped, and they kidnapped his girlfriend Leila instead. So the senator

was already disappointed by Reza, for the failure of a big assignment, then he heard about Munkaila's murder, who was a rich man with some approaches. The senator promised him to protect from the police, who was in search of Reza. But he handed Reza over to the police and as pre decided, Reza was encountered.

To conclude, Season of Crimson Blossom is a rebellious story with the reflections of Cultural Feminism, Oedipus complex and Jocasta Complex. It has a strong positive message in the end that is, despite of being socially culturally suppressed and marginalized, she dared to set an example for the women with exceptional desires. She emerged as a strong protagonist, who suffered a great loss but she moves on. She understood the deep meaning of life and said, " ... life is like a dress. Some are made fortunate, others not so. So when it gets torn or stained, all you can do is wash it, mend it or cut it up and make something new out of it" (Ibrahim, 289). Abubakar Adam Ibrahim shares his opinion about the tragic ending of his novel, in an interview with Elizabeth Olaoye, as "For me this is a reflection of how I see society, especially the Nigerian society, in which one gives a lot to be compliant, to flow with the norm and then at the point of divergence, and I think we all feel the urge to stray occasionally, how viciously intolerant our society could be. The Nigerian society is one that is governed by some strict codes and these codes have a way of reasserting themselves through the agency of people who often don't realise the impact of what they are doing. Fiction is a tool that could and has been used to interrogate our relationship with society and how various little individual acts serve to preserve the pervading powers of society. In this instance, Binta and Reza were the tools I chose to explore this phenomenon" (Web). Gender equality and women empowerment are the favorite topics for most of the authors at present time. Abubakar Adam Ibrahim has also projected through his novel, the middle class woman's urges, dreams and desires. The novel tries to change the social norms about the age of a couple. How an older man is fine in a relationship but an older woman is weird. It explores how society react to the personal decision of two mature people.

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