African Poetry: The Grieved Lands of Africa by Agostinho Neto

Introduction to the Grieved Lands of Africa.

BACKGROUND OF THE POET

Agostinho Neto was born in 1922 in the Angola town of kamikaze. He had his early education at Luanda secondary school. Thereafter, proceed to the University of Cumbria, where he obtained his medical degree. Agostinho's bitter experience with the Portuguese colonial administration in Angola hardened his hatred of European colonialism in Africa generally.

Agostinho is the first democratically elected president of independent Angola, a former colony of Portugal. This was made possible through his activities in the movement of liberation of Angola (MPLA). He was indeed a true freedom fighter. Neto's poems can be classified as protest poetry, based on his strong opposition to racial injustice, colonial aggression, and total misrule.

BACKGROUND OF THE POEM

Agostinho's “The Grieved Lands of Africa” addresses the traumatic impact of servitude in Africa after over four hundred years of human slavery during which many Africans were exported to different parts of the world ranging from the UK (Britain, Scotland, Whales, Northern Ireland) to Americas (both North and South) which include, US, Mexico and so on.

The poem also explores the subjugation of foreign culture alongside its outrageous experiences of domination and exploitation of African resources by Adventurists for over a hundred years of colonization in which many got independence through negotiations but some like Angola; the poet country got theirs through war.

SETTINGS

The poem is set in Africa as implied from its title as an aggrieved land. Africa had been subjected to centuries of different kinds of suffering, sorrow, pain, anguish, and turmoil in the hand of her European colonizers. The outrageous dealing with Africans as mere usable, expendable, and exportable are disheartening. "the degrading sweat of impure dance/of other seas" as they were exported in their millions in ships"

STRUCTURE

Neto's "The Grieved Lands of Africa" is a poem written seven stanzas, 42 lines. The first stanza is simply an introduction of the poem that tickles the heart of the reader. Africans are seen as the unfortunate victims of "grieved lands" as the poet goes down the memory lane, by tracing the predicament of the black man. He narrowed it down to the period of slavery in Africa when Africans were enslaved due to no fault of theirs. He recalls the degrading inhuman treatment in the hands of their captors. He draws a contrast between the "ancient and modern slave" of colonization. In stanza two up to the fourth stanza, the poet continues to lament "the Grieved
lands." He uses the imagery of a "flower" that is "crushed" in the "forest" jungle, to enable the reader to visualize how the African continent was taken over by the "wickedness of iron and fire." It explains the destruction visited on Africa by the western colonizers, in the name of Christianity, and civilization. In stanza five to seven, Neto talks about the untimely death of African slaves, who died on their way to Europe due to severe beating or exhaustion from starvation or simply murdered and were thrown into the Atlantic Ocean.

Finally, although the lands of Africa grieve as a result of the inhuman treatment of the western colonial masters, the harmonious sound of conscience" found in "the honest blood of men" mixed with" strong desire" and "sincerity" to exist "in the pure and simply rightness of the stars." They live. Many were determined to overcome all unbearable sufferings to survive the western colonization towards independence and some attained independence through war.

The poet concludes by stating that Africa is an indefatigable part of the earth which cannot be annihilated and Angola is great part of it. Lines 40 – 41 “Because we are living/And are imperishable particles”. Instead new stars will emerge which help in the transformation of the world as we have seen in the world today.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Diction

Neto made use of appropriate words to narrate how Africans became the victims of "the Grieved lands." It’s easy for readers to understand the anguish experienced in the hand of the Colonial Masters. The poet's use of words was carefully crafted to expose how the ancient slavery of Africans, and the modern slavery of Africans by western colonial masters, made the black man grieve under unbearable inhuman existence.

Mood

The mood of the poet can be described as been emotionally grieve about "the tearful woes of an ancient and modern slave" perpetuated "by the wickedness of iron and fire."

The reader is made to feel Neto's grieve about the sordid experiences of the black man before and during the period of colonization.

Tone:

The tone of the poet reveals his anger and agony. His voice is that of requiem against the intolerable condition of "the grieve lands" in Africa. Neto's protest is directed at the racial prejudice and the worst inhuman treatment by the western colonial masters.

POETIC DEVICES
Contrast:

Inline two "in the tearful woes of an ancient and modern slave" shows the contrast between ancient slavery in Africa by Africans, and modern slavery resulting from western colonization.

Alliteration:

The use of repeated consonant sounds in lines 14 and 20 are examples of alliteration.

".....victorious voice of laments" line 14

"Decked with dances by baobabs overbalance" line 20

Symbolism:

The representation of the Africa continent in line 7 as a beautiful "flower" and "forest" which are "crushed." is symbolical. And The wickedness of iron and fire" that is responsible for the senseless destruction is symbolized by western colonialism.

The "honest blood of men" and the "strong desire of men" symbolized the determination and fortitude of the black man in "The grieve lands of Africa" to survive.

Allusion

The title of the poem, "grieve lands" is an allusion to the inhuman treatment meted out to the African slaves, the racial discrimination, and a litany of "tearful woes" suffered by the oppressed Africans in their lands.

Repetition:

"The grieved lands of Africa" is repeated in lines: 1,6,12,16,30,39 and 41. Also, "they live" is repeated in lines 8, 28, and 35.

Personification

The repeated lines of "grieve lands of Africa is n example of personification. The "lands" are given the human quality of grieving.

Metaphor:

The use of this literary device makes the poem easy to understand. Neto uses the metaphor of "tearful woes" to describe the unbearable sufferings in "the grieved lands of Africa." Similarly, "The degrading sweat of impure dance, of the other seas" is used to describe the merriment of dancing by the western colonial masters amidst the grieve in the lands of Africa.
**Imagery:**

This is the use of expressions that creates a mental picture of what is being described in the minds of the readers. The repeated line of: "The Grieved lands of Africa" creates a clear picture of the untold sufferings and struggles of Africans.

**THEMES OF THE POEM**

a. **The Theme of Grieve Lands.**

In Agostinho's "The Grieved Lands of African" grieve flows from its title through every stanza of the poem. It is the major theme of the poem. The poet grieves over the "ancient and modern slave" experiences in the lands of Africa. He laments the untold sufferings, loss of lives, assets, and the cultural heritage of the peoples of Africa sacrificed on the bloody altar of western colonialism. The "stunning perfume. flower" in line 8 symbolizes the African continent that was "crushed" by the "wickedness of iron and fire" of the colonial masters.

He recalls the unbearable pains of slavery in the past, which has witnessed "a change of guard" from the African slave masters to the present western taskmasters of colonization. He protests the cause of grieve in the Africa, he however sees a future of agitation for fairness in the unity of purpose to put an end to the grieve.

b. **The Theme of Servitude - Ancient and Modern**

Apart from the dominant theme of grieve in the poem, we also experience the theme of servitude in the poem.

Undoubtedly, the seemly oppression, injustice, and slavery perpetuated by the major western powers under the guise of bringing Christianity and Civilization to the African continent are portrayed in the poem. Africans were subjected to the most inhuman treatment not even meant for animals by the colonial masters.

c. **The Theme of Hope in Adversity**

The poet, nonetheless tells of the persistent spirit of the African even when faced with a lot of adversity. "The stifled laughter " in line 14, and " the unconscious brilliance of hidden sensation" in line 15 are indications that the subjugated hardship will last only for a while.