

**Pan-Africanism and Globalized Black Identity  
in the Poetry of Kofi Anyidoho  
and Kwadwo Opokwu-Agyemang**  
Oyeniya Okunoye

The fact that most of contemporary African writing is immersed in the historical and the social constantly poses a challenge to reading and theorizing it. The boundary between text and context is often so thin or blurred that it becomes difficult to distance texts from their enabling situations. This convergence implies that any attempt at transferring values that are already taken for granted in Western traditions of critical practice will distort or misrepresent literary practices in this case. The situation is becoming increasingly complicated as various national literatures are acquiring distinctive idioms based on the unique ways that social and creative traditions negotiate their terms of engagement. The challenge that this poses to theorizing African literature is to appreciate the traditions that sustain specific literary efforts and appraise them accordingly. Ghanaian literary culture, an aspect of which is the object of this exploration, is very unique in the sense that it exhibits a considerable sense of historical awareness. This historicity testifies to its implication in the discourses that sustained the nationalist project in much of what used to be British-controlled West Africa in general and the former Gold Coast in particular.<sup>1</sup> Ghanaian writing exhibits a great deal of Pan-Africanist consciousness, a reality that has much to do with the nation's history and the conscious way that a Pan-Africanist outlook has been sustained within the Ghanaian intellectual tradition and public life.

Ghanaian writing has probably borne more of the African historical burden than any other national literary tradition in Africa and this is its unique input into the constitution of African writing; Ghanaian writers generally privilege realities that are central to defining the experiences of black people from the pre-colonial era to the present. It is no surprise,

for instance, that three out of the four writers that Cristel Tempels studies in *Literary Pan-Africanism* are Ghanaian. Two major factors explain this orientation in Ghanaian writing. The first is that Ghana has many of the reminders of the traumatic experience of slavery, the single most important assault on the continent, which constantly inspire creative reflection on the experience. These are mainly forts and trade posts that European slave traders used:

Ghana boasts the distinction of having sixty castles, forts, and lodges built along its three-hundred-mile coastline. The Portuguese were the first to protect their trading interests by building Sao Jorge da Mina, or St. George's castle, at Elmina in 1482; thereafter the Dutch, Swedes, Prussians, Danish, and British all competed for dominance, with many fortifications changing hands as one European power triumphed over another. With the abolition of the slave trade, these structures were often used as colonial administrative offices and prisons; after independence in 1957, some functioned as schools or military training academies; Christianborg castle in the capital, Accra, has served as Ghana's seat of government since 1876. (Richards 622)

The monuments have become important for the development of a heritage tourism built around the experience of slavery. These historical sites attract diasporic Africans who are eager to trace their African roots and emotionally recapture the origins of the African diaspora. The second factor is that Ghanaians have particularly sustained the Pan-Africanist vision and this has come to be associated with the way the Ghanaian nation itself is imagined. Kwaku Larbi Korang's *Writing Ghana, Imagining Africa* situates African modernity within a trans-national framework and demonstrates the sense in which the intellectual history of Ghana must proceed from acknowledging the foundation that a form of Pan-Africanism from the nineteenth century laid the foundation for the Ghanaian outlook on the African identity. The fact that Ghana was also the first African country to gain independence from the British naturally placed the responsibility of leading the rest of the continent on

her. Kwame Nkrumah, who led Ghana to independence and became her first president, sought to translate his vision of an integrated Africa into reality by also encouraging Ghanaians to long for an African nation in which people of the African diaspora will also have a sense of belonging.<sup>2</sup> He consequently promoted an official policy that encouraged people in the African world to return as a practical expression of the grand dream of uniting Africa and recovering from her fragmentation by colonialism. This reinforced the link between the new nation and the African diaspora to the extent that many diasporic Africans<sup>3</sup> either relocated to, or had extended sojourns in, Ghana. But the concern with shared historical experiences in the Ghanaian literary imagination has never been limited to the backward glance that the preoccupation with the involuntary removal of Africans through slavery represents. Ironically, more critical attention seems to have been devoted to the seeming obsession of this literary tradition with the consequence of colonial incursion and the failure of independence that is just a phase in the engagement with the black condition in Ghanaian writing.

### **I. Traumatized Memory and the Black Literary Imagination**

While it is not possible to separate the engagement with the historical and cultural connections between continental Africa and the rest of the African world in Ghanaian writing from the propagation of Pan-Africanist ideals in Ghanaian national life, it is also possible to appreciate the same reality in the context of the strong link between black writing in general and collective memory. Black writing is remarkable for its ability to compel a journeying back in space and time to reflect on the assault of history as it seeks to locate black peoples and their conditions in time. In the process, it prioritizes shared experiences as opposed to personal quests. The consequence is that no informed reading of the black expressive culture will fail to appreciate its immersion in history. But because no literary tradition simply reproduces history, the black creative imagination is almost obsessed with recreating, reinterpreting and recovering remarkable experiences. For people of African descent forcibly taken away from their lands and peoples, these include slavery and the consequent loss of identity, the agony of the Middle Passage and

the eventual quest for freedom and integration in the new environment. In continental Africa, the sad events include the loss of a substantial population in very dehumanizing circumstances, the protracted assault of colonial exploitation and dominance as well as the irresponsible manner in which the indigenous ruling elite has been managing independent Africa. In every case, the writer seems to have been preoccupied with the challenges of history and the urgency of recovering from its negative impact. These experiences, unpleasant as they are, have inspired unique forms of musical and literary expression.

It is not difficult to demonstrate the sense in which almost every major event in the black historical experience has been recreated in Ghanaian letters. Various generations of Ghanaian writers as well as different genres have sustained this commitment in a variety of ways. Kofi Anyidoho opines that “[Pan-Africanism and the issue of slavery dominate Ghanaian literature because there is no major Ghanaian writer who has not engaged either or both of these themes in his or her work” (Conversation 8). Kwado Oseyi-Nyame demonstrates in his study of the novels of Kwabena Selky and J.E. Casely Hayford, two Ghanaian nationalists, that a great deal of Pan-Africanist consciousness animated their imagination. Ayi Kwei Armah has given the most eloquent contemporary expression to the transnational consciousness that centralizes black experience, and his work explores various aspects and phases of the same history in a way that makes him register his vision of the black experience in a consistently passionate fashion. There is a tendency in the works of these writers not to be content with exploring the African but the wider black experience and thereby recognize affinities to black people who have been separated from the homeland. This is the sense in which we should appreciate the ease with which Awoonor’s *Comes the Voyager at Last* and Armah’s *Osiris Rising*, for instance, privilege the trope of return in which the familiar quest for self-discovery that inspires many diasporic Africans to come to Ghana in the bid to appreciate their roots, now provides a basis for fictional recreation.

But while fictional recreations of African history are familiar, engagements of the same experiences in the genre of poetry have not enjoyed adequate consideration in spite of the fact that they are far more diverse

and inventive. The desire to imagine experiences that transcend localized realities and imaginatively construct a black world is a value that the works of Kofi Awoonor, Kwabena Eyi Acquah and Kofi Anyidoho share with the poems of Langston Hughes, Kamau Brathwaite, and the Congolese Jean Baptiste Tati-Loutard. While the poems have been studied as works of art and have also been located within the *oeuvres* of their authors, it will be exciting to read them comparatively with other works that inhabit the same space. Works as diverse as Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and Jean Baptiste Tati-Loutard's *Poems of the Sea* demonstrate profound consciousness of the variety of journeys that have shaped the black identity. Joseph McLaren maintains that "Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" [...] written prior to his journey to West Africa, suggests the literary seeds of Afrocentricity through references to the Nile and the pyramids" (528). The Congolese Tati-Loutard captures the pain of loss that the involuntary shipment of Africans caused those left behind and emotionally recreates the assault of the Middle Passage in a way that makes the sea, the site of the ordeal, the eternal witness to the affliction of his people. Braithwaite, a West Indian historian and poet, has presented what is apparently the most elaborate recreation of the black historical consciousness in his poetry. It is so wide-ranging in scope that it maps the many journeys that have shaped identity constructions in the black world.

In a sense, these poets draw inspiration from the—journeys—both spiritual and spatial—of African peoples in various parts of the world. They also acknowledge the bridge between Africa and the rest of the black world, underscoring a deep awareness of fragmentation. This article seeks to account for the inspiration for this consciousness and demonstrate the sense in which Kofi Anyidoho's *AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* and Kwado Opoku-Agyemang's *Cape Coast Castle* build on the Pan-Africanist consciousness by imagining the possibility of constructing a global black community. It suggests that writings by continental Africans on slavery and related experiences may be seen as complementing the component of the literature of the African diaspora on the same subject. Adopting the strategy of close reading in the study of Anyidoho's *AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* and Opoku-Agyemang's

*Cape Coast Castle*, I read the collections as presenting contemporaneous constructions of Pan-Africanism in the sense that they appreciate the fact that the historical and cultural ties that bind black communities in Africa and the black diaspora defy the constraints geography poses to their sense of cultural and historical affinity

## II. Pan-Africanism and the Vision of Wholeness

In spite of the fact that Pan-Africanism as an ideal features frequently in various struggles of Africans in and outside the continent, it has never designated a single and coherent consciousness because its various proponents have come to be identified with different and often conflicting conceptions of the shared dreams of African peoples. Right from the first Pan-African conference that was held in London in 1900,<sup>4</sup> Pan-Africanism has been identified with a variety of agitations and movements that prioritize nationalist dreams in Africa and the struggle for restoring the dignity of diasporic Africans. In other words, it has always been informed by the various challenges confronted by global Africans. But, it has also responded to the peculiar conditioning that the immediate environment dictated in shaping or modifying its aspirations in each context. Thus, “Pan-Africanism can in a general sense be said to encompass all the discourses, ideologies and all cultural and political practices which have been mobilised as a means of confronting the historical derogation of African peoples” (Osei-Nyame 138). For diasporic Africans, it provided the impetus for a collective quest for dignity in the face of racial discrimination and the prejudices that the experience of slavery imposed on individual and group aspirations in addition to serving as catalyst for celebrating a shared African heritage.

While providing a rallying-point for mobilizing diasporic Africans to revive a common sense of Africanness and prompting a desire to reconnect with their continent of origin, Pan-Africanism also created a major platform for agitating for self-determination in Africa. Pan-Africanist conferences, for instance, gave priority to the urgency of African liberation, and this was a meeting point between diasporic Africans and African nationalists who were to constitute the ruling elite in post-independence Africa. Michael Williams recognizes the shared values in the

Pan-Africanist thoughts of Martin Delany, Edward W. Blyden, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Ras Makonen, Pane Robeson and Kwame Nkrumah and Zionism (293), and associates a more restrained variant with Mwalimu Julius Nyerere who, in spite of seeing the prospect of an integrated Africa in the spirit of African unity, still saw it as a possibility in the future. Sonia Delgo-Tall, in underscoring the apparent lack of consensus among African leaders in this regard has, in this vein, argued that “Nkrumah’s Africa could not be Senghor’s Africa nor could it ever resemble Sekou Toure’s” (293). A way to appreciate this dichotomy is to recognize what Ali Mazrui calls “the distinction between Pan-Africanism of *liberation* and Pan-Africanism of *integration*” (35, original emphasis). While Nkrumah, for instance, desired a continental government, most others either did not subscribe to it or were simply content with other forms of integration that would not necessarily lead to forfeiting the opportunity to govern their individual countries.

While a common vision or experience of Pan-Africanism was impossible in the various parts of the African world, we cannot deny the fact that it has served and continues to serve a variety of purposes. What is pertinent is to appreciate its essence in spite of its various realizations. This, in my estimation, consists in a quest for wholeness. The longing for wholeness is a logical response to the fragmentation that the many forced removals of Africans to different parts of the world caused. It received impetus from the desire to recuperate from the violence that the balkanization of Africa into territories by European powers caused in the nineteenth century. This may account for Pan-Africanism’s ambitious agenda, embracing every imaginable aspect of life that has suffered some form of assault in Africa or in the larger African world—culture, religion, economy, politics and identity.

### III. Reconstructing Black Identity

Even though Pan-Africanism designates the sense of communality between continental Africans and their dispersed kindred, it has, in reality, never adequately accounted for the totality of the African world because the Pan-Africanist project has always privileged the trans-Atlantic axis of the African diaspora. In underscoring the exclusion of a significant

component of the African diaspora from conventional mappings of the African world, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza suggests that “the historic African diasporas can be divided into four categories in terms of their places of dispersal: the intra-Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and Atlantic diasporas” (44). While admitting that the Atlantic has the most developed historiography, he sees the necessity of exploring the others. Kofi Anyidoho presents a similar argument in *The Pan-African Ideal in the Literature of the Black World*:

To talk of the black world is to talk of the world’s five continents and most of its inhabitable islands, especially the islands of the Atlantic, the Pacific, even the South Seas. In our search, however, we must be careful not to dwell only on where black people may be found in significant numbers . . .

To define the boundaries of the black world we must begin, not by facing the geographical world, but by confronting the word “black”. There seems to be something illogical and almost irrational, in the application of this colour term as the defining characteristic of a whole race. The glaring fact is that a great majority of those referred to are anything but black. This is particularly true of the black diaspora. (2–3)

To adopt the diasporic model in defining the relationship between Africa and the rest of the black world will at once imply recognizing a great deal of shared values as well as divergences. While cultural Pan-Africanism sustained nostalgia for the homeland and resulted in many diasporic Africans resettling in various parts of Africa, spatial and temporal gaps make it necessary to appreciate the fact that diasporic Africans, after many centuries of settlement in various parts of the world, do not necessarily share exactly the same realities with those in the homeland. This is what characterizes the relationship between diasporas and their homelands in general. As Sean Carter explains,

[t]he idea of a diaspora is attractive in the sense that it offers a progressive possibility of non-essentialised self, and can break the supposed fixed relationship between place and identity.



Within diasporic communities this can be achieved through the maintenance of multiple connections between the present 'here' and a past 'there.' (54)

Contemporary Ghana, in which much of the poetic imagination that relives the enduring ties between Africa and the African diaspora thrives, nurtures a consciousness of the presence of the past and the fact that the history of the nation is incomplete without considering its strong ties with people of African descent in various parts of the world. The vision of Nkrumah, the most ardent promoter of Pan-Africanism with regard to appreciating a sense of African brotherhood, has endured in Ghana as it has permanently stamped affection for members of the global black family on the collective consciousness of the nation. Proof of this is the significant presence of those that Obiagele Lake describes as "diaspora African expatriates" in Ghana, and the influx of diaspora Africans into the country through the tourism industry built around such heritage sites as the slave forts, the W.E.B Du Bois Centre for Pan Africanism and an event like Pan-African Historical Theatre Festival (PANAFEST).<sup>5</sup> Anyidoho argues that PANAFEST, in particular, has become "a focal point for Ghana's traditional image as "the home of Pan-Africanism" on the African continent" and that "several contemporary Ghanaian writers are turning more and more to the subject of Pan-Africanism, with special attention to interrelations between continental Africa and the diaspora" ("National Identity" 16).

To underscore the possibility of what I describe in this article as the reconstruction of a black identity, by which I refer to the effort to link up imaginatively various black diasporic communities with the homeland, is not to suggest that the Pan-Africanist project has become irrelevant. On the contrary, the diasporic awareness in this case is intended to map specific situations and recognize particular locations of African peoples, each of which is seen as unique but also related to the homeland. As will be clear from reading the two collections, it is possible to harmonize this outlook with the conventional expression of Pan-Africanism. It simply modifies the often vague and romanticized vision that characterized earlier understandings of the African world, and it is safe to assume that it

may become the standard way to define relationships in the black world in the twenty-first century.

While Kofi Anyidoho's *AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* and Opoku-Agyemang's *Cape Coast Castle* may differ in certain respects, it is important to draw attention to the unique and common insight that they give into the representation of the African world in contemporary Ghanaian poetry. The collections demonstrate that it is not only writers in the African diaspora that are preoccupied with the tragedy of slavery and the emotional longing for all that was lost in the process. They represent the agony of Africans who have had to live with the deprivation, loss and emotional trauma that the involuntary relocation of millions of their people—fathers, children and—breadwinners—brought to them as well as the consequent emasculation of the continent. In this sense, the poets underline the fact that the story of slavery, as well as the yearnings it created among the community of the enslaved, will be incomplete without reference to how it is represented by the societies that were plundered. The collections present complementary explorations of the whole phenomenon. While *Cape Coast Castle* is almost exclusively concerned with accounting for the origin of the slave-derived African diaspora, *AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* presents a contemporaneous mapping of the African diaspora. But as with other imaginative recreations of the black experience in the African diaspora, the two works underline the diverse implications of these events. The fact that the works were inspired by intimate and sustained engagements of the poets with the realities that they represent—as stated in the extended introductions to the collections—reinforces their significance. Anyidoho is a cultural activist with particular interest in African and African-heritage literatures,<sup>5</sup> while Opoku-Agyemang, equally demonstrates concern with the history of slavery beyond his creative work. His argument in “A Crisis of Balance: The (Mis) Representation of Colonial History and the Slave Experience as Themes in Modern African Literature” confirms this emphasis:

For the most part our creative writers hug the bare shorelines of African history, touch the colonial experience and report that

to be all there is. The vastest depths and structures of African history, slavery and the slave trade, is hardly ever regarded in a sustained way or mined in any serious fashion for its lessons, its truths and its metaphors. (64)

#### IV. *Cape Coast Castle* and the Other Half of the Story

In a ten-page introduction to *Cape Coast Castle* that situates the—castle, from which the book takes its title, in history and justifies the concern of the collection,<sup>6</sup> Opoku-Agyemang expounds the significance of Cape Coast Castle in the discourse of trans-Atlantic slavery and its diverse symbolic values. The poems that the castle inspired are a product of sustained reflection on its lingering and disturbing presence. The poet recognizes what the castle symbolizes not only for diasporic Africans but also for the immediate community which he describes as “the victim society”:

The victim society consisted of the ordinary members of the community, neither slaving chief nor warlord, who were given as gifts to slavers, or were haggled over and sold: captives, prisoners of war, the kidnapped and the total range of people swept away, or who daily suffered the threat of capture. Apart from the actual captives there were those killed in slave wars, and those who could not endure the arduous march to the castle.

Yet, tragic as the fate of all these victims is, perhaps the most horrendous experience of all the victim society belonged to a group hardly ever mentioned in the literature: the damned who survived, those deprived relatives of the captured African. (5)

The poet’s extensive introduction to the collection is very helpful in the sense that it provides sufficient historical insight into the making of the castle and what it represents to him. In a sense, we may read this intervention as an attempt to capture much of the burden that the poems bear.

*Cape Coast Castle* is unique because, most of its poems, in spite of being divided into three parts (“Four Hundred Years of Vigilance,” “People in Me” and “First Trip To Sunrise”) confirm the sense in which

the history of slavery that the castle represents haunts the present. The poems that are related to the main concern of the collection are in the first part, constituting about half of all the poems. While a temporal gulf exists between the experiences with which the castle is associated and the moment of its recreation, slavery is not spoken about as a distant reality, but as one that various generations of “the victim society” must psychologically engage. It is in this sense that the work attempts to present an aspect of the story of slavery that is not possible to encounter either in the narratives of enslaved Africans or histories of slavery written on the other side of the Atlantic. The collection makes no pretense to recreating the origins of all African diasporas; it concentrates on the trans-Atlantic slave trade identified with the castle. It therefore complements whatever the direct victims of slavery and their descendants have had to say about the experience, revealing the complexity of the experience even within the black historical experience. In this sense, it reinforces the argument of J.F. Ade-Ajayi that “in the end all Africans and peoples of African descent were victims, not beneficiaries of the slave trade” (9).

Certain tropes facilitate meaning in *Cape Coast Castle*. The most recurrent is the awareness that the perspective the work presents on slavery is “here” (Africa) which comes before and blends with whatever is “there” (trans-Atlantic African diaspora) to tell the whole story. Much of the collection also depends on the castle and the sea as symbols in the discourse of slavery. The images that recur are largely visual and the mood that permeates the world of the poems is one of gloom, horror and unspeakable inhumanity. The poems are cast in the narrative mode and evoke various scenarios and summon the various categories of people that were involved in slavery. The scenarios that feature in the collection include capture scenes, the slave market, movement of chain gangs, the branding of slaves, the inner chambers of the castle, journeying on the sea and the agony of relatives of the enslaved.

The castle and the sea are the most important images in *Cape Coast Castle*, and both are thoroughly demonized. The castle is a torture chamber, an indecent grave and an arrogant monument that conceals the atrocities of its interior by outwardly appearing white. But it also represents a history. As “Eclipse” reveals:

NOTHING COULD be simpler:  
History simplified as a castle  
The wind stands mouthing  
Nothing can be heard  
Except the rainroar of the past

It was dark then, it is dark now. (40)

It is not enough to argue that the castle represents history. The relevant question is ‘what type of history does it tell?’ African peoples on the two sides of the Atlantic will easily agree that the castle was first of all a major point of dispersal, one that we cannot discountenance in a bid to understand the pangs that produced the trans-Atlantic African diaspora. “What the Castle said” testifies to this,

I ruined the sea’s virginity  
When the evening dropped her skirts:  
With such delicate arms and gestures  
Did love reach me in my deepest dungeons  
I am at edge a restless sea  
Surinam Jamaica Alabama Nova Scotia  
I echo the owl’s surprise—eyes in the glare  
The zombie-shuffle of four hundred years ...

The silhouette of a defiled race leaps flaming  
But it’s only a shadow  
I remain strong in the darkness of my whiteness. (47–48)

In complementing the images of the castle, its closest ally in the business of enslavement, the sea, is not so vilified. It is the bridge between the New World and the homeland for dispersed Africans; at the same time, for those who could not survive the horror and agony of the Middle Passage, it was also a devourer. As stated in “The Executioner’s Dance”: “The careful coast pinned its future/ To the fat ships’s cargoes/ And threw the rest to the sharks” (18).

In the spirit of Pan-Africanism, Opokwu-Agyemang avoids localizing the history of slavery that he constructs by appropriating events and per-

sonages that relate to it in various parts of the continent. These include Olaudah Equiano, who was captured from Igboland in what is now eastern Nigeria, and Sengbe Pieh, a man of Mende origin from what is now Sierra-Leone, who led the famous Amistad Revolt. Pieh represents the valiant Africans who resisted slavery and regained their freedom. His story continues to inspire others because he "... searched everywhere/ Looking for freedom in everything/ He found it on deck in a spike" (21). The poet retains Sengbe's original name, as opposed to Joseph Cinge, which was imposed on him, to celebrate his valour and assert his humanity. And in a bid to suggest that slavery devalued its victims, "Pacotille," a poem set in Ethiopia, itemizes the articles for which Africans were exchanged: "13 beads of coral/ 1/2 a string of amber/ 28 silver bells/ 3 pairs of bracelets" (34). "Equiano: A Mother's song" recreates the agony of a mother who could not be placated: "They snarled him like a beastly thing/ Took him washed out in streams of fishy swarm/ Scaled and sold him, my flute song/ Where his mother can never reach him/ My body is streaked with red clay/ I will not be consoled" (66).

Much as *Cape Coast Castle* tells the story of trans-Atlantic slavery, it does not go beyond recreating incidents and experiences that relate to the ordeals associated with it from the point of capture to the journey on the seas. This is at best half of the story of slavery; it complements the second half that is told on the other side of the Atlantic. The strength of the poems derives largely from their imagery, even though a certain measure of incoherence frequently impedes its effectiveness. But the sense of gloom and agony that defines the world of *Cape Coast Castle* is unmistakable. The poet-persona is able to sustain the emotional involvement of the average reader in events that he retrieves from the archives of popular memory by adopting images that fuse haunting precision with empathy. This is evident in "Scarification" which attempts to recapture the branding of enslaved Africans: "sword slashed the greening flesh/ Maame held on/ The gap was not me/ But the word touched the earth in me/ Saturated wind with a howling/ My hanging will would not let go." The poem ends on a similar note: "Maame chased fingers/ Over the route of the knife/ Her face shone/ The scar is hers, all hers/ Just as I am too" (37).

**V. *AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues*: The Cartography of Blackness**

*AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* takes its title in part from *la resistencia cultural de negro en America Latina: logica ancestral y celebracion de la vida* by Muamba Tujibikile,<sup>7</sup> a Catholic priest of Zairean origin that Anyidoho encountered in the Dominican Republic in the early 1990s in the course of a ten-day visit to the country and Cuba, a trip that inspired many of the poems in the collection. The rest of the poems were also inspired by the many journeys he made at the time. Anyidoho reveals that

the poems were written at a period when I was doing a lot of travelling back and forth. I spent quite a bit of time in the United States and even here in Ghana—being involved in PANAFEST, being involved in the Du Bois Centre, and other programmes we organised were connected with Pan-Africanism. (“Conversation” 7)

Some useful insights that “IntroBlues,” the introduction to the collection, provides complement these reflections:

There is a journey we all must make into our past in order to come to terms with our future. In the last decade or so I have journeyed into various spaces of the world. And everywhere I go I must confront dimensions of myself that I did not know were there.... There is something of my story carved into every tombstone of the world, something of my story enshrined in every monument and every anthem ever erected in the spirit of endurance. (xi)

The collection reads almost as a travelogue because most of the poems in it respond to situations that the poet encountered in various parts of the African world, from continental Africa to the New World. But the poems do not stop at representing various spheres of the black world; they chronicle his efforts at cementing bonds among black peoples and project his concern about what he describes as “our history of pain and endless fragmentation” (xi). A way to appraise the work is to see it as a poetic rendering of a journey of discovery that is a reverse form of the homeward journey that diasporic Africans normally embark upon in

a bid to discover their roots in Africa. In this sense *AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* attempts to map the black world.

Far from romanticizing the black condition, the collection dispassionately reflects on the condition of black people. It does not ascribe all their woes to the actions and conspiracies of outsiders. It is divided into three main parts that are separated by two pauses, giving the impression that it aspires to a performance. Parts One and Two, “CaribbeanBlues” and “AncestraLogic” are particularly relevant to the concern of this study.

Anyidoho’s response to the labelling of people of African descent in the Dominican Republic as Indios, despite the fact that very many African practices survive among them, is a critique of an official denial of the African identity in this context. In “The Taino in 1992,” he appraises this suppression as a way of perpetuating the elimination of identities and peoples in the West Indies, starting with the Arawaks. The turbulent seas in the region then synchronize with the “...turbulent memory of the taino/ And a hurricane of Arawak sounds” (3). In “Republica Dominica” the paradox that governs the African presence becomes apparent as the survival of African drumming and dance traditions in the Fiesta de Palos negate the official inscription of their identity. The irony that defines their identity is worth considering. On the one hand, “The census office undresses your skin/ peels your veins/ and dilutes your blood... Dispossessed of your ancestry/ your BlackNess/ Dissolves into vague regions/ of the Indios Myth” (8). On the other hand, “On the fiesta grounds/ AncestralLogic reclaims/ lost dimensions/lost dimensions of the Soul// Each face a mask/ of agony overwhelmed/ by joy of life hatched/ in rituals of re-/Birth/ in StormFields of Cane Sugar &/ Death (9). The fact that the same cultural manifestations animate Christian worship without being acknowledged makes the official position ridiculous:

Outside the Church

A group performs the ResurrectionDance.

The Drums reconstruct foundations of lost HomeLands.

The voice of the BaKongo

Rise deep into a sky silenced

By its own lack of creative Truth. (10)



The figure of a tarantula with “dis-/crepancies and dis-/jointed limbs” provides an insightful metaphor for the situation under review, leading the poet-persona to appropriate it as the “Pitiless and venomous/ image of history’s dis-/tortions/ of our furious Race” (11). But the present in Haiti for the African people is not any better as poverty and the dislocation of basic social institutions stare the discerning in the face. The memory of the heroic resistance of the past reveals the contrast between the promises of the Haitian Revolution with the impotence of the present. This has made breadwinners out of teenagers who have lost fathers to the sugar fields:

These are the children  
Of Macandal and Toussaint  
Of Dessaline and Olivoro Mateo  
  
But ancestral trophies  
are no valid collateral  
For the new industrial enterprise. (6)

But if the heritage of the Haitian heroes has been lost, the Cuban dream has survived in the face of incredible negative propaganda. Cuba then becomes a symbol of hope and the possibilities of defiance. It will then be improper to see the African diaspora as a landscape of frustration and failure so long as the Cuban story inspires hope. After experiencing the splendour of its landscape, the glory of its history and the joy of reunion with the Afro-Cuban world, the poet-persona, comes to appreciate the spatial gulf between continental Africa and her diasporas on the one hand and that among African diasporic communities on the other. His dream of an integrated global African community comes to a climax in “HavanaSoul” where he envisions a Pan-African air route to counter the memory of the Middle Passage and link up the African world:

... from Ghana to Havana to  
Guyana  
And and on and on to Savannah in Georgia of the deep deep South.  
With AfricanaAirways we can renavigate the Middle Passage,

clear  
the old debris and freshen the waters with iodine and soul-  
chlorine.

And our journey into SoulTime  
will be  
The distance between the Eye and the Ear (16-17)

The shortening of distance that the poem envisions is a metaphor for linking up the black world so as to symbolically reverse the damage that the history of slavery did to the sense of oneness of the people. "Earthchild," demonstrates the sense in which the cultural unity of global Africa is not in doubt based on a shared musical heritage which amazingly survives in the various languages that Africans now sing, suggesting (as the refrain to the poem states) that: "... *those who took away our Voice/Are now surprised/ They couldn't take away our Song*" (22). The metropolitan space in the major cultural hubs in the black diaspora must take the credit for conserving values that survived the Middle Passage:

And in all the alleyways of old London and Paris and  
Lisbon  
And in all harlemways of New York Chicago New  
Orleans  
In Kingston-Jamaica Havana in Cuba Atlanta in Georgia  
On Vodoun shores of Haiti                      our Haiti Oh Haiti!...  
you will find footprints running backways  
into lives once lost to sharp rhythms of Panther's greed  
lives all lost to cold embraces of Atlantic's waves. (21)

*AncestralLogic and Caribbeanblues* does not construct any artificial sense of harmony, solidarity and justice in the African world. Neither does the poetry present contemporary Africa as a terrestrial paradise. "Santrofi Anoma,"<sup>8</sup> which expresses solidarity with Jack Mapanje, detained by the despotic regime of Kamuzu Banda, reveals the travails of visionary intellectuals in contemporary Africa. "Harare Blues" also decries the neglect of veterans of the Zimbabwean war of independence

long after the birth of the nation. But while the poet–persona lends the less active segments of the African diaspora a voice, “Lolita Jones,” the poem that articulates the sense of hurt and betrayal that many African-Americans nurse against their African kindred, is made very dramatic. Apart from denouncing the complicity of some Africans in the enslavement of fellow Africans, it also vindicates Nkrumah, whose legacy has been a subject of debate and controversy in Ghana, for giving diasporic Africans a sense of belonging in the homeland. By drawing attention to this lingering sense of mistrust and vindicating Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanist legacy,<sup>9</sup> the poem seems to suggest that genuine unity cannot thrive among black peoples until they address the mutual reservations they harbour about one another—whether arising from genuine claims or stereotypical perceptions:

Long ago your People sold ma People.

Ma people sold to Atlantic Storms.

The Storms first it took away our Voice

Then it took away our Name

And it stripped us of our Soul.

Since then we’ve been pulled pushed

kicked tossed squeezed pinched

knocked over stepped upon and spat upon.

We’ve been all over the place

And yet

We aint got nowhere at all.

That’s why when the Black Star rose

I flew over to find ma Space

And aint nobody like this Brother

Who gave me back ma Soul. (28)

To read “Lolita Jones” as inscribing dissension and fragmentation is to misread it. The poem is a frank and sincere outburst which passionately presents a quest for true reconciliation in the African world. Anyidoho seeks to invent bases for African unity in “Children of the

land: A Sequence for African Liberation,”<sup>10</sup> his most important Pan-Africanist poem. Robert Fraser considers it “[t]he centrepiece of [the] ... collection” (371). The poem celebrates a shared dream of African freedom and constructs a common vision from the travails and struggles for self-determination in the four regions of the continent. It invents a common image of Africa from the charm of her physical and cultural geography and the courage she has demonstrated in withstanding various intrusions and crises. The second movement of the poem starts on this note:

WE are the Children of the Eastern Lands.  
the lands of the Rising Sun.

Once so long our hopes were ambushed  
by the Children of the Panther  
But by the fighting skills of our warriors  
We broke the Panther’s jaws and pride.

Today we fold our dreams gently in our arms.

Like the rift Valleys of our ancient lands  
Our roots cut deep into the bosom of our Earth...

As in the other sections, the closing section inscribes hope and possibilities of progress:

Our land’s beauty is larger than the dream of praise singers

Our hopes rise deep from the bosoms of our Earth  
And touch the very forehead of the Sky.

From the mountain glories of our Eastern lands  
We come to you with the victories the worries of our People:

We are the Children of the Eastern Lands. (43)

In sum, this paper demonstrates the sense in which a trans-national black identity in the poetry of Kofi Anyidoho and Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang operates within the discourse of shared cultural memory. It is no surprise that the two poets limit their focus to the trans-Atlantic, even

though they are conscious of the fact that the African diaspora is global. The fact that they explore the trans-Atlantic probably demonstrates an awareness that, apart from being the dominant segment of the black diaspora, it is also immediately associated with the Ghanaian experience. Their works are significant because they recognize the possibility of drawing inspiration and challenges from the diverse realities that have shaped the (dis)location of black peoples and their conditions in the world today. In this sense, they dispense with the wild dream of an ingathering in the Zionist fashion or a desire to terminate a sense of African diaspora. Their alternative vision advocates the linking up of various segments of the black world as a necessary act of collective self-apprehension, conscious of the fact that the sense of collective definition of Africans peoples in their various locations cannot be divorced from their histories.

## Notes

This paper was originally presented at the 32nd Annual Conference of the African Literature Association held at La Pame Royale Hotel, Accra, Ghana, from May 17 to 21, 2006.

- 1 Ghana was known as the Gold Coast until independence.
- 2 The constitution of the Convention People's Party clearly stated this as part of the party's manifesto. In addition, Nkrumah made the pursuit of a free and united African nation his dream. The Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute in Winneba was to effectively propagate this consciousness and ensure its sustenance within the Ghanaian intellectual culture.
- 3 Notable among these are W.E.B. DuBois, Maya Angelo, Richard Wright and Kamau Braithwaite.
- 4 The conference attracted thirty-one delegates from various places: the United States, West Indies, Britain, Canada, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.
- 5 Apart from his scholarly interest in the legacy of slavery in West Africa, Anyidoho has travelled extensively in the African diaspora and is actively involved with institutions and events that promote a shared African heritage. He is on the Management Board of the W.E.B Du Bois Centre for Pan-African Culture in Africa. He has also been involved in PANAFEST in addition to serving as the Director of the African Humanities Institute which is also based in Accra.
- 6 The essay that serves as introduction also appears as an essay entitled "Cape Coast Castle: The Edifice and Metaphor" in *FonTomFrom: Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film*.
- 7 Anyidoho's encounter with the priest at a seminar was to influence his attitude to the official denial of the Africanness of people of Dominican Republic. In

spite of the fact that they are not recognized as African, but as Indios, ancestral logic plays itself out by revealing itself vibrantly in their dances and music in which Anyidoho saw the rigour and vibrancy associated with spirit possession in continental Africa.

- 8 The social burden that the modern African writer bears necessitated drawing on the idea of the mystery bird in Akan mythology called Santrofi Anoma. To take it home is to bring misfortune, while leaving it in the bush will amount to losing a treasure. This is a way of suggesting that modern Africa cannot do without the writer.
- 9 Anyidoho's effort in this poem is better appreciated in relation to a similar attempt at enacting an imaginary trial of Kwame Nkrumah in which various witnesses are summoned to testify for or against Nkrumah and his legacy in a poem entitled "In the High Court of Cosmic Justice" in an earlier collection, *Earthchild*.
- 10 The Ghana Commission for Children commissioned the writing of the poem. Children from schools in Accra were selected for the performance. Each of them held the flag of the country they represented. But they also appeared in groups along regional lines. After stating the shared experiences in the four regions of the continent that they represented, each of them stepped out again to introduce the country he/she represented. The proper way to appreciate the poem is to situate it within the tradition of poetry performance in Ghana.

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