

## Blame it on Culture

Vincent Mahmoud Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson is a lawyer. Because he is a lawyer, he uses the title, *barrister* and also adds the appendage *JP* after his name. *JP* stands for *Jerusalem Pilgrim*, an indication that Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson has been to Jerusalem on holy pilgrimage. He lives in Abuja and drives a Mazda. He swears by Japanese cars. In fact, he swears by Japanese anything. His TV, refrigerator, microwave oven, deep freezer, laptop, cell phone, wristwatch and stereo set are all Japanese made. Even the air conditioners in his house and office are Japanese made. It is a wonder that his wives are not Japanese made. He is determined not to buy any made in America because America enslaved his African brothers and sisters.

Whenever he goes to court, Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson adorns his special black gown with matching white horsehair wig and detachable wing collar. The wig makes him look like a failed attempt by a black man at bleaching himself, succeeding only with his hair. While inside his judicial outfit, Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson is always tortured to near-death by heat, but parading his colorful status is worth dying for. Sometimes he curses at the British from whom he inherited his legal fashion. He thinks they could have excluded the wig because it always itches his baldhead, and vows that one day he will find out why it was included, maybe even challenge the decision.

Besides being a practicing lawyer, Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson is a vigorous defender of culture. He makes it a point to visit his village every Christmas and Easter, during which he insists that his wives and three sons wear only traditional clothing. This is the only time of the year that he doesn't display his wig and gown on the rear dash of his Mazda. While in the village, he temporarily discards all cutlery and eats pounded yam and *garri* with his fingers. He also indulges in a variety of other local dishes like roasted yam with palm oil, *amala*, *isi ewu* and *okporoko*. He tries his best to avoid gin and lime or beer, and prefers to sit on a low bench with other men and guzzle gourd after gourd of palm wine. Instead of snacking on biscuits and tea, he hopes everyone sees him as he tosses pieces of kola nut into his mouth, or chews on garden eggs and *ubé* softened in hot water. Sometimes Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson would even participate in a libation ceremony, but with hopes that word would not get to his Christian brothers and sisters in Abuja.

It is because he is fanatical about culture that Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson is married to two women. This is in spite of the fact that he prefers to be seen in public with his graduate wife, while the other one that his mother married for him spends most of her time in the house—actually, the kitchen. Though she didn't go past elementary six and can hardly make a complete sentence in English, she is great at cooking,

cleaning and washing. Because she answers “yes sir” to everything he says, she is also a great standby for sex, notwithstanding how undesirous she feels or how inconveniencing it is. As a man of culture, Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson can’t stand it when his wives disagree with or disobey him. For their own good, he slaps and punches them once in a while, which is why they have learned to be well-behaved African wives. One day his graduate wife dared to question his decision to kick her in the stomach. “Shut up!” he barked at her. “After all, my father used to beat my mother!” To reinforce his point, he followed with another swift kick to her stomach. Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson is so dedicated to traditional marriage that he is thinking of taking a third wife. The decision is slightly complicated only because the woman he has his eyes on is his housekeeper.

Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson hates the British because they robbed his people of their black culture. Of course it would be good if he could cite other substantive and invaluable resources that the British stole from his people besides culture; like science and technology, architectural innovations, groundbreaking infrastructure and globally significant inventions. But since no one accuses the British of stealing and destroying anything else, Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson has decided that it is enough to demonize them over culture. And so, he is on a determined mission to reclaim what the British stole. This is why, depending on the issue, his standard defense is either “it is not our culture” or “it is our culture.” He is a polygamist because “it is our culture.” He hates homosexuality because “it is not our culture.” He thinks it is a great idea to circumcise little girls because “it is our culture.” He fumes whenever a woman is appointed to a ministerial position because “it is not our culture.” When his wives irritate him he punches them because “it is our culture.” It is okay that his grandfather owned slaves that were buried with him when he died because “it is our culture.” He is late to every event except a job interview because “it is our culture” (to measure time with shadows and the sun). He celebrates when a teenage girl is given to a fifty-five year old man in an arranged marriage because “it is our culture.” And because it is “not our culture” to feed babies with feeding bottles, Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson loves it when a woman scoops out a breast in public and shoves it into the mouth of her wailing infant.

Perhaps you have met Ahigbe-Saint Clarkson. But if you haven’t, don’t worry; you are bound to run into him sooner or later. After all, he is everywhere.