

The publication of Kofi Anyidoho's latest collection of poems, *The Place We Call Home*, should be an exciting moment for those of us who enjoy poetry. It is the second book of poems that he has released with accompanying audio CDs, the first being *Praise Song for the Land* which came out in 2002. The CDs are a welcome addition; the poet's own rendition of the words in his deep, vibrating voice will delight even the most casual listener.

The Place We Call Home is divided into three 'Movements' which begin with a backward plunge into earlier times, proceed to an engagement of events in the more recent past and end with a contemplation of current happenings. In his preface, Kofi Anyidoho remarks that the poems, variously inspired or originated, constitute 'an endless yearning to pay homage to ancestral time and seek guidance into a future beyond the mirages of our daily human existence'. Accordingly, the title poem, 'The Place We Call Home', presents the spatial and ideological concepts of 'place' and 'home' upon which this (re)collection of memories is constructed. These twin concepts invite us to recall the appropriation and exploitation of our 'home' and our ensuing 'unhomeliness', and to reflect on the author's 'decolonizing' mission of remembering our story and of establishing 'home' as an anchor against the storms we have weathered.

Anyidoho is already a celebrated African poet with seven collections to his name. In all his poetry, memory is as much the grand theme as the guiding metaphor by which the poet transforms our collective experience into his distinctive voice. In *The Place We Call Home*, memory is the leading light in what he terms 'This Dance into a Future/That ends in the Past'. Through memory, he transports us on a psychic 'journey into time', across the borders within which our perceptions of ourselves and of others are typically trapped. It is an eye-opening journey during which he scrapes away 'a topsoil of bad memories' and reveals to us, with blinding clarity, 'our constant acts of Dis-remembering/our sacrificial eggs laid at shrines of Alien Gods'. On this journey, too, memory collapses space

Memories Out of Time / Recalling Home

Helen Yitah

The Place We Call Home

by Kofi Anyidoho

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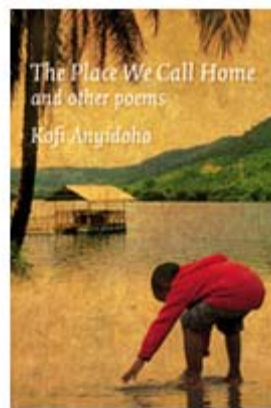
into time, so that, like the Iraqi General in the poem 'The General's Battle Plan', who sits on CBS rueful about his betrayal of his country to enemy forces, we often find ourselves 'Memories away from home'.

In *The Place We Call Home*, the trajectory of the journey is captured in the arrangement of the poems in the three MOVEMENTS. The poems appear in a pattern that mimics the backwards-forwards ceremonial dance called *Husago*, announced in the 'Prelude' to 'Ancestral Saga II'. We take the first step backwards in MOVEMENT ONE where poems like 'Husago', 'Ancestral Roll-Call' and 'Backwards Glance' plunge us into the very beginnings of Time and toss us through some 'Thunder Storms', 'Rain Storms' and 'Desert Storms' that we have weathered together up to 'this hopeful moment of our Re-collecting'. In these, as in other poems in the collection, time is measured in the rhythm of drum beats punctuated by pauses pregnant with the pain and hope of recall and rebirth:

And the union of Time and Sound and Silence

Gave birth to Rhythm and Rhythm
Gave birth to Pleasure and Rhythm
Gave birth to Life and Rhythm
Gave birth to Death and Rhythm
Gave birth to Dance

From this point, we are ushered into a middle passage where the speaker stands still for a moment and throws a 'backward glance' at the 'million agonies' suffered during the dark journey to slavery and serfdom, before turning his gaze in MOVEMENT TWO to the more recent past of war and terror, particularly the September 11 events and the several invasions of Baghdad as well as its resilience through it all.



It is however in the intimate stories of loss and longing in MOVEMENT THREE that the emotional energy in this assemblage of memories can be most felt. The most noticeable feature of this Movement is that, of all three sections of the book, it has the closest affinity with the Ewe dirge. More than simply complaints, these poems are songs of sorrow, and the sorrows involved are immense, touching all humanity. As Véronique Tadjo remarks in the 'Afterword' to this volume, 'suffering has no borders'. In poems like 'Waiting in the Shadows', 'Gifted: The Girl Died', 'A Song for Fo Willie', 'Daavi' and 'Post-Retirement Blues', the poet's passion and lyricism tighten our nerves like the strings of a banjo on which he plays notes that soar into the air, sink down low and sad, rise up hopeful, rise and sink, dance and weep. In 'Daavi', for example, we encounter one woman's determination to defeat death as 'She tackled Death Up/the

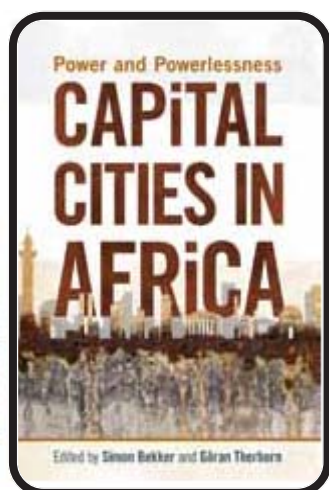
mountain slopes Down/ to craggy foothills of Hell'. Then:

Death kicked her in the ribs;
She clutched her sides and
staggered back to health.
Death jammed her spinal cord;
She stretched her neck and danced
her way to wealth
Death choked her breath with
trembling hands;
She sneezed and sneered with
scornful smile.

The Place We Call Home picks up thematic threads from Anyidoho's earlier work, including racism and Pan-Africanism which should be familiar to readers of *Ancestral Logic and Caribbean Blues* and *Praise Song for the Land*. Also well known is the self-effacing bard who deems himself unqualified to speak on the weighty matters he recounts. Yet, in this new collection, there is none of the humour in his earlier works like *Earthchild* or *A Harvest of Our Dreams*. Instead, *The Place We Call Home* is more serious in tone and mood, more meditative in its recall of the terror and horror of man's inhumanity to fellow man. The tone and mood are as much a part of form as they are integral to meaning. Consider, for example, the following lines from the poem, 'nine-eleven' in MOVEMENT TWO, where the destruction of the towers of the World Trade Centre is captured both in the meaning of words and in the mis-alignment of lines:

As the towers burst
into flames
The future crumbles
into ruins
And O how our soul's being
Is heavy laden
With rage and ruin and Smoke.

But we are not allowed to become overwhelmed by the austere evocation of pain and endurance. We are soothed, even enchanted by the tremolo of the bard's voice as he stands in the eye of the storm, singing, contemplating the future, with great hope.



Capital cities today remain central to both nations and states. They host centres of political power, not only national, but in some cases regional and global as well, thus offering major avenues to success, wealth and privilege. For these reasons capitals simultaneously become centres of 'counter-power', locations of high-stakes struggles between the government and the opposition. This volume focuses on capital cities in nine sub-Saharan African countries, and traces how the power vested in them has evolved through different colonial backgrounds, radically different kinds of regimes after independence, waves of popular protest, explosive population growth and in most cases stunted economic development. Starting at the point of national political emancipation, each case study explores the complicated processes of nation-state building through its manifestation in the 'urban geology' of the city – its architecture, iconography, layout and political use of urban space. Although the evolution of each of these cities is different, they share a critical demographic feature: an extraordinarily rapid process of urbanisation that is more politically than economically driven. Overwhelmed by the inevitable challenges resulting from this urban sprawl, the governments seated in most of these capital cities are in effect both powerful – wielding power over their populace – and powerless, lacking power to implement their plans and to provide for their inhabitants. In its concentration on urban forms of multi-layered power, symbolic as well as material, *Capital Cities in Africa* cuts a new path in the rich field of studies related to African cities and politics. It will be of interest to scholars in a wide range of disciplines, from political history, to sociology, to geography, architecture and urban planning. *Capital Cities in Africa* constitutes an important contribution to the burgeoning literature on African cities and urbanisation. Its inclusion of Francophone capitals such as Conakry, Lomé, and Brazzaville is particularly significant in that details about such cities are often missing in English language accounts. The emphasis on the heterogeneous histories through which power is generated and configured through colonial and post-colonial temporalities and how this process itself engenders specific vulnerabilities and constraints is the book's key strength.

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