

Themes and Styles in J.P. Clark *a Decade of Tongues*

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Abstract

“A Decade of Tongues” by J.P. Clark stands as a testament to the poet’s mastery of language, form and thematic depths. The abstract offers a comprehensive exploration of the prominent themes and stylistic features found within Clark’s seminal work. Through an examination of key themes such as identity, cultural heritage, political commentary and existentialism, these abstract illuminates the profound depth and complexity of Clark’s poetry. Additionally, it delves into the stylistic elements employed by Clark, including imagery, symbolism, metre and structure, to convey his messages effectively. By analyzing select poems such as “Abiku”, “The Casualties”, and Ibadan,” this abstract highlights how Clark intertwines themes and styles to create a cohesive and impactful body of work. Ultimately, this abstract seeks to deepen our understanding of J.P. Clark’s “A Decade of Tongues” and its enduring significance in the realm of African Literature. To this end, this research presents the themes and styles used in the selected poems of J. P. Clark citing reference from other poems in comparison with poems related to achieve the aim of this research; however, different theoretical approach are used to analyze the selected poems for further clarification, and to enhance the result of a targeted aim of this research. This paper provides the insight view of the underlying message and subject matter of the selected poems in J. P. Clark’s A Decade of Tongues and the stylistic exploration of J. P. Clark’s poetry and producing aesthetic effect of his poems.

Introduction

The unique feature of this research is that it explains the poem vastly to sieve the styles and themes of the selected poems.

Clark is most noted for his poetry as a lyrics that treat heterogeneous themes; A Reed in the Tide (Longmans, 1965), occasional poems that focus on Clark’s indigenous African background and his travel experience in America and other places; this poetry deals with coverage of transnational issues and fiction, themes between African and his experience as a traveler. He exclaims his feelings toward Africa from a distance on how the Europeans have dealt with us, extorted our resources through exploitation and make us feel less important and irrelevant to our landscape not minding the fact that we (Africans) are the protectors of the establishments in their land, from his view in Flight Across Africa, explains this better and Home from Hiroshima. Let me present a typical example of European demoralization on Africa in the poem;

Service.

A dime

In the slot,
And anything
From coke to coffee
Spews down your throat,
From crackers to candy
Breaks against the enamel
Wear of your teeth

This poem reminds me of the phases of colonialism, post colonialism, neocolonialism and decolonialism movement; J. P. Clark presents the problems with Africa from the first phase to the present day. He described the past due to his experience while the future as prediction which is already what is the problem up till today with African, Nigeria and the Niger delta region. The Poetry of the Niger Delta encompasses a diverse range of poetic expressions that reflect the experiences, struggles and aspirations of the people living in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This poetry often delves into themes such as environmental degradation, socio-economic challenges, cultural heritage, identity, resistance against exploration by oil companies and government neglect.

Many poets from the Niger Delta, such as Gabriel Okara, Tanure Ojaide and John Pepper Clark, among others, have used their works to amplify the voices of the marginalized communities in the region and to bring attention to the environmental devastation caused by oil exploration and exploitation.

The poetry of the Niger Delta is characterized by vivid imagery, rich symbolism and a strong sense of oral tradition, drawing inspiration from the region's natural landscapes, folklore and everyday life experiences. It serves as a powerful medium for raising awareness, provoking thought and advocating for social and environmental justice.

Niger Delta Literature, particularly focusing on oil exploitation, is a significant genre within Nigerian and African literature. It sheds light on the multifaceted impacts of oil exploration and extraction on the region and its people. Here are some key points of J. P. Clark's illustrations of his poem to his environment;

- i. Environment Degradation: Writers from the Niger Delta vividly depict the environmental devastation caused by oil spills, gas flaring and other harmful practices. They describe how these activities pollute the land, waterways and air, leading to the destruction of ecosystems, loss of biodiversity and health problems for local communities.
- ii. Social Injustice and Exploitation: Authors often highlight the social injustices and economic exploitation faced by the people of the Niger Delta. Clark illustrates how multinational oil corporations, in collusion with government authorities, exploit natural resources without adequate compensation or benefits for local communities. This exploitation exacerbates poverty, inequality and social unrest in the region. And so on...

J.P. Clark focus on ecological activism is portrayed in most of his, for instance in His poems, Night Rain and Home from Hiroshima, these poems explains the possible effects of swampy nature of his hometown, irresponsible environmental exploration on the people.

A plant, sapped to the root,
Takes over a plantation:
Comes a forestguard, to call
Of pipes and drums; and
He picks on limp leaves.

When the Niger Delta struggle became militarized by militant groups, Clark vehemently rejected the use of arms. Instead, he championed art as an effective protest medium, with the power of influencing future generations. According to His logic, bullets may run dry and bombs routinely detonate. But words lived forever.

It is to this backdrop that one explains the problem of the Niger Delta since it contributes to the major themes in his work, however, J. P. Clark writes more about the myth of his people often, hence, he made use of words relating to people in the Deltas; words like “fresh fish” bamboo walls, “stream” “fresh cassava” “swamp” “flood” “river” “gums and oils” “valleys” “plantain”. Every description of Niger Delta balls down to the presentation of literature. Literature thrives more on human and social conflict, particularly, on the ecology of oppression all over Africa. Traditions of literature have cropped up from the wreckage of war and difficult circumstances and situations man and society have been plunged into. These facts are well reflected in the literature of Africa. Going by this understanding of hard ground as this concept of doom and retrogression, it is logical to reduce that all known territories where humanity has suffered or suffers in the hand of, natural disasters, in the embrace of terror teasing tyrants and apostles of destruction are tasted territories, territories that roundly and resoundingly fit into the site of hard ground.

The stylistics nature of J. P. Clark’s *A Decade of Tongue* is really an understandable one for any scholar who tends to develop more love and interest in literature. For the fact that most of his poems may be difficult to comprehend due to the vocabulary that requires an assistance or a dictionary.

CULTURE CONTACT AND CLASH

The theme of cultural contact and clash a dominant theme that manifest in JP Clarks’ Poetry. Clark who wrote in the first generation was among those who experience the initial infiltration of these forces into Africa with divergent ideologies. As a poet of that who perceived their evil early, he expressed his displeasure over their arrival. Such poem carry national or regional coloration. They depict the ills, factual achievements, trauma, societal and environmental discomfort this arrivants brings on the African society hence, he brings to light some forms of remedy to the problems in the environment and society. They express the grievances facing human kind, environment, nature, society and humanity. He expressed his displeasure over sad realities of his people, how they feed from hand to mouth as while the wealth of the people is exported abroad. This is his preoccupation in Ivbie.

In J.P. Clark’s *A Decade of Tongues* the theme of culture contact clash is prevalent throughout the narrative. The poem explores the interactions between different cultures, particularly the clash between traditional African culture and the influence of western colonization. Clark delves into the complexities and tensions that arise when these cultures intersect, highlighting issues of identity, power dynamics and the struggle for autonomy. Through vivid imagery and evocative language, the poem captures the complexities of cultural exchange and the enduring impact of colonialism on African societies.

In this poem. The poet referred to them as people from the ‘far-fabled country’ however, these far-fabled country men were welcomed and received with arm hands, addressed in disinterested manner not knowing they had interior motives to the otherwise in a *Song of Wrong*’ he explains the regiment of lamentations in repeated form expressing their grievances in a scornful manner as the proletariat are oppressed by the bourgeoisie:

This act gives us quick a remainder of Kari Marx (Marxism) that explain the changes and developments in society as the result of opposition between the social classes. Clark write:

You who from far-fabled country
Reached into our virgin jungle
Muscles tangled-torn out of roll,
Has the fire stopped riding the wind,
The fire you lit cigarettes with?

The first line explains the distance the visitors covered to arrive Africa. It also serves forms an opening address from the addresser to his addressee. That is to say, these people came from a very far land where their culture, norms and traditions are far different from Africa. He puts it again: 'Reached into our virgin jungle'. Here; Virgin land refers to a land that is filled milk and honey – where its honey flows naturally and undefiled. The addresser welcomes them to the land that is undefiled, and also make them to understand and acknowledge such facts: passing through like therapeutic rays'. The smile, like therapeutic rays' implies they pretended or, where assumed to be a helping or healing light, a vessel through which the people will see their errors, weaknesses and diseases, whereas, therapeutic means a scientific tool designed to help treat their illnesses and ray, a narrow beam of light, heat or other energy. However, here, it used to describe the visitors coming with a little presence of healing the land:

'Muscles tangled-torn out of roll,
Has the fire stopped riding the wind?
The fire you lit cigarettes with

The lines above represent the power and influence they possess and their intent to make their host do their biddings, however, seeing them like the therapeutic rays-pretenders 'has the fire stopped riding the wind'. The fire you lit cigarettes with? These people were drunks and full of big words while the addressers were abashed which cause abhorrent for the addresser and addressee. And at this state, the people are in states of quandary: they smoked all day and all night on their visit while the chief speaker reminds them of the fire, they lit Cigarettes with on riding the wind that is on the journey:

You've seen the ancient iroko
Last flood torn to bits by lightening?
'The one they say witches haunt at cockcrow?
'Lice, lice, my dear, may infest
Stately woman's crest.
Shall we see them all, the whole lot
And in the act steal a shot?
As likely as no
So you make sure
You hold out your pennies.

The host also takes these visitors around still with a clear conscience, Showing them their inheritances, achievements and also describe to them their uses, how it works, the power they possess and also make their point plain that they should not come to steal and hold their pennies: You've seen the ancient iroko' 'Last flood torn to bits by lightning? The one they say witches haunt a cockcrow? These lines explain the ancient inheritance from the land 'ancient iroko, in the eastern part of Nigeria is an inheritance from the forefathers that the people value so much because it is an economic tree therefore, has monetary value to them and their generation. In this aspect, ancient Iroko also means legends and icons of the land; the great men of valour of the old time who not worth required disrespect.

There is also a direct question from of a statement but ‘‘statement’’ which refers to what is said or written that creates and sends information or an opinion. However, in this case, the line is seen as more of informative than opinion. The direct question that seeks information is also answered in the hearing of the visitors: As likely as not’’ the speaker in same way, making the question look untreachorous to the hearing of the visitors: ‘As likely as not’’. The speaker also instigates the notice that they should hold their pennies for whatever they want. You hold out your pennies’’- pennies in plural form refers to money and literarily the things they were shown where not free, and they deserve more than a penny. ‘Hold out’’ is a verb phrase and collocation that involves them presenting the money to them before they will be given anything.

In the irresolution
Of one unguarded moment
Thereby hangs a tale
A tale so tall in implications
Universal void cannot contain
The terrible immensity
Nor its permanence dissolve
In the flux wash of eternity.

This part of the second movement attest to the confusion in the midst of the people in the land being irresolute to decide how to deal and focus on what is at hand, how to understand the mindset of the visitors and finally, they were found ‘‘napping’’ – napping means a sleep in progress, nap is a short sleep, especially during the day. Napping during meaning the day while work is on, it is more like a guard feeling dizzy or tipsy while on guard, like the biblical verse proverbs 6:1-35. Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber, save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler’’. This passage of the Holy Scripture replicates what the visitors will do when they found the host napping (sleeping) the resemblance states that whoever sleeps while work is on may lose its captives and will be loose guarded. The second line explains that even at the state of irresolution; a situation where they are not able to decide what to do: they were also unguarded at the moment there by hangs the tale they were telling due to long time they have told their people. They told these tall tales without taking note of the implications. Clark take his take his message of African culture in ‘Agbor Dancer’ where has captures the beauty of African tradition. Clark’s gives an account of melodious rhythm of African drum in the poem:

See her caught in the throb of a drum
Tripling from hide-brimmed stem
Down lineal veins to ancestral core
Opening out in her supple tan
Limbs like fresh foliage in the sun.

This stanza is the description of the sound and the dancer, explaining how she dances to the drum beats, her moves, and its ancestral heritage, See her caught in the throb of a drum’’ this takes us to meet with the dancer whom we have longed to see, as the writer explains to us the sweetness of her dance moves to the drumbeat. ‘‘Tippling from hide brimmed stem’’ which explains the level of pleasure the dancers gets from the repeated rhythm of the drum and music she gets. He presents the natural and pristine nature of African culture. He writes:

See how entangled in the magic
Maze of music

In trance she treads the intricate
Pattern rippling crest after crest
To meet the green clouds of the forest.

These lines bring to light the assertions of culture heritage to Africa, and the moves of the dancer to its greener or productive land To meet the green clouds of the forest.

There is a contraction of words ‘green clouds of the forest’, this implies that no matter how unfavorable one may describe the cloud, for the sake of the oral presentation, the cloud must yield fruit or be favorable to anyone who admits its culture. The same culture theme Clark buttresses gain, in ‘Abiku’ He writes:

Coming and going these several seasons,
Do stay out on the baobab tree,
Follow where you please your kindred spirits
True, it leaks through the thatch.

The word ‘Abiku’ in Yoruba mean ‘a child from the spirit’ in Igbo, it called Ogbanje. ‘Abiku’ is a child who must die repeatedly and be reborn severally into the same family or within same family. In contrast to Wole Soyinka’s version, he explains the supremacy, arrogance of the spirit, and the belief in the supernatural in African tradition. It is believed that the ‘Abiku’s are born with same mark they had in their first world because the mark is to proves that they have come again. Though the western world has tried putting blame on various types of illness that leads to a mother’s continuous loosing and giving birth of a child, such belief, is not acceptable in the African world view. The believe in ‘Abiku’ and ‘Ogbanje is that people reincament and are born again in another body when they die.

In line one; coming and going these several season/Do stay out on the baobab tree/fellow where you please your kindred spirits/in indoors is not enough for you/True, it leaks through the thatch. These lines explain how she comes and goes in the several season’ in African tradition, when a child is born and dies and, another is born with the same features of the other, a diviner is usually, Consulted to know about the child to help Line three gives instructions to the spirit child to fellow where her spirit leads. In this poem, Clark paints an ideal the rural life with words such as bats and owls and thatche and bamboos which evidences.

Another culture reflection from the poem is the superstitious believes and supernatural robotism of the Yoruba (Africa) people According to line 2 and 3 respectively, Do stay out the baobab tree/Follow where you please your kindred spirit’ the Yorubas (Africa) have strong believe in the unseen forces, and the two quoted lines claims, that the actions of Abiku were dictated by some strange forces whose residence is on the baobab tree.

Disillusionment, War and Trauma

Disillusionment, war and trauma are other themes Clark brings to manifest in this collection in His Excellency the masquerader’ he captures, the ills of contemporary Socio-Political issue in Africa. Although most of his works are lyrical in nature, yet cover a board spectrum of themes, hinging on prevalent socio-economic and political ills that bedevil the Nigerian society. In this poem, the

persona rhetorically questions the fate of the people who are ruled by the Juggernauts of the nation's self-serving political elites:

He serves/ To ford between swamp and sand, He serves? these lines explain the regiment of bad leadership in Africa and Nigeria in particular To ford means to drive, push or even to lead. Ford is a name of an American car company that produces most valued vehicles and are sent across other nations. However, these African leaders lead us with the mentality of the British from their own selfish interest. They move with their vehicles and forget the masses who cannot walk on "flood" roads. Now they move between swamp and sand swampy places in most African nations are not always funny palaces because they have to their users, and people living around its environs. Swamp is an area of low-lying uncultivated ground where water collects; a bog or marsh. It is a place overwhelm with water in an unusual way, damaging plants and other inhabitants. They serve even in sand, this implies, that there was no swamp before the emergence of his rule, but due to mismanagement of economic resources, extortion, and embezzlement of public funds and diversion to private account, for their selfish interest, they forget and feel reluctant to what they would have put in place before the next climate change or season. However, in all, he serves and rules. He remains the authoritative leader who is only on the seat of power to give instruction without going down to know if such instructions are carried out. He remains a 'shallow' leader.

The bridge stands,
All that stone and steel put together,
It stands,
The bolts drop.
And steel that should be blue
At close grip

The first three lines is an advice that for a project to be successful and accomplished there are positive steps that needs to take, hands need to be on deck, everyone needs to work together for better achievement However, the stone are human, the steel are also human effort that needs a collective mind and effort to make the bridge stand? In that case, when all these are not done, the bolts drop' which simplifies that it is not just one person's work but all:

Shows brown....
And for such service, songs more than water and sand
In Ojoto
So they worship the masks
Although in season

This shows the result and reaction of a failed ruler, the result states that every neglected effort by the leader His Excellency turned out to 'show brown.... 'When bolts turn brown. It simply means that the bolts used to fix the steel is left, and is not taken care of in the way becomes brownish. The brown colour implies, that the city is dirty, forsaken, unkempt of sabotage of miscreants, political propagandas and songs of eye service that are more than water and stand that water and song, it shows that these socio-political propagandists rain praises to His Excellency. According to the little, these satirical songs were hideously sang to mock their leadership and make jest of what they never did. These praise appear in flex, radio stations of local and international television stations, newspaper magazine and other forms of media:

In Ojoto
So the worship the masks,
Although in season
The masks

O take off the mask? And behind?
What wind' what straw

Ojoto is a town in Eastern of Nigeria, Anambra state precisely, made up of 21 LGAs in the state and the towns in the council. Maybe that is where the poet persona finds himself to tell the story that the people there worship his Excellency the masks. The masks shows plurality of crime, however extorters of public fund are found everywhere, and in offices and every phase of human pursuit for daily activities, earnings and workplace. 'Although in season these praises are not really done what its time or season for elections, during electioneering campaigns or other forms of social and political gatherings for recognition: O take off the mask? And behind? He exclaims that the mask should be taken off so that his Excellency will be humane and not human in disguise, and stop parading himself to be what he is not with his eloquent speech.

The last line is another derogatory and vulgar line that explains the naughtiness of His Excellency. In this line, he is referred to as 'the wind' which connotes that such person does not quality the role of ordinary existence but extra ordinary.

In conclusion, His Excellency the masquerade'' parades with a mask and unmask himself when he feels there is a human role to pay. The title is a metaphorical one-that presents to the leader directly the implications of bad and poor leadership and its upshot and aftermath. Clark's 'His Excellency the masquerade' is to ridicule the affairs of the upper head because they scare people away from them leaving its followers to stay behind because they are the ones that understand the nature of a being wearing mask.

The poem hails the masquerader as 'His Excellency'', and with good reason. It is a praise poem, so it is expected that its subject will be praised and exalted. But it is not just flattery or adulation. Note the line 'they worship the mask'', which is true. The masquerader dances in the religious ritual wearing a mask which is a representative of an ancestor, deity or god. So, when the masquerader puts on the mask to dance, he is no longer himself as an ordinary mortal, but he becomes the god. He is treated as 'majesty' he is revered, feared, and indeed worshipped by all who encounter him. No. Note 'Altho in season''. The masquerader with his mask will only appear at a particular season. A band of masqueraders will appear on the streets as representatives of the gods who have come to visit. All will run away when they see them coming, hastily clearing a path for them to pass. Mortals are forbidden to come into contact with them, and if they do, they be beaten by the whips carried by the masquerade dancers.

As far as the mortals are concerned these are deities, not men wearing masks and costumes. There is more than a grain of truth there because the identity of the masqueraders in Nigeria is hidden from the public. They are usually members of a secret society of high-ranking men in the community, and no one is supposed to know who they are when they are mystical-they are unknown people. But more than they are mystical-they are not mortal, they are spirits. This tradition of the praise song is taken from the oral literature. A good example is the untitled incantation from the Swahili language, which is also typical of another tradition, that of the drinking song. These are known across the world and across centuries of time.

Then, in 'the Casualties'', the poet laments the grief of the victims in a way of singing it out during a funeral to the audience. The poem points to the 1966 Civil War in Nigeria when Biafra wanted to be free and independent. It affected the common people who suffered endlessly. The

battle failed and the problem was silenced. The poet asserts that the casualties are not only the ones who are dead, for they are far from the divesting consequences of the war. They are not only those who are wounded though they are well on the route to death. For they are far from the divesting consequences of the war. They are not only those who are wounded though they are well on the route to death. They await burial by installments as death is the ultimate escapism. It is not only those who have lost their material assets and property, it is also those who have irretrievably lost their near and dear ones. It is those led away by the law at night, there is always the uncertainty about the cell. To some, it may be a cruel place, to others it may function as a heaven.

Furthermore, the casualties are not only those who started a fire and that cannot now extinguish the same. This may be any form of rumor or issue that kindles a controversy or sparks communal violence. The scapegoats are the innocents who had no say in the matter, and they are the shattered shell of its aftermath. They always experience the walls falling against them. These so-called diplomats remain smug in their rooms smoking. They cannot see the means of alleviating tension using a shortcut.

This poem refers to the casualties of the war in an ironic and sarcastic manner. These so-called 'casualties' exist outside the scene of ravage and wreckage. Rather than being the emissaries of peace, they cannot see the funeral fires consuming the forest or natural vegetation. They fail to have a far to have a far-sighted view. They are the wandering minstrels who beating on the drums of the drums of the human heart, taking advantage of human-sensitivity to certain issues. These drive humanity to a frenzy that is unfamiliar to its basic nature itself. These drums possess a power that overwhelm even guns. He put it:

We are thus caught in a chaos of charges and counter-claims
When not in the niche others have left. We fall,
All casualties of the war.

The 'niche' referred to here is that of being 'politically correct'. This means, only those who are politically correct are in a safe corner'. People are caught in the hatred of communities or a cause that they see only the crowds in a tumultuous situation, nobody can hear each other speak. Nobody sees the innocent individual faces, Who are unnecessarily made the victims. This is very significant in the contemporary context of terrorism. To know or not know the extent of wrong on all sides is not a matter of concern for them: 'We are characters now'/'we do not have an existence of our own' Though we appear to be the 'stay-at-home', we unsettled by rumours of inflation, taxation, rumours. He writes further:

By taxes and rumour, the looter for office
And wars, fearful everyday the owners may return.
We are all Case celebrated for Kwashiorkor,
The unforeseen camp-follower of not just our war.

Kwashiorkor is the unseen camp follower of every war: a huge personification of all the deteriorating and devastating effects of the claustrophobic war. Kwashiorkor is an acute form of childhood protein-energy malnutrition. What the poet means is that, the war is like a disease afflicting a child, or a new generation at its very core. It is the children of today that own the future of tomorrow. Therefore, the best way to win a war is to prevent psychoanalytically, the relevance of this poem is that it tends to find the mental effect of casualties, the problems that befall the victims, their reactions to the experiences during the war and how they managed to survive it through elucidate discourse. No wonder Ebele Eko et al(45) observe that the absurdity of evidence and war constitutes the theme of Clark-Bekederemo's third poetry volume, "The Casualties" the

contents of which deal specifically, with the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 and generally with war.

This title poem, ‘the casualties’, catalogues losses, in terms of lives and property, suffered in wars, using pain-evoking diction. The poem’s diction dramatizes the traumatic experiences of wounds, starvation, insecurity, captivity, detention, deformity, dispossession, loss and death which are concomitants of wars.

Theme of Nature, Time, Pastoral life and Poverty

In ‘Streamside Exchange’, Clark examines the theme of nature and the transient nature of time. He stresses the need for humanity to be humble and loyal to Mother Nature, since only her has the powers to control season and time. This poem is a dialogue between two interlocutors, the bird (nature) and the child (man). It is believed that man and nature exist side by side, man need so also nature needs man. He writes:

Child

River bird, river bird.
Sitting all day long
On hook over grass,
River bird, river bird.
Sing to me a song
Of all that pass
And say,
Will mother come back today?
Bird
You cannot know
And should not bother,
‘River bird, river bird
Sitting all the long
On hook over grass

The poem explains the vanity of human existence. He further explains that the bird is a natural phenomenon. It show man’s nature against ‘nature’, the whole system of the existence: arrangement, forces and events of physical life that are not controlled by man.

Hence, there is the tone of anxiety in the child’s voice that is put across to the bird:

‘Sing to me a song
Of all that pass
And say,
Will mother come back today’?

The child is so confused about the puzzle of time, time to live, time to enjoy, time to play, time to make money and time to die. ‘Will mother come back today’?

In the above lines, we get to know that the child’s mother has died and the child is inquiring if mother will still come back to him. The question is, will mother come back today? And the reply is a killer rather than a answer. That further shows the poet view of a world where we have questions without answers; a God forsaken world where we must do whatever we want to do before our time expires:

‘You can not know
And should not bother;

Tide and market'' here are a measure of time

The poet uses that as a marker of man existence in a meaningless world. Tide (the clinical rise and fall of the sea). So, no matter how high the sea rises, it must surely come down. This shows that no matter the status of man-rich, poor, disabled etc., they cannot exceed or add to his time in the world. The poet also considers man's time in the world as a market, which will come and go it is belief in Africa the Ayeloja, Orun nile, depending on how different languages would put it so, no matter how man strives, he cannot have control over time, he cannot bride time, neither can he reverse time-counted, because time will actually time our time timely. On the other hand, the poem focuses on the anxiety of child. The child which symbolizes man, is curious about the future and longs to see a picture of it but the bird calm her down by telling her 'you cannot know and should not bother'.

The poem explores the contrast between man and nature. This demarcation is boldly clear that whether big or small animate or inanimate object, whatever represents nature is seen as a supernatural creature. Let us see the case of the child asking the bird that does not talk and can be fed by that child about the way about of mother. More so, the issue abandonment. Streamside exchange happens to the combination of dirge and elegy; it is a curious lamentation of sorrow and grief expressing sadness for not just mother but to the resource, environment and lost glory expressed through a child by the seaside who feels abandoned by the person who is supposed to take care of him. And off course, the theme of uncertainties. There is an uncertain answer to the question of the child just like the title of the play by Samuel Beckett Waiting for Godot. The answer remains rhetorical for the child to understand whereby he will continue to wait for Godot:

You cannot know
And should not bother,
Tide and market come and go
And so shall your mother.

In 'Night Rain'' the ruggedness of life in the village is represented with images of sheaves, wooden bowls, earthenware, mats, etc. and then man's helplessness in the face of natural occurrences or disaster. These two major themes are evident in how the rainstorm deprived the poetic persona's family of their humble home. He discusses the forces of nature through a natural phenomenon and that man is not to run away from the latter but face it and become unified with it. More so, the solidarity of humanity. Under the unrelenting forces of nature man should stick together as the family becomes an epitome of the general level of poverty prevalent among humans even in the face of something as powerful as a natural phenomenon. Man is seen as depending on the environment, suppressed by it but also fighting and getting united in the face of its onslaught. 'Night Rain' portrays the possible effects of irresponsible environmental exploration on the people. Clark represents a class of writers who did not write for writing's sake, but committed to finding lasting solutions to contemporary problems.

Theme of Corruption

Corruption is a general motif in African poetry. There is hardly any poet who will does not handle issues of corruption in their poems. This is because literature handles the burning issues of the day in the words of Achebe (34). This is the general concern of Clark's ''State of the Union'. The poem shares similarities with Williams Shakespeare's 'something is Rotten in the state''. However, the poem captures pertinent contemporary socio-political issues, it also covers a broad

spectrum of themes, prevalent socio-economic and political ills that bedevil the Nigerian society. “State of the Union pictures the country as a heterogeneous society from the perspectives of an informed poet, who shift through historical facts to prove that “something is rotten in the state. The prophetic bard’s startling revelations are succinctly depicted in other narrative – cum historical poems such as ‘the sovereign’, which exposes ills, Problem and fallacy of Nigeria’s claim to egalitarianism and being a country, whose people are united in diversity. He writes: ‘it was never a union. It was at best/And amalgamation, so said, in fact/the foreign adventure who forged it. Four hundred and twenty-three disparate/Elements by the latest count, all spread/Between desert and sea, no trace of one/Running into the rest in two thousand/ Years of traffic. Perhaps the most momentous verse in term of relevance to the country’s present travails is the poem, ‘An Epidemic without a name’ which captures the essence of the dread that envelopes the nation over the corona virus pandemic and reported corona virus pandemic and reported deaths of thousands of people from strange ailments. The following lines gleaned from the poem portray fear of the unknown:

Another one went
It was never like this before n
Not when there is no war
Or a dread disease widespread
What feast among the dead calls them home at such a run ?
Fear beats the drum

In the poem, “Where do they all go”? the persona rhetorically queries the fate of the nation’s Self-serving political juggernauts after they had left office: where do they all go, the big wigs/In government, when by force or choice/They leave service? Some we know/ Side-step into boardrooms and but/Themselves a little time, While a few/Ascend to thrones termites dispute/But the bulk these characters/Who in their time manipulated/Millions in the name of Million/where do they go, when, willing or not, they leave their posts on high? O. The poet decries Nigeria’s inability to safeguard human and material resources many years after the Civil War.

Furthermore, the tone of the poem is clear. “Services taken/For granted elsewhere either break down/or do not get started all/ when introduced here”. The problem, Clark maintains, lie with the citizens of the country, “something they must/be in ourselves”, who cannot commit themselves to a society paradigm. Ways, and in “The sovereign “. The last poem of the first section, he makes his most complex claim.

According to the poet, Nigeria has never been a sovereign nation, “‘never a union” nothing but “an amalgamation” of “four hundred and twenty three” states. “all spread/Between desert and sea” and it never will be a complete whole” states, “all spread/Between desert and sea”, and it never will be a complete whole” Hammer upon/Anvil many strike like thunder and but all is alchemy/Tying to sell as gold in broad daylight/This counterfeit coin called a sovereign.

Clearly, as both Nigerian history and Clark’s career have proceeded, his poetry has grown, its approach shifting according to the unusual stance of vital poet.

A dominant tune of pessimism cuts across most of the poems, revealing, the poet’s Attitude to the prevailing socio-economic and political setup, perpetuated by the mediocre leadership the country still grapples with decades after her independence. The poet deploys diverse poetic devices in exploring the various underlying thematic concerns.

The poet chronicles issues of injustices evidenced by extra-Judicial killings, high-level corruption, nepotism and ethnocentrism, widespread insecurity religious bigotry, political instability, social inequality and intolerance, economic exploitation, self-aggrandizement, deceit and fear of the unknown.

Conclusion

The work has examined peculiar themes of disillusionment, war and trauma, nature, time, pastoral life and poverty in Nigeria as well as Delta with regards to Clark's *A Decade of Tongues*. It has also looked at the stylistic uniqueness of Clark's *A Decade of Tongues*. It has also looked the stylistics uniqueness of Clark's *A Decade of Tongue*. The study has indeed shown that Clark's *A Decade of Tongue* is pregnant embedded with stylistics quality which was not explored. In fact, the study further reveals that Clark is rich in poetic manipulation, thereby distinguishing him from other poets of his time.

The conclusion of this collection would likely emphasize the richness and diversity of Clark's work, showcasing his ability to explore a wide range of topics, from personal commentary, using various poetic techniques.

Overall, it would underscore Clark's significance as a poet and his contributions to Nigeria and African literature.

Recommendations;

The Study recommends as follows:

J.P. Clark's *A Decade of Tongues* is a rich literary work that explores various themes and styles. Here are some recommendations for studies focusing on these aspects;

- i. Themes Analysis: Identity and cultural heritage: Explore how Clark reflects Nigerian identity and cultural heritage in his work, particularly in relation to the colonial context.
 - Socio-political commentary: Analyze Clark's commentary on socio-political issues such as corruption, power dynamics and social injustice in Nigeria.
 - Environmental concerns. Investigate Clark's portrayal of environmental degradation and its impact on society and individuals.
- ii. Style and Technique:
 - Poetic form and language: Examine Clark's use of language, imagery and poetic devices such as metaphor, symbolism and allusion.
 - Narrative structure: Explore the narrative techniques employed by Clark, including shifts in perspectives, flashback and stream of consciousness.
 - Oral tradition and performance: Investigate how Clark draws from Nigerian oral traditions and performance styles in his writing, including the use of rhythm, repetition and dialogue.
- iii. Comparative Studies:
 - Comparative analysis with other Nigerian poets: Compare Clark's themes, styles and techniques with other Nigerian poets of his generation, such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe.
 - Comparative analysis with international poets: Explore similarities and differences between Clark's work and that of poets from other cultural backgrounds, highlighting universal themes and unique cultural expressions.
- iv. Reception and Influence:
 - Critical reception: Examine the critical reception of *A Decade of Tongues* both within Nigeria and internationally and how it has contributed to Clark's reputation as a poet.

- Influence on Nigerian literature: Investigate the influence of Clark's work on subsequent generations of Nigerian writers and poets and its impact on the development of Nigerian literature as a whole.
 - v. His stylistic ingenuity be investigated by future scholars.
- By delving into these aspects, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the richness and complexity of J.P. Clark's poetry in *A Decade of Tongues*.

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