

CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT:

A Multi Disciplinary Approach



Editors

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CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES IN NIGERIA

ADEOTI Abdul-Lateef Bisi

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, readers should be able to:

- examine what culture and cross-culture are;
- understand features of cross-culture in Nigeria;
- document the variability of various cultures in Nigeria; and
- develop cultural-bound theory for indigenous explanation of social reality.

Chapter Outline

- Introduction
- Definitions of culture, sub-culture and cross culture
- Cross-cultural issues in Nigeria
- Widowhood and widow inheritance across cultures
- Cross cultural notion of health and illness
- Cross-cultural health issues in Nigeria
- Summary and Conclusion
- Glossary
- References

Introduction

Nigeria is black Africa's most influential state: one in four Africans is Nigerian; it has the continent's largest army, is the second largest supplier of oil to the United States, and Britain's biggest trading partner. It is also the most socially and culturally diversified African country. It is the most populous country in Africa (the population was estimated at 140 million in 2006), and potentially one of the richest countries in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Africa. Bountifully endowed with natural and human resources, more than 60 percent of the population is engaged in agriculture, which provides the bulk of Nigeria's food,

raw materials supply and non-oil export (see Financial Times Survey, 1981).

The ethnic diversity of the Nigerian society is based on the fact that the country has over 250 identified ethnic groups with over 400 languages. According to a Financial Times Survey (1981), three very large ethno-linguistic entities dominate: the Yoruba in the South West, the Ibo in the South East and the Hausa-Fulani in the North. The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Kanuri, Tiv, Edo, Nupe, Ibibio and Ijaw groups account for almost 80 percent of the population. Muslims comprise more than 50 percent of the population and Christians account for about 35 per cent, while the remaining are traditionalists (Middleton, 1975).

Culture

Culture is a complex concept, with many different definitions. Simply put, culture refers to a body of learned behaviour common to a given human societies. According to Madubuike (2012), culture is a patterned ideology found in every society which regulates means of livelihood and human relation with the living and non-living. This includes groups that we are born into such as race and national origin; and groups we join or become part of. However, the sociologists use the term *culture* to denote the totality of complex things acquired by man in a society. Tylor (1871: p. 45), defined culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of societies'. Culture comprises two parts: material culture (which includes our cooking utensil, mud houses, dressing, etc.) and non-material culture (which includes language spoken, laws and morals, etc.).

Sub-Culture

This is a culture within a culture; that is, a group that develops its own sets of beliefs, morals, customs, and practices which its members share but which are contrary to the prevailing culture in the larger society or in other major groups in the society. Milton (1960), defines a sub-culture as norms that set a group apart from, not those that integrate a group with, the total society. All minority

ethnic groups in Nigeria belong to this category (e.g. the Onko speaking people of Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State, and the Ikale/Ilaje speaking people of Ondo State can be regarded as sub-cultures within the larger Yoruba culture).

Cross-culture

The term 'cross-cultural' is a concept that refers to interaction between or among people of different cultures. In cross-culture, there must be an evident case of cultural contact between or among people of different cultural regions. The collage and understanding of people belonging to different groups and backgrounds is central here.

Cross-cultural issues in Nigeria

Cultural issues that exist in Nigeria vary across cultures. Issues such as marriage ceremony, naming ceremony, bereavement, widowhood, widow inheritance, tribal mark incision, among others, are cultural issues which Sociologists also regard as social facts in any societies. Notwithstanding, reactions and practices relating to these practices vary from culture to culture. The Igbo people live in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, covering five States, the Yoruba live in the South Western part of Nigeria covering six States, while the Hausa/Fulani people lives in the Northern part of Nigeria. This work explores the differences and similarities on some issues relating to cultural practices among the Yoruba, Igbo and Other minorities in Nigeria. Our sample is limited to just these two major ethnic groups for the sake of convenience rather than for any formal consideration. How to address the issue of death, the rites and sacrifices involved, the care of the properties left behind, including the children and the wife (or wives) of the deceased, vary across ethnic groups, and few of these are considered in this chapter.

Widowhood and Widow Inheritance Across Cultures

The reactions to the death of a man as husband or a woman as wife is culturally determined. Each culture determines the rationality of practices relating to widowhood and mourning rites. For example,

the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa/Fulani cultures in Nigeria have different practices relating to widowhood rites and widow inheritance. The loss of a loved one is a source of intense emotional stress; yet, the bereaved need to express and deal with feelings of loss before they can re-organise their lives. Normal grief often follows a fairly predictable patterns (Schulz, 1978).

In many parts of the indigenous African societies, special attention and care are expected to be accorded to widows. Ordinarily, a widow is entitled to either of two types of protection. One, she can be remarried to the nearest male relative of her husband, where she enjoys all the protection and care normally enjoyed by his existing wife or wives. Two, if she is not re-married, she can be given general protection and care by the relatives of her deceased husband; In this case, she enjoys financial and labour assistances from the relatives of the deceased husband.

Widowers on the other hand do not receive any significant care, except that at the early stage following the death of his wife, the sympathisers usually render assistance to the widower in respect to the specific duties his wife was fond of performing during her life time. For example, if a man's wife dies leaving young children behind, sympathising women may assist the widower in taking care of the young children until they grow up. Women may also help him in farm work such as weeding and harvesting during the season his wife usually perform such duty.

In the Yoruba Culture, widowhood practices are as old as Yoruba Society itself as they are observed across different Yoruba communities and across different categories of people. A widow is expected to express her sorrow of losing her husband through wearing black clothes, crying and often falling into the ready hands of others around her to prevent her from injuring herself. According to Adekanye (1988), the woman is expected to go into seclusion for seven days during which she is not expected to take a bath or change her clothes. As a sign of severing bonds between her and her late husband, she may be expected to unweave her hair,

have a low cut, shave or scrape her hairs depending on the type of practice prevalent in such Yoruba community. Similarly, the mourning period varies from one community to another. She may be asked to sit on a bare floor or a mat at best. Fasoranti and Arunah (2007). While in some Yoruba communities, she is expected to eat from broken plates and cooked with broken pots. (Fasoranti and Arunah 2007). At the end of forty days, three months, four months as the case may be, the final rites are performed on the widow. The final rites include being 'washed' in the night after having the final wailing and making some rituals which are expected to finally put the spirit of the departed to final rest and the 'outing' which involves change of dresses and being led to the market.

According to Aransiola and Ige (2010) widowhood practices is observed among the Yoruba to protect the woman from being harmed by the spirit of the husband; for the woman to prove innocence of the death of her husband and for the husband family to ascertain if the woman had been pregnant as at the time the husband died so that they can claim responsibility and care for the woman among other reasons. Fasoranti and Arunah (2007), noted that after the wailing periods, widows experienced several degradations and deprivation. Among the Yoruba people, the widow may be accused of killing her husband and therefore could be asked to swear with either the Holy Bible or the Holy Quran or through other traditional means like being asked to drink the water used for washing the corpse in order to prove her innocence.

Adekanye (1988), also noted that at the end of the mourning period, the widow is inherited by a male relative of her dead husband, just like the rest of the man's property through a process called 'Osupo' in Yoruba. However, this has been affected by modernisation, education, Christianity, and high level of exposure of the woman; as widows who fall under the above influences will refuse to be inherited like a property by the relative of the dead husband.

In the aspect of property, according to Ilozue (2007), it is actually when there exists greedy family members that they can then drag the properties with the widow or sometimes, the attitude of the woman when the husband was alive determines the way she is treated. The in-laws will want to collect everything from her, throw her out of the house too, if she was behaving badly to them before their brothers' death, but if not, there is no reason for taking the late husband's property and punishing her. Finally, though widowhood practices is still in existence among the Yoruba people, factors affecting the intensity and feasibility of practicing such include the educational level and the involvement of a woman in modern industrial labour (Aransiola & Ige, 2010). For instance, it is extremely difficult to compel a woman who is working in banking sector to stay at home for long period other than the short period, she is allowed by her boss to mourn the death of her husband. It is also not feasible to ask such women to wear black clothes for one year as this contradicts the dictate of her work organisation.

Nwanegbo (1996), posits that in some parts of Igbo land, when a man dies, the wife will tie a wrapper over her chest without a blouse. She must not talk to anybody and will not have her bath until her husband is buried. After the burial, the 'Umuada' (daughters of the man's ancestors) will come to shave her hair, bath her in an open compound, only having the privacy of being surrounded by the 'Umuada.' Apparently, oblivious of the tragic loss which every widow suffers on the death of their husbands, callous in-laws conspire to apply vicious burial rites to dehumanise the embattled widow. They confront her with questions on how and when the deceased husband died, the circumstance that led to his death, what she did to save him from dying and her extent of contact with the late husband's family before his death? Where the explanations are not satisfactory, the widow must drink the water used in bathing the corpse of her husband to prove her innocence. In fact, there is no end to the humiliating punishment encountered by widow under the cover of native laws and customs.

Nzewi (1981), found that among the Igbo people of Nigeria, the relatives demand for documents relating to the deceased properties including lands, investment and bank account and the widows were required to take oaths as proof that the knowledge of relevant land and personal property of the deceased were not concealed. Subsequently, the widows were required to provide expensive items like a white goat and two jars of palm wine for purification purpose to the female members of their husbands' lineage who made and implemented decision on every matter concerning widows.

The widows were forbidden to touch any object including themselves without defilement. Hence they were given piece of sticks to scratch their bodies, while their food is also cooked in old pots rather than those normally used for cooking for other members of the family. Also, they were to sleep on old mats placed on wooden planks which would be burnt at the end of the mourning period. If a woman dies during the one year mourning period, she is perceived as being responsible for her husband's death and therefore commits an abomination (Nzewi, 1981).

Among the Ikwere in Rivers State, the man's extended family assumes instant control of his belongings when he dies. They give to a woman list of what she has to provide before her husband's body could be buried. These include goat, yams and drinks, followed by a levy to cover the funeral expenses. The widow will wear a single black mourning cloth for six months and cannot eat with spoon or a decent plate. At the end of the mourning period, there will be a second burial after which she can remarry. Though Christianity has brought about some modification in widowhood practices in the community, such as wearing white cloth instead of black, but the practices still exist (Nigerian Tribune, 15/07/06:03)

Furthermore, in Akwa-Ibom State, according to their custom, there are two forms of widowhood rites: the Christian and the Non-Christian rites. The former involves sacrificing a fowl and shaving the hair during which incantations are said. After her husband's

death, the widow will not be allowed to go out, but will be made to sit on the same location to cry and mourn. She has to wear the same wrapper and blouse for a period of six weeks until after the burial. One of the beliefs of the community is that, a man and his wife shared everything in common in their lifetime. In order to break the relationship, her pubic hair is shaved, her finger nails cut and buried near the grave. During this ceremony, the following words are said: "this is your share from the body of your wife, so take and leave her alone for she has nothing in common with you as from this day that you are given your share" (African Guardian Magazine, 12/09/88:8-11).

The woman will be bathed in public by other women as the final separation ritual. Rites were also performed to separate the children: she is asked to buy dead and dried young chick, which will be used to brush the children's body. Every part of the house would be swept and the rubbish thrown away at the foot of a plantain tree. These rites are being performed by the elderly widows of the family and it involved one bottle of hot drink, minerals, palm-wine and cooked food. The women camp with the widow for three days. After the burial, items such as jar, plates, and cups that belong to the husband will be packed away by his brothers. A little portion of land would be given to the widow if she has a male child.

While in Non-Christian rite, a widow had to wear the same cloth for six months. After the burial, she will be 'put into widowhood' by the older widows of the lineage. She had to wear a sack for six months. She will provide drinks, fowl, palm-wine and food. She will be asked to confess if she had sex with another man since her husband's death. She will take an oath and then be able to bath every night if she is not guilty of sleeping with another man, but if she had sex with another man, that is another issue entirely. Again, she will not plait or comb her hair, after eating twice a day, she will not wash her hands until the following day. After the burial, she will not go to the market, and will not be allowed to farm for another six months (African Guardian Magazine, 12/09/1988).

When it is time to celebrate her widowhood, the ladies come around and rub her whole body with a substance they called 'Iduot.' With the sack she is wearing, she will be told to go to the market to buy some items, she will not be allowed to cover her body and her hair. Before leaving the house, she will be given four small sticks to hold in her palms and a particular leaf called 'Ofuho' which she puts in her mouth so that she will not talk to anybody. Other ladies will accompany her, at the market, she will not go in but will beckon on someone to come, who she will tell what she needs from the market and give the person money to buy the items for her. When she gets home, her hair will be shaved with razor and certain decorations will be done on her body (African Guardian Magazine, 12/09.1988).

The next being the real celebration day, her sackcloth will be changed to a wrapper. She will be given a hen which is used to rub her whole body and she will be asked to mention whom to marry so that the person will come out and divorce her from her late husband and give some money with yams, fowl, palmwine, snuff, kolanut and she will dance all day. She will be taken to the market accompanied by drummers, dancers, men and women. People will give her gifts, money and food items. After that, she will be accompanied home by those who dance to the market with her and they will be served food and drinks. After all these, they will all leave in the evening and the widow will then be free to go to the stream, market, farm and everywhere she wants (African Guardian Magazine, 12/09/88).

Cross-Cultural Notion of Health and Disease

The idea of cross-culture also encompasses the concept or notion of disease or ill-health. The notion of disease or ill-health is perceived differently across cultures. For many years, most cases of disorders in humankind could only be explained in 'medical' and psychological terms until people began to document notions of health and disease in many non-Western societies. It was discovered that different explanations exist for the meaning of health and disease in different cultures. These explanations led to

the emergence of different sub-specialties such as, to take one example, trans-cultural psychiatry (Kiev, 1972; Lau & Stokes, 1974). There are lots of documentary evidence on the interplay between culture and disease. Many culture-bound syndromes and conditions have been documented and accepted regarding the management of such conditions and how they could be more effectively tackled through an informed knowledge of their cultural context and the social background of patients.

Cook's (1994) study show that cultural variability is the extent to which different cultures subscribe to biomedical, psychosocial and phenomenological beliefs about chronic illness. Furnham (1997), also agrees that cultural attitudes toward illness in particular affect availability of professional help. The issue of acceptability of professional help is very important because if cure is recommended to a patient who does not believe in the theories of cause, or cure of an illness, the patient suffering from such illness may not follow the guidelines for the cure, or may ensure that the cure is ineffective. The theories of cause or cure of diseases have to be meaningful to the patient in terms of the realities he/she understands.

Cross-cultural Health Issues in Nigeria

Researches conducted among the Yoruba in Nigeria show the relevance of the concepts of *Ode Ori* (Hunter of the head) and *Ogun Oru* (Nocturnal Neuropsychiatric disturbance) which Aina and Famuyiwa (2007) as well as Makanjuola (1987) confirmed in the explication of health issues. Also, '*abiku*' (reincarnation) among the Yoruba and the concept of '*Ogban-nje*' (one who returns after death) particularly among females of Igbo origin, are pathological reincarnation which explain most forms of mental illness/possession (Aina & Morakinyo, 2010; Idumedia, 2004). Some culture-specific syndromes involve somatic symptoms (pain or disturbed function of a body part), while others are purely behavioural with sudden attacks of brief duration characterised by paranoid delusions and concomitant hallucinations, typically

believed to be a confusional state and highly emotional behaviour and after attack, by amnesia (Jilek, 2001).

Making a clarity from the chronicle of the empirical history of cultural bound syndrome, it is sustainably clear that a number of cultural-bound syndromes have been described among West Africans, most of which are yet to be incorporated in the internationally accepted classificatory systems (Ayonrinde, 1977; Attah-Johnson, 1984), while others have remained unknown. *Iyolgenen* which literally translates as 'body disruption' is a transient and episodic psychotic-like reaction which is affecting only Tiv women in Benue, North-central part of Nigeria. This disorder is typically characterised by chest pain, aching teeth, and disorientation, muteness restlessness, hearing of voices and seeing indescribable things (auditory/visual hallucination), running away to unspecified direction (confusion), screaming and shouting, as well as stripping off of clothes worn (Fasoranti & Aruna, 2007).

The Yoruba concept of '*were*' (Mental illness, madness or insanity), as both social and psychological morbidity, is considered problems of perception, hope and reality. The state of imbalance between three thus lead to mental disorder which is referred to as '*were*' (Jegade, 2010). The concept of '*were*' is classified into three categories:- '*were amutorunwa*' (mental illness that one is born with), '*were iran*' (hereditary mental illness), and '*were afise*' (mental illness due to affliction). The onset of *were* is observable in the wild or abnormal behaviour of individuals, while help-seeking mostly commences at the crisis stage (Jegade, 2010).

Summary and Conclusion

Knowledge of our history can help us understand ourselves better. Exploring the ways in which various groups within our society have related to each other is key to opening channels for cross-cultural communication. Anthropologists have noted that, people tend to interpret others as 'abnormal,' 'weird,' or 'wrong' (Avruch & Black, 1993). If this propensity is either consciously or unconsciously integrated into organisational structures, then

prejudice takes root in our institutions, e.g; in the structures, laws, policies, and procedures that shape our lives. Consequently, it is vital that we learn to control the human tendency to translate 'different from me' into 'less than me. We can also learn to collaborate across cultural lines as individuals and as a society. Awareness of cultural differences does not have to divide us from one another. It does not have to paralyse us either, for fear of not saying the 'right thing.' In fact, becoming more aware of our cultural differences, as well as exploring our similarities, can help us communicate with one another more effectively. Recognising where cultural differences are at work is the first step toward understanding and respecting one another.

Learning about people's cultures has the potential to give us a mirror image of our own. We have the opportunity to challenge our assumptions about the 'right' way of doing things, and consider a variety of approaches. We have a chance to learn new ways to solve problems that we had previously given up on, accepting the difficulties as 'just the way things are.'

Lastly, if we are open to learning about people from other cultures, we become less lonely. Prejudice and stereotypes separate us from whole groups of people who could be friends and partners in working for change. Many of us long for real contact. Talking with people different from ourselves gives us hope and energises us to take on the challenge of improving our communities and world.

Chapter Exercises

1. Differentiate among culture, sub-culture and cross-culture.
2. Sociologists refer cross-cultural issues as social facts. Identify some of them and describe how they are practiced in Nigeria.
3. In a comparative analysis, describe the notion of health and disease across cultures of the world.

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