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**Of Mothers as Mistresses: Jocasta Complex and Transference in Abubakar  
Adam Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*.**

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**Abstract**

*This work studies how individuation and neurosis can lead to the entrenchment of unacceptable socio-moral dictum. The society frowns at a sexual relationship between an unmarried older woman and a younger man, because it leads to all sort of conflicts and communal abhorrence, and the characters that indulge, are seen to have erred greatly. However, when the motivation for such indulgence is psychological, it eats deep and moral considerations become blurred. In this novel, Hajiya Binta, who does not experience filial affection from her parents, neither does she experience emotional love from her husband, and as a result of cultural inhibitions, she is again unable to show love and affection to her first son. She now decides to engage in an amorous relationship with a young man who reminds her of her son, deciding to give him all the love she never gave her biological son as a mother, nor received as a wife from husband nor from her parents as a daughter. With no regard for cultural and religious restrictions, she becomes both a mother and a lover to the young man, who is himself already grappling with a pre-existing Oedipal complex. This study therefore, uses psychoanalysis to examine the mental state of Binta and her overarching reasons for consummating her love with her child surrogate. Freud puts forth that, repressed emotions create neurotic characters and their bottled-up passions finds a way to manifest itself when those unruly potentials are activated. Hajiya Binta therefore, transferred her unrealized feelings as a mother and a wife to a surrogate, and even though it goes against her culture and morality, yet, she will not stop, for in indulgence, she finds her fulfilment and indeed, her personal redemption.*

**Keywords:** Jocasta complex, transference, neurosis, trauma, displacement, rationalization

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**Introduction And Conceptual Issues**

*Season of Crimson Blossoms* (2015), is a novel decked with characters having deep psychological issues and other neurotics who are trying to cope with the effects of trauma. According to Boeree (2002), neurosis is a "poor attempt to adapt to one's environment, an inability to change one's life patterns, and the inability to develop a richer, more complex, more satisfying personality." Practically, all the characters in the text are neurotics, having to privately or collectively deal

with the fallout of some collective or personal violence, mated on them at some point in their lives, and the author presents them in their blundering attempt to cope with that trauma.

For Hajiya Binta, before Hassan Reza cuts into the fabric of what is her heart, she is not a happy woman. First, she has to endure a cultural construct where the display of affection from parent to child is tabooed; then, she lives through a forced marriage to a



man she barely knows, after that, she has to live through the stages of domestic violence as well as endure the effect of her first son and husband's violent deaths in the religious crises in Jos. Furthermore, the physical displacement of being forced out of a place she has always known as home (Jos), creates a crater in her soul. All these events set the stage for the tragedy in the text.

Hajiya Binta, as a human being, is subject to all the primal instincts that defines one's humanity – love, happiness, pain, desires, and so forth. According to Freud, these human actions are defined, based on one's actions, and, or reactions to these external stimuli. Since Binta, the Jocasta mother does not love her husband, she falls in love with her son. However, she could not consummate that love because of socio-moral restrictions and therefore lives a life of denial and repressed affection for him, till he dies. And the death of her first son creates a crater in her that she has been unable fill, even though she has other children.

Jocasta complex was introduced to psychoanalysis by Raymond de Saussure in 1920 to explain an erotic craving a mother may have for her son. According to Jon E. Roekelein (2006), "it is the incestuous sexual desire of a mother towards her son (112)." This compulsive obsession by a mother for her son, often manifests as a result of an unloved, absent or weak father. Consequently, the mother sees her son as the center of her universe and does everything to protect him, even from himself, his friends, and when grown, from his spouse. Such mothers show repulsion if the son is close to another

woman and tries to marry her. The Jocasta Mother now sees that relationship as trying to usurp her of her status as both mother and unconsummated lover. Often, in this set up, the mother does not encourage the son to get married, and when he eventually does, she treats the wife with disdain – as one would a rival. Nevertheless, all of this is because the 'Jocasta mother' herself has an unfulfilled adult relationship of her own and her over-concern for her child instead becomes a source of neurosis (Stuart Sutherland, 156).

Transference is in short, the projection of feelings from a patient to a therapist. However, in this study, it is explained as the inappropriate direction of feelings from a child to a parent or from a parent to a child. Lars Lindahl (2011), explicates further that, it is "the redirection of feelings, desires (particularly of those unconsciously preserved from childhood), with respect to a new object (148). Judith Bendheim Guedalia (2015), sees it as "a reproduction of emotions relating to repressed experiences, especially of childhood, and the substitution of another person ... for the original object of the repressed impulses" (325). Thus, according to Leonard Kapelovitz (1977), transference can be said to be the "inappropriate repetition in the presence of a relationship that was important in a person's childhood" (66). Using psycho analysis, this study looks at how the neurotic characters transferred repressed childhood emotions to surrogates – a tabooed replacement – which dooms them and seals their fate.



### Analytical Plot Synopsis

*Season of Crimson Blossoms* is a story of a fifty-five-year-old devout widow and a retired teacher – Hajiya Binta – who is in an amorous relationship with a twenty-five-year-old thug, Reza, in conservative northern Nigeria. There is hardly a setting where such indulgences will be tolerated, however, Binta's affection for Reza is borne out of the need to correct her failure as a mother in not bringing up her first son, Yaro, with love and affection as a result of cultural inhibitions, which taboos a typical Fulani woman, according to the text from showing public or private display of affection to her first born, a concept known as *kunya*.

Because of the aloofness of his parents in his formative years, Yaro, the boy, grows up to be a street urchin and addict in marijuana and other hard drugs, leading to an untimely death as a result of hanging with the wrong crowd. Having relocated from Jos to Mararaba, a town in the outskirts of Abuja as a result of ethno-religious crises, she was again a victim of a break-in by a thief, Reza. Although the plot of the narrative should have naturally shown Binta in righteous indignation toward her assailant, he nonetheless, reminds her of her late son, and she resolves to rehabilitate him, even if it means breaking a socio-moral code and becoming his lover and mother in the process.

### ***Kunya and Jocasta Transference in Seasons of Crimsom Blossoms.***

In Greek mythology, Jocasta was the queen of Thebes and wife of Laius who after Laius' death, inadvertently marries her son. The term Jocasta complex in psychoanalysis is used deductively to explain a mother's

conscious or unconscious erotic affection for her son, that is because, the primal Jocasta was not aware that she was in consort with her son. In modern discourse however, the term is used to explain the fixation a mother might have for her son, it could be sexual or non-sexual. In the later, it will be as a result of a domineering non-incestuous attachment a mother has for her son as a result of an absent, weak or unloved father or husband, which is what manifests in Hajiya Binta's life.

Jocasta complex vary from character to character. But central in their neurosis, is an attachment to a child, biological or otherwise, who becomes the recipient of an affection that defies socio-cultural values. At the beginning of Hajiya Binta's life, her neurosis is as a result of deprived affection from her parents. Her relationship with her mother is vague and almost non-existent; her mother is "taciturn" towards her and "hardly said a word to her" (20). It is customary of Fulani parents to shun open display of affection towards their children the narrator notes, because it is seen as "immodest" (21) not to do so. In fact, her mother does not even acknowledge Binta by calling her given name and the narrator notes that that aloofness, creates a desperate longing in Binta, that "she would have given anything to hear the sound of her name on her mother's lips" (21).

However, whenever Binta looks at "her mother's eyes, she glimpsed before it was blinked away, a clandestine love she wished she could grasp and savor" (21). When without Binta's consent, patriarchy holds sway and she is married off in forty-eight hours, she



runs to her mother for comfort, nevertheless, her mother “turned her head to the wall, her hand poised uncertainly over her abdomen” (23), and does nothing to comfort her. This psychological effect of deprived affection is partly responsible for Binta’s inability to show open love to her children, especially, her first son, Yaro.

Binta now envies the liberty xennials enjoy in calling their children by their given names and loving them openly (57). She reminisces that: “in my time, such things as a woman calling her first child by its name were frowned at. Some women didn’t even acknowledge their second or third child” (58), she muses. Reflecting on the life of Yaro, Binta’s first child, the narrator recounts that, “because of *kunya*, the socially prescribed modesty, his mother had to live with, she called him ‘boy’ instead” (51). She now wishes she acts differently, because she carries over the lack of affection she endured from her mother and passes it unto her children, especially, Yaro her first son. She reasons that: “there were things she wished she had done differently; such as showing Yaro some affection, protecting him like every mother should do her child...the son she had loved, but to whom she had been forbidden to show love” (56). As Binta further cogitates on her failings as a mother, she blames it on her cultural prescriptions, which she regrets. She recalls, that even when her son is sick, it is tabooed that she should show him open love. She remembers albeit, sadly:

... the blank look in his eyes.  
She knew she had felt that way too, longingly wanting the Fulani woman to touch her, to call her name, to

display even a hint of affection. He was the one she wanted to make hers, to claim for herself, for the memories she wished she had had with her own mother. She wanted to touch her son, to feel his temperature, to whisper his name and tell him it would be all right. She wanted to. But she could not (118).

Murtala, also known as Yaro, does not enjoy the love and affection he should get from his mother, he craves for it, desires it, but never experiences it (170). He is doomed to bear the curse of all first-born children birth into a rural Fulani family. Actually, the little affection ever shown, is directed to his siblings (119), and he is left to fend for his emotional needs elsewhere and all by himself. This leads him into a life of drug addiction and thuggery. When Binta sees him smoking in the house one early morning, her repressed love for him manifests itself in anger, and she assaults him for his vice.

However, he is “angry and hurt,” and when the blows lands on him, he could not understand his mother’s detachment towards him and yet, this act of violence, and “when he looked away, it was the hurt that she remembered more, it was the hurt that endured in her mind” (171). And when next his mother calls his given name; it is when she is holding his dead body after a mistaken identity leads to his murder by the police. Indeed, in his lifetime, his mother only calls his name twice, once in his lifetime (121), the other in death (171).





It can therefore be deduced that, Hajiya Binta's Jocasta complex is now triggered by her pre-existing inability to have experienced love from her mother as a daughter, love from her husband as a wife (51, 63, 86, 136) and show affection to her first son as a mother. This conundrum leads her to reconcile both emotions of mother and sexual partner in her assailant who reminds her of her son. The love which she was unable to feel for her husband and express towards her son because of cultural inhibitions, is now mentally and sexually transferred to Reza for maternal consolation and sexual fulfillment. She sees Hassan Reza as her redemption, her second chance, to fix all she has done wrong in the bringing up of Yaro, her late son.

First, she starts off by addressing Reza by his given name, Hassan, not Reza, his nickname. Having been robbed by Reza, he returns what he had stolen and apologizes, at which opportunity, she asks of his name, when he tells her, "she rolled the word on her tongue like one savoring the taste of a new meal" (46), something she is unable to do with her son, for she calls her son Yaro and not Murtala, his birth name. Also, when she calls the thug by his given name, he was also ecstatic, he says, "'it is strange the way you call my name. Nobody calls me by my name anymore.' He was grinning" (116). Furthermore, when she asks if she should stop calling him that, he asks her not to stop. How it must have eaten her up that she misses out on the delights of seeing Murtala her son experiences the thrill of hearing his mother call out his given name, how it must have eaten Murtala also, not to hear his mother call out his name.

### **Mother as Mistress, Son as Lover in *Season of Crimson Blossoms*.**

Hassan Reza is a drug peddler, a political thug, a kidnapper and a thief. He breaks into Hajiya Binta's house to rob her of her gold jewelries and electronics. When she is face-to-face with her assailant, she pleads and begs him to desist, saying, "my son, I am old enough to be your mother" (9). That initial encounter becomes "a seed of awakening" (9), that opens up the floodgate of repressed memories and emotions of Yaro who died fifteen years ago (13).

Reflecting on the theft, she is worried that, "the moistening of her long-abandoned womanhood had apparently been provoked by someone who reminded her of Yaro..." (26), who like Yaro, is also a thug and never gets a formal education. When Reza returns again to apologize for the break-in, her anger melts, "and her eyes grew soft because he reminded her then, more than ever of Yaro" (35); and being a teacher herself, Reza "reminded her of the countless new students" she has taught, leading to confused emotions where she hates a thief, a smoker, but loves a son and a student.

Indeed, the repressed love meant for Yaro, is now showered on Reza. Her chief motivation leading to the tabooed concupiscence, is to correct the failed upbringing of Yaro in Reza. For example, when Reza for the third time, scaled over her fence to return what he had stolen, her first reaction: she "threw an arm across her breasts" (46), instinctively, covering her mammary glands which evinces both nourishment for a child and pleasure for a lover. And when Reza follows her to the room, the first thing he reaches





for, were her breasts, wherein is found the culmination of both filial and erotic love that he needs, and which she also has to give (58). Similarly, while Reza apologizes to her, "she was thinking of Yaro" (46). The narrator notes that, "her search for Yaro in the eye of a stranger has unshackled her long-suppressed desires..." (58).

Binta's repressed desires started since childhood and culminates in adulthood. For instance, her marital duties with her husband are bland, "and their intimacy an exercise in conjugal frugality...". However, "she wanted it to be different, she had always wanted it to be different" (54). She wants to reach for her husband and explore him. When she tries to do that, her husband chides her with hurtful words which "struck her like a blow" (54). As such, she lives a life of repressed sexuality and unfulfillment.

Nevertheless, with Reza, she is able to explore her femininity and sexuality as she never did before. She opens up to him and "allowed him" do things to her she had only imagined. And since "she had always wanted to" (60) feel this rush of sexual satisfaction, she allows her repressed emotions to find fulfilment in Reza's touch. However, the narrator recounts that, whenever Binta looks into Reza's caramel eyes, she remembers her son's eyes and "it disturbed her, this constant reminder of her son when she looked at Reza. But Reza was not Yaro. He was her lover" (115). Since as Jocasta mother, she is unable to respect her *weak* husband and love her son, these dual emotions find self-actualization in her son's surrogate – where he can be both child and lover, and she can be mistress and mother.

Indeed, as observed, her affection for Reza is borne partly because of her inability to properly mother Yaro. As such, she will not make the same mistake twice. Therefore, she goes into trying to rehabilitate him, to train him, to advise him and try to get him to stop thuggery, drug addiction and enroll into school. In fact, she asks him: why is he not in school? Why was he expelled? Won't he go back and finish his schooling? (63 - 64) – the mirror questions Reza's mother asked him eight years before, when she visits him for the last time (94). Hajiya Binta becomes his mother now and sees it as a duty to refurbish him, and by so doing, redeem herself of her failure with Yaro. This, she pursues with vigor and speaks to Reza "about opening a bank account...about his going back to school, about sin forgiveness and prayers, and God's infinite mercy" (125-26). Undeniably, she tries to be his moral compass as mothers should be, she calls him on the phone and her lines of enquiries goes like: "have you been taking care of yourself? And your prayers, have you been praying? Try not to neglect your prayers" (133-34). Also, after he gets into a fight and bruises his knuckles, she tearfully admonishes him to stop fighting and try not to miss his daily prayers (156-57).

In addition to being his moral conscience, she also tries to improve his educational standing. She goes ahead to buy the form for senior school certificate examination for him, telling him; "I think it is important you go back to school, Hassan" (167), but he shows no interest in going back to school (188). When Binta pushes further, telling him how the education



of her second son is responsible for her favorable economic condition, Reza blurted, "I'm not your son, you understand". That statement shook her to her core and her "eyes widened and she shrank into herself" (190) in disbelief, for in her eyes, he *is* her son.

That is because, all along she has seen him as Yaro, her son returned. And she ends that encounter by repeating the very words she told Yaro the day she caught him smoking: "if you want to smoke your life away, there's hardly anything I can do about it...[then she adds to Reza], especially since I'm not your mother" (190). Despite the fallout, Binta refuses to give up on his education, for when she again sees him, she tells him to give up drug addiction and go "back to school...seriously, Hassan" (212).

Yaro, his life and death permanently scar Binta and her regret at the way she brought him up leads her to reevaluate her life and relate everything in her extant world to him and his memory, even her subconscious musings and dreams are a correlation between the two boys. When for example, when she has a nightmare about Yaro's death, on waking up, "her first thought had been of Reza, of his face looming before her mind's eye" (207); and when she visits her son Munkaila, her granddaughter's dark eyes and pretty nose, "reminded Binta more of her dead son Yaro than the child's mother" (229). Her neurosis therefore, hovers between the world of the living and the dead, and Reza is that bridge that links her to her past, its failings and her prospect for redemption in the present and a possible lifetime of contentment in the

future, having corrected the ills of the past through him.

Although, towards the end of their relationship, she could see "rebellion crawling into his eyes" when they are together and she brings up the issue of his going back to school. The more she imprints on Reza the need to be educated, the more he repeats the phrase, "you are not my mother." In the course of her pushing him to the right track, at least, educationally, he attempts to strike her in anger (245), yet, she justifies his actions by reasoning that, "he was just a desperate young man who needed her guidance" (250).

Furthermore, considering she never has a soulful discussion with Yaro, with Reza, she attempts a corrective, "she sat down beside him and, as she would her own son, talked to him about the importance of education" (270). Indeed, all her inadequacies with Yaro, she is not going to repeat the same with Reza. Despite his annoying and violent tendencies, she keeps pushing and making demands of him, because according to her, "Hassan, I am trying to help you. I care for you and I want to see your life on track" (270). She has never spoken to Yaro in the above manner, neither has she called his name like she does Reza. She sees him as a project to complete, a second chance to correct what she has done wrong fifteen years ago.

After reports of her concupiscence goes rife in her community – because she is seen on occasions leaving the hotel (213-14, 281) and talking with Reza in compromising places (249) – and she is called upon by the Uztaz, she



denies, "these rumors are untrue" (306). Yet, when one would have expected tact in her actions, she doubles up her efforts at *saving* him. Certainly, when she looks at the confused emotions in Reza's eyes, which arises from a botched kidnapping, "she thought of her son Yaro, to whom she never gave the chance to tell her how confused he must have felt" (324), growing up without his mother's love. This reasoning makes her query anyone who thinks ill of her relationship with Reza, musing that, "how could the world not understand what he was going through, how he needed her, how she needed to save him as she has failed to do with her own son? How could they judge her?" (324).

Even though she wants Reza and delights in the sexual pleasures she gets from him, her motif for continuing the relationship despite being found out is altruistic; "she was inching closer to his redemption – her redemption" (314). For Reza has finally agreed to register and sit for his examination after his last job for his boss. Why then should the world judge and condemn her, when she is finally on the threshold of his salvation and her freedom? Of course, she is not going to give up. Not when there is the evolution of Reza, the emancipation of Binta and the final ascension of Yaro.

For fifteen years, Binta has lived with remorse and guilt. Her first son, whom she loves dearly, because, he "always reminded her of her mother" a woman she loved, yet, unable to acknowledge her love for her because of her culture, now finds a corrective in Reza. Despite the accusations, she resolves not to give up on Reza, rather she shores up

her resolve by bringing out Yaro's picture, "called him by his birth name and told him she was sorry while she wept. That she wished she had told him that loved him even once. That she wished she could have just one more minute so she could tell him that and keep him close to her bosom" (308), a bosom that now satisfies Reza, *her* Yaro.

Often, if a mother has several sons, Jocasta complex is likely to manifest itself in relation only to one son, the most preferred one. However, after Yaro's death, Hajiya Binta transferred her Jocasta complex to Munkaila, her second son, whom she despises. Because unlike Yaro, who is light skinned and with a pointed nose that looked like her mother, Munkaila is a replica of his father, dark skinned and broad nosed. Therefore, her inability to love him is because he reminds her of her late husband, a man she loathes and marries out of duty, not love.

Notwithstanding, in her inability to reconcile her Jocasta complex towards Yaro, she transferred the same to Munkaila, by micro-managing his life and disapproving his wife when he brings her home. She always casts judgmental glances at her and judges her actions/inaction often in a bad light. Nonetheless, when Reza becomes the center of her neurosis, she pays no attention to him or what he does. Subsequently, Munkaila hears of his mother's affair, goes to confront her and finds Reza in the house, their struggle leads to Munkaila's death and Reza's fugitive status before also, the law cuts him down.



## Conclusion

Hajiya Binta and Reza show all the signs of neurotics, in their inter- and intra-personal relationships. Replete in their psychosis are the following psychological defense mechanisms which paves the way for the tragedy in the text: Avoidant Personality, Aim Inhibition, Displacement and Rationalization. All through the text, Binta shows Avoidant Personality, by drawing inward and keeping to herself because of her loss and unfulfilled and repressed emotions.

As a result of her Avoidant Personality, she is unable to forge a healthy relationship with her children and the other women in her madrassa. She loathes involvement in social activities or any form of relationship with others, explaining her aloneness and aloofness as a result of her losses, paving the way for the socially unacceptable relationship with Reza to grow.

In addition, both characters are also faced with Aim Inhibition, where they have to live with unfulfilled desires – Binta for a son she would not be ashamed to call him by his given name, and a husband she would love to make love to without inhibitions, however, both holdbacks find fulfilment in Reza.

Another defense mechanism employed by the tragic characters is Displacement. This is an unconscious defense mechanism where the mind redirects the effects of an object felt to be unacceptable to an object felt to be acceptable. Binta sees Reza first as a son, and he sees her to an extent as his mother. Who will frown at a mother-child filial relationship? Their sexual transgression is transferred and displaced with the socially acceptable

union of a family. Finally, Rationalization: this is where controversial behaviors or feelings are logically justified and explained in a logical manner, to appear consciously tolerable. This creates a block against internal feeling of guilt. Binta justifies why she has to be in a relationship with Reza, and since for her that makes sense, she does not care what anyone says.

The success of Binta's Jocasta complex is as a result of Reza's Oedipal complex. As a result of her personal void and the need to fill her emotional chasm, she gives into a tabooed love, not only in the form of biological concupiscence, but a socially outlawed indulgence. And in seeking to redeem her past, she loses it all. Indeed, by the end of the narrative, Binta has lost all the men in her life.

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