

**TOPIC:**

**A Perspective on Aspects of Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Ghanaian Culture: A Study of  
the Poetry of Awoonor and Anyidoho**

**KNUST**

**NAME:**

**OPOKU, PHILIP NANA YAW**

**DEPARTMENT:**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**STUDENT NUMBER:**

**PG 3456909**

**SCHOOL:**

**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND  
TECHNOLOGY**

**SUBJECT:**

**ENGL 791 THESIS**

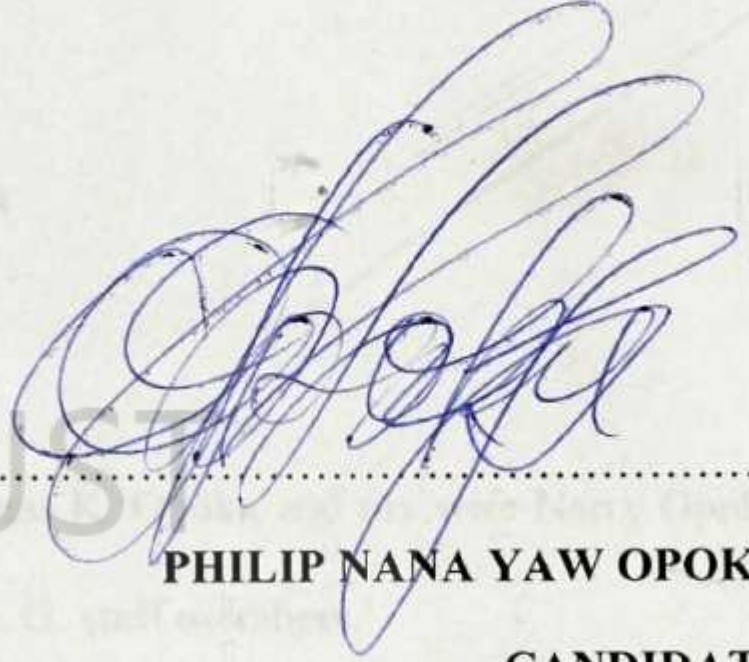
**SUPERVISOR:**

**PROF. S. K. OKLEME**



## DECLARATION

I certify that this is my own original work. Where references have been made to other people's views and analysis, full acknowledgements are given. This thesis has not been presented in whole or in part to another institution for any degree.



**PHILIP NANA YAW OPOKU**

**CANDIDATE**



**PROF. S. K. OKLEME**

**SUPERVISOR**



**HEAD, DEP'T OF ENGLISH**

**July 2012**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CONTENT

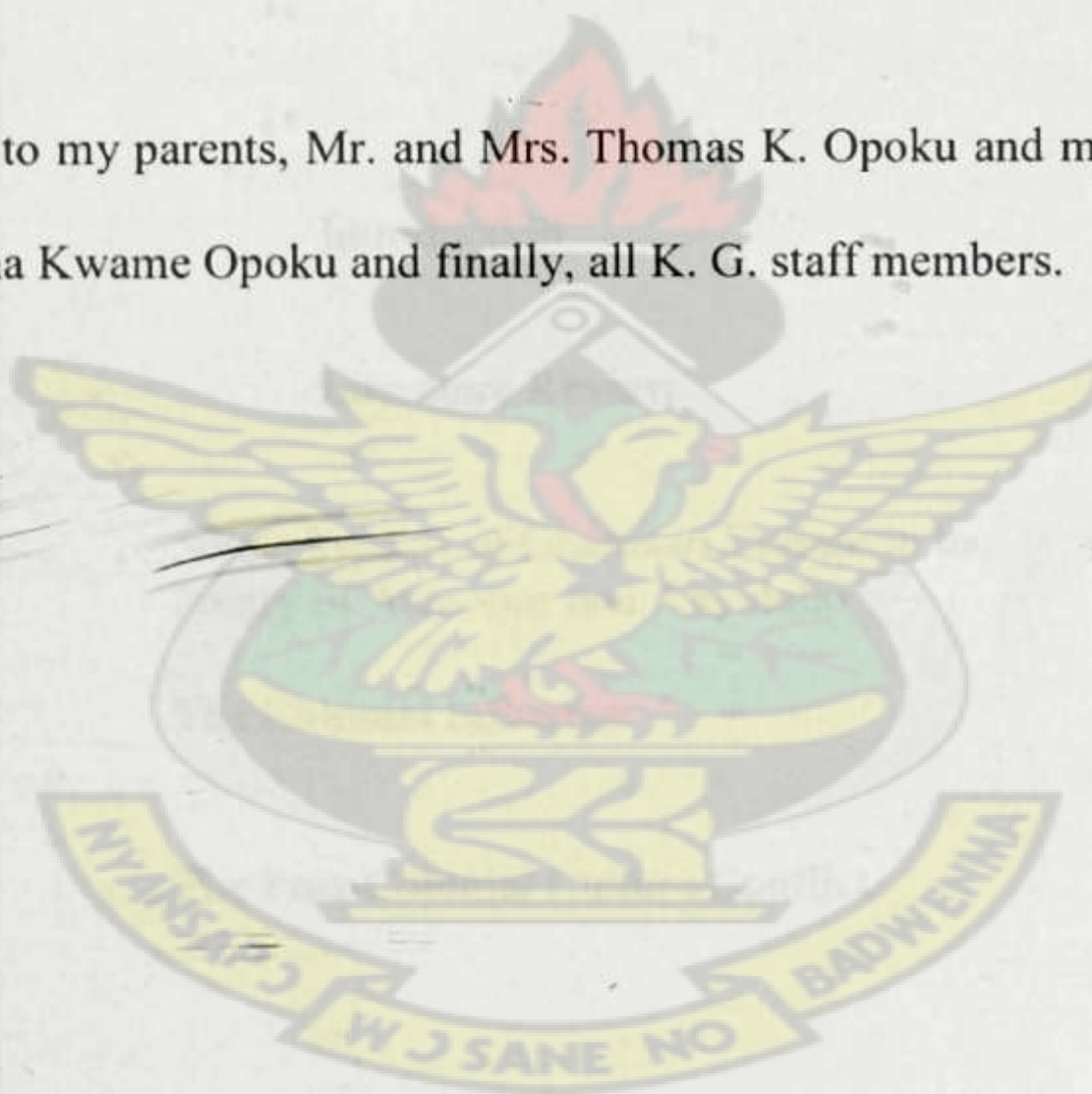
### PAGE NUMBER

### Dedication

### DEDICATION

KNUST

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas K. Opoku and my wife Narry Opoku and baby – Laud Nana Kwame Opoku and finally, all K. G. staff members.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENT	PAGE NUMBER
Declaration	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
Chapter One	Introduction
	1
	Literature Review
	10
Chapter Two	Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture in the Poetry of Awoonor and Anyidoho
	27
Chapter Three	The Colonial Influence
	66
Chapter Four	The Post-Colonial Culture Conflict
	80
Conclusion	91
Works Cited	94



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I thank God for the strength of mind and stability in my life to pursue the MPhil English programme. Based on this strength and stability, I worked to finish this thesis on time. May your name be praised forever more. You are indeed the great God of wonders.

I acknowledge the effort of my supervisor, Professor S. K. Okleme whose fatherliness and mentorship helped and encouraged me to work through this thesis. Another important person is Dr. Mrs. Dadson who supervised most of my term papers and challenged me to work hard. Other significant people worth mentioning and acknowledging are Dr. John Aning, Dr. Confidence Saka who did proff-reading of this thesis and Mr. K. O. O. Armah who supervised my undergraduate dissertation and Mr. Amoako who also inspires confidence in my life.

I also want to acknowledge the Department of English, KNUST for making it possible for me to pursue my MPhil programme. Finally, yet importantly, it is of worth to mention the Balme Library, U.G. Legon where a greater part of the library materials for this research was obtained and also the effectiveness of the librarians contributed largely to the content of this paper.

May the Almighty God bless and favour the lives of all those mentioned with abundance in his Kingdom. Amen.



## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to investigate some aspects of Ghana's culture before, during and after colonialism using the poetry of Awoonor and Anyidoho. It examines how they have used poetry to portray some aspects of the Ewe culture and by extension, Ghanaian culture. It also looks into the effect of colonialism on the colonized and the post-colonised. It analyses some colonial theories such as hybridization, double-vision or consciousness and cultural dilemma as some of the major effects of colonialism.

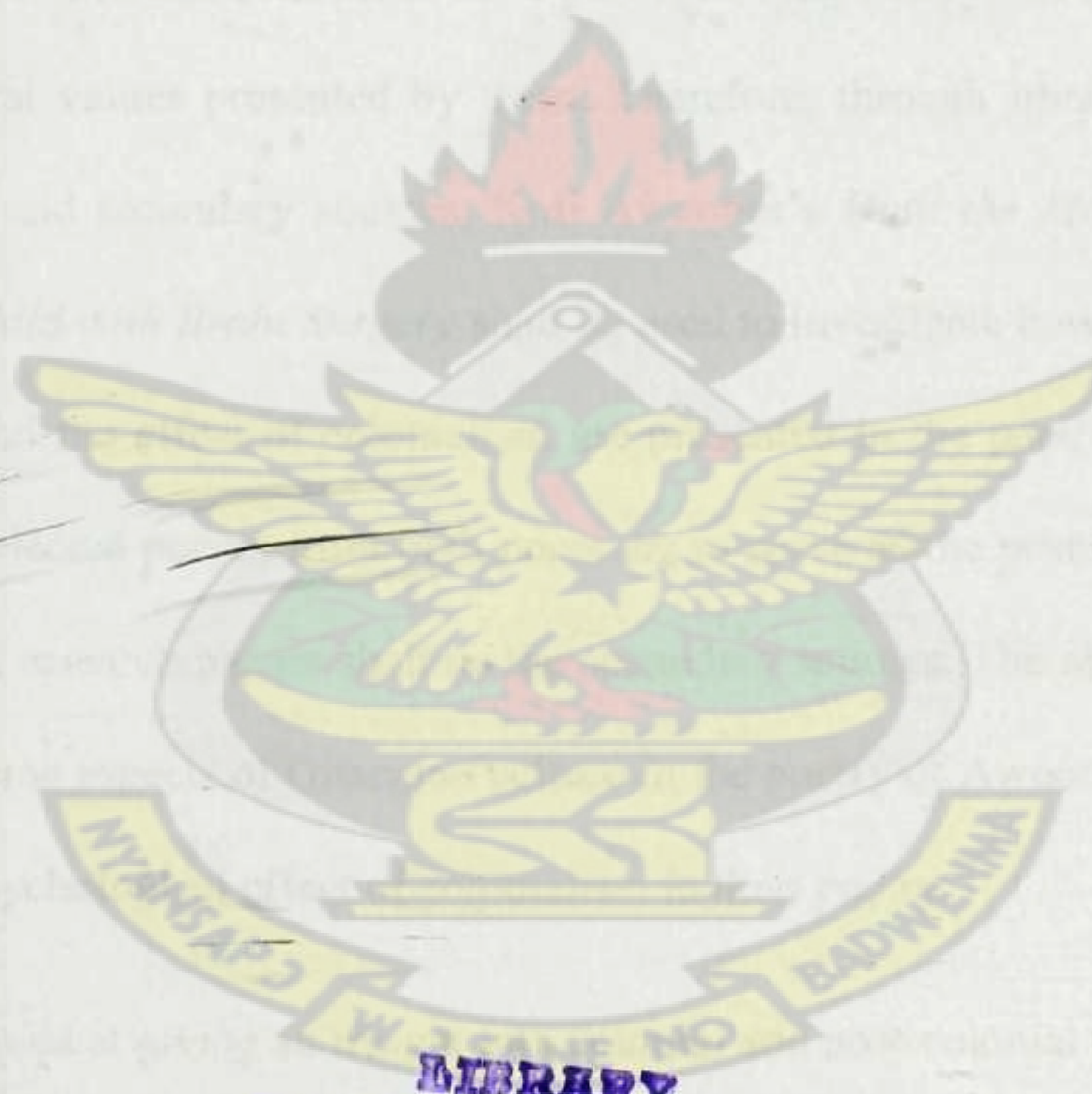
Awoonor and Anyidoho are poets who hail from Wheta in the Volta region of Ghana and they are cousins. They are astute intellectual luminaries, poets, and writers who have demonstrated a depth of understanding of their culture and have used it for their poetry. They have portrayed different aspects of their culture through their poetry. Some of these aspects of their culture are traditional religion, social settlement in the Ghanaian society, the family system, chieftaincy, rites of passage and ancestorship. They also show signs of syncretism and cultural synthesis in their works. They have developed as individual poets from using the Ewe poetry and music as primary sources to a more advanced form where their imagery is drawn from different sources. They have developed to accept their cultural heritages which are their traditional Ghanaian culture and that inherited as a result of European invasion.

Based on research, it is safe to suggest that both poets have shown a deep understanding of the Ewe culture and used it to define the voice as poets. They have both gone through the phases of poetical development whereby they started by using Ewe poetry as raw material for their poetry and to the second phase where they struggled to either remain with their indigenous culture or to synthesize the cultures. Finally, they have grown to accept both cultures by adopting and



defining their own poetical voices which are neither wholly indigenous nor foreign. They have reached a stage of development where they have couched their own intellectual identities.

Another significant thing is that they have tried to preserve their indigenous culture by documenting it in their poetry and this will, in the long run, promote the study of Ghana's traditional past at higher levels of study and preserve it for future investigations.



**LIBRARY**  
**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF**  
**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**  
**KUMASI, GHANA**



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Kofi Awoonor and Kofi Anyidoho are astute intellectuals, poets and writers whose works have been largely discussed. They are thought to have drawn largely on the Ewe tradition. However, several researchers, critics and academics have surveyed their poetry but have not dealt directly with specific cultural values presented by them. Therefore, through library research, dwelling largely on primary and secondary sources, Kofi Awoonor's *Until the Morning After* and Kofi Anyidoho's *Earthchild with Brain Surgery* shall be used to investigate how aspects of traditional Ghanaian culture and the effect of colonialism are presented in the poetry of these intellectual luminaries. Some selected poems from both poets are to serve as the primary materials whereas critical writings and research papers shall be the secondary sources. The objectives of this thesis are to investigate some aspects of Ghanaian culture in the poetry of Awoonor and Anyidoho and to understand the psychological effect of colonialism in their poetry.

The thesis is also aimed at giving an insight into colonial and post-colonial theories and how they reveal the colonised in the poetry of Awoonor and Anyidoho. Besides these objectives, the thesis is to investigate the double-vision and nervousness associated with the colonized as presented in their poetry. This study would help explain the Ghanaian traditional culture from the perspective of Anyidoho and Awoonor and how it has undergone transformation as a result of colonialism.

The justification for this topic is that even though some writers and students have worked on these two poets and have examined several aspects of their poetry, this thesis seeks to add to discussions on how aspects of pre-colonial and post-colonial Ghanaian culture permeate the works of Awoonor and Anyidoho and the extent to which they seek to promote 'Africanness'



through poetry. It also seeks to help interpret Ghanaian culture using the Ewe tradition from which both poets hail. This is not to say that Ewe culture is typically Ghanaian culture but as Awoonor conceded while reading Nketia's note on Asante's musicology, he (Awoonor) could identify with aspects of Asante culture because such things pertain in Ewe musicology. This means that in the Ghanaian culture, although not the same in all the ethnic groups, yet the same cultural values are upheld except that they are practiced in different ways. The thesis shall therefore serve as an interpretation of Awoonor and Anyidoho's poetry and also as a way of preserving the Ghanaian culture for onward transmission to generations to be born.

This thesis is theoretically underpinned by Post-Colonial theory of which Frantz Fanon's theory shall be largely used. This is because he espouses hybridism, double-consciousness and cultural dilemma as some of the major effects of colonialism. Hybridization is a state in which the colonised assumes a double nature which influences his behaviour, perception and attitude. Double-consciousness is also a state in which both the colonised and post-colonised have a conscious awareness of a double nature. In these natures, one is inherited from his indigenous culture and the other is acquired through exposure to another culture, social interaction, educational and religious affiliations. Finally, cultural dilemma is when the post-colonised is struggling between turning to either the indigenous culture or lives with the understanding of the new culture which is mostly the culture of the colonialist. These concepts are portrayed in some of the poems – *Weaver Bird*, *Exiles*, *The Cathedral*, *This World must Go*, *What Song shall We Sing*, *The Anvil and the Hammer*, *I Heard a Bird Cry* - to be discussed in the thesis. Also, in these poems, *My God of Songs was Ill*, *Exiles*, *The Cathedral*, *The New Warmth*, *The Weaver Bird*, *The Purification*, *I Heard a Bird Cry*, *Night of My Blood*, *The Years Behind*, *More Messages*, *At the Gates*, *Do not Handle It*, *This Earth My Brother*, the precolonial and post



colonial Ghanaian cultural values and colonial and post colonial cultural transformations are presented.

Pre-colonial Ghana had its own cultural identity which was predominantly religious. Pre-colonial Ghana had a religious belief system which is the traditional worship in which there is a strong belief in the Supreme God who, it is believed, cannot be reached by ordinary mortals and therefore the people resort to lesser gods. These lesser gods receive prayer through the pouring of libation and pass it on to God. The lesser gods are classified functionally and named accordingly. The naming is also done based on tribal or ethnic groups. In Akan, the lesser gods are referred to as *anyame*. Sarpong says that they have “generic names in every tribe, but a multitude of proper names.”<sup>1</sup> The Krobo call theirs “*dzemawoi*”<sup>2</sup> This is etymologically explained to mean “guardians of the world.” They are called upon in several context such as war periods, festivals, naming ceremonies and so on.

Pre-colonial Ghana also has a belief in high moral life. Gyekye explains that “Morality is intrinsically social, arising out of the relations between individuals.”<sup>3</sup> By this explanation, Gyekye means that morality is ingrained in the Ghanaian psyche and it informs the behaviour and interpersonal relations among the people. If there were no such thing as human society, there would be no such thing as morality, Gyekye adds. Pre-colonial Ghana was not a chaotic environment as one has been made to believe by the colonial lords who came under the guise of trade partners only to establish hegemony over the nation and consequently subjugated the entire populace culturally, politically and economically.

Sarpong and Gyekye also affirm the fact that pre-colonial Ghana believed in death and ancestorship. They say that the ancestors are “certain individuals of the past generation of a



lineage who are said to have distinguished themselves in many ways and in particular, to have led virtuous and exemplary lives worthy of emulation by succeeding generations of the lineage.”<sup>4</sup> Sarpong in particular does not make any distinction between the use of the words, “saint”<sup>5</sup> and “ancestor”<sup>6</sup>. He argues that it is just a matter of semantics. Both words, according to him, mean, people who once lived and led good lives on basis of which the living name their children after those saints and ancestors. The only difference is that while the traditionalist demonstrates his veneration by worshipping in the form of pouring libation to invite the spirit of the dead to help in time of need, the Christian does not call upon the saints to help; instead, they call on God for help. Nonetheless, it is significant to note that ancestorship was ingrained in the social fabric of the pre-colonial Ghanaian society and even to a large extent in post-colonial Ghana regardless of the introduction of Christianity.

Other important cultural beliefs of pre-colonial Ghana adequately discussed by many writers include the political system which was and still is hinged on chieftaincy. However, the chieftaincy systems practiced in Ghana differ from one ethnic group to another. In Ghana, there are two dominant family systems. These are the matrilineal and patrilineal systems. The matrilineal system is an inheritance through nephews. This is where the Chief or King bequeaths his throne to his sister’s son.

This is predominant among the Akan group. The Ewes, Gas and other ethnic groups practice the patrilineal system in which the first son inherits his father, the king. This system of inheritance is similar to the system of primogeniture that prevails in Britain and other kingdoms of the world. However, the chiefs or kings have the same functions and powers. They are the law-makers, the link between the living and the spirit world.



However, regarding all these practices of pre-colonial Ghana, a lot has changed with the advent of colonialism. Colonization comes with what Fanon describes as "psycho-affective injuries."<sup>7</sup> This means that the "individual is without an anchor, without a horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels."<sup>8</sup> "For colonialism", according to Fanon, "this vast continent was a haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals – in short, the Negro's country."<sup>9</sup>

Post-colonial Ghana, therefore, has seen several changes in its religious, social, educational and political systems based on the definition given by the colonial powers. These changes have led to what Fanon describes as a nervous condition – a condition in which a dilemma is created for the indigenes as to whether to remain with the new cultural definition or the pre-colonial Ghanaian culture or to subscribe to the amalgamation of both identities. The effect of the colonial experience is dire. This shall be discussed in greater detail because it is important in establishing the effect of colonialism on the poets under study.

LIBRARY  
KUMASI  
KUMASI UNIVERSITY OF  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
KUMASI-GHANA

Colonialism introduced Islamism, Christianity, multiparty-democracy, the judiciary one finds today and formal education. These changes have caused a confusion in which Nkrumah, Mazrui and other pan-Africanists argue that the peace of the colonized continent lies in the marriage between the three gods – Islam, Tradition and Christianity.

Nkrumah advocated "~~philosophical~~ consciencism"<sup>10</sup> as a "way of integrating Africa's humanistic past with principles borrowed from Islam and Euro-Christianity."<sup>11</sup> Nkrumah considers the three religions as Africa's heritage. He says, "...a new harmony needs to be forged, a harmony that will allow the combined presence of traditional Africa, Islamic Africa and Euro-Christian Africa, so that this presence is in tune with the original humanist principles underlying African



society.”<sup>12</sup> He adds that “Our society is not the old society, but a new society enlarged by Islamic and Euro-Christian influences,”<sup>13</sup> and that the cultural distress of African societies is a belief that “contemporary African society must be understood as an extraordinary complex, a culturally rich continent which exists within a world that it has helped to shape.”<sup>14</sup>

Ghana, of course, is no exception to the post-colonial dilemma. Ghana is just a microcosm of Africa, and is also faced with these post-colonial difficulties. Ghana has to embrace multi-party democracy and redefine the role of chieftaincy in traditional societies. Even though the traditional role of the chief in adjudication has not been totally absorbed by the courts, the new legislative system and the courts seem to get all the attention for the enactment of laws and dispute settlements respectively. In modern times, Ghana is experiencing a change in chieftaincy practice. This change has been embraced by several Ghanaian chiefs who are actively involved in national development through education, infrastructure, the provision of the basic needs of society such as potable water and other social amenities. Obviously, chieftaincy has undergone a total change with little left of the traditional roles of watching over the customary laws and ceremonies such as festivals and so on.

Religion is also another area where Ghana has experienced a change. Now, Ghana is considered a secular state. One can find all kinds of religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism, in Ghana. This is the result of colonialism. However, Christianity is considered the major religious belief of the people and majority of them profess it. Christianity is a product of colonialism. What is threatening is the religious disenchantment among the populace who show affinity to Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and others. There is a constant rivalry among adherents of the various religious groups.



Post-colonial Ghana has a kind of educational system which inconspicuously stratifies the society in a more destructive way. The pre-colonial Ghanaian society was literally oral. Knowledge was transmitted through oral means but in today's era of formal education, everything is documented and formalized. This has also come with its different professional groups. These groupings have their own operational methodologies. Such operational methodologies have further stratified the Ghanaian society even though some people may argue that it has rather organised the Ghanaian society very well.

Meanwhile, post-colonial Ghana has been affected culturally in terms of its arts and literature as well. Formal education has enabled the intellectual elite to document the folklore that was handed down by the forefathers. Anyidoho, Awoonor, Okleme, Amoako, Nketia, Dickson and others have worked tirelessly to document poetry and folk songs of their respective ethnic groups.

Education, therefore, has had a positive influence on Ghana. Nonetheless, education's negative effect has been the production of a new indigenous bourgeoisie. These indigenous bourgeoisies run counter to the European bourgeoisie who "prepares enough fences and railings to have no fear of the competition of those whom it exploits and holds in contempt."<sup>15</sup> The indigenous bourgeoisies are described by Fanon as "racism of defense, based on fears"<sup>16</sup> because they retard national growth and stifle political and economic developments in their respective countries. A situation is created whereby the elite bourgeoisies' interest is to exploit and corrupt national development system but not to develop them. As a result, the elite bourgeoisie is used as a puppet by the former colonial power to perpetuate the economic imperialism disguised as aids both financially and technically and termed co-operation. This is aptly described as neo-colonialism.



It is clear from the discussion above that Ghana prior to the European invasion had its own culture which most culture proponents believe is the heart and soul of the moral and social life of the people in a given society. It must only be stressed that a lot has changed during colonial and post-colonial Ghana. "A Perspective on Aspects of Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Ghanaian Culture: A Study of the Poetry of Awoonor and Anyidoho" is therefore a discourse on how the poets have used poetry as a means of portraying aspects of pre and post-colonial Ghanaian culture. From the discussion on pre-colonial and post-colonial Ghana, it is obvious that pre-colonial Ghana had its own way of life which is somehow different from today's Ghana. Ghana, before the advent of colonialism, has its own beliefs and practices rooted in its past. Traditional worship, chieftaincy, communal settlement, extended family practice, the rites of passage and ancestorship were some of the cultural practices of the Ghanaian society.

Post-colonial Ghana, on the other hand, is polarized. The polarization is the consequence of religious plurality that is unable to merge. Though Nkrumah and other pan-Africanists have advocated the marriage of the three gods which have been considered Africa's heritage, it is obvious that the various religions cannot merge. To merge is impracticable.

Meanwhile, this thesis shall examine the following aspects of the Ghanaian culture: religion, social settlement and the Ghanaian society, the family system, chieftaincy, rites of passage and ancestorship. It shall also look at the colonial influence on education, religion and others and finally, the negative effect of colonialism on the colonized. Meanwhile, the next chapter shall discuss aspects of Ghanaian culture seen in the poetry of Awoonor and Anyidoho but before that literature review and culture definition shall be done.



## END NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Sarpong, Peter. Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974. p. 14

<sup>2</sup> Ibid p. 14

<sup>3</sup> Gyekye, Kwame. The Unexamined Life: Philosophy and the African Experience.

Legon: Sankofa Publishing Company, 2004. p. 55

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p. 162

<sup>5</sup> Sarpong, Peter. Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974. p. 33

<sup>6</sup> Ibid p. 33

<sup>7</sup> Fanon Frantz. The Wretched of the Earth. London: The Chaucer Press, 1963. p. 175

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p. 170

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p. 170

<sup>10</sup> Morwoe, Bjornson. Ed. Africa and the West: The Legacies of Empire. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986. p.35

<sup>11</sup> Ibid p. 35

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p. 4

<sup>13</sup> Ibid p. 35

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p. 4

<sup>15</sup> Fanon Frantz. The Wretched of the Earth. London: The Chaucer Press, 1963. p. 131

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p. 131



## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this thesis is premised on the materials in which Awoonor and Anyidoho have been evaluated and critiqued. Roscoe A. Adrian's Mother is Gold: A Study in African Literature, Understanding African Literature: A Study of Ten Poets by Goodwin K. L., Morell L. Karen's In Person: Achebe, Awoonor and Soyinka and finally Akogbeto C. Patrice's thesis, Bilingualism in the Creative Writing Process: A Comparative Analysis of Kofi Anyidoho and Agbossahessou are the works to be reviewed on these poets.

First of all, Akogbeto states that Kofi Anyidoho, the Wheta born, is from a family of poets and cantors in the tradition of the Anlo dirge known as the Akpalu tradition; and he grew up active among those poets and was recognized as a heno (composer of funeral dirges).<sup>1</sup> Obviously, Anyidoho is familiar with his traditions and poetry from childhood. As a Ghanaian, he is also given education which is largely religious through the colonial educational institution. This means that he is educated in the English language which is mainly the colonial medium for interaction. As an educated Ghanaian, well versed in his mother tongue and the English language, he decides to employ both media of interaction to reach out to his varied audience. He has done this so well that Frazer observes that "Anyidoho has his own English."<sup>2</sup> Anyidoho himself has said about the use of the mother tongue that "We cannot forever escape the need to reconnect with the daily realities and dreams of the majority of African people whose working language, even now, to be an African mother tongue, not a French or English or Portuguese, not a foreign language or anguish."<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile Anyidoho believes European language should be used "only as a starting point of rebellious and necessary act of self-recovery and self-assertion."<sup>4</sup> In effect, Akogbeto's work reveals the mastery of code-switching in Anyidoho's



poetry which is obviously a post-colonial effect; and he asserts that Anyidoho has a conscious appeal in the use of the different pedagogic codes which help to promote his poetry universally.

On the other hand, the Wheta born Awoonor has been considered by Goodwin as a "syncretist"<sup>5</sup> in his critical work, A Study of Ten Poets: Understanding African Poetry. Goodwin argues that Awoonor combines all experiences, be they personal ones or the collective experiences of Africa into a single vortex of images. Awoonor grew up in the Anlo Ewe country of the Keta lagoon where the citizens fell prey to foreign infiltration; and he was educated in the Bremen Mission (the North German Mission Society). He is a cousin to Kofi Anyidoho and both drew largely on the Ewe traditions for their poetry at the beginning of their career. Awoonor, in particular, is credited with the use of "vibratory and rhythmic Ewe pronouncements"<sup>6</sup> and popularizing Ewe poetry and folk songs by intertwining English and Ewe languages. In this case, Awoonor shows that he thinks in his local lingua and then in English. He has been criticized for plagiarizing Henoga Vinoko Akpalu, the originator of the modern style of the Ewe dirge. In Awoonor's case, poems like "The Sea Eats Our Land at Home", "Songs of Sorrow", and "Song of War" are largely from the Ewe dirges, laments, and battle songs which he learnt in part from his mother, Afodomeshie, and translated them into English.<sup>7</sup> This experience of foreign infiltration, education and mingling influenced his perceptions of life, religion, politics and many other areas in his life. He says in Morell's In Person: Achebe, Awoonor and Soyinka that:

Don't forget that we ourselves in Africa, because of the missionary process of education, have also been made to veer away from the internal structure; the internal dynamic organism of that society; a lot of us now are making a very conscious effort to go back to this organism.<sup>8</sup>



Based on the statement above, Goodwin argues that Awoonor's poetical maturity is a result of a cultural synthesis which has been achieved in three phases. In each of these phases, one realizes a steady development and transitions from one state of perception to another. He states that the first phase of Awoonor's progress towards cultural synthesis was to rely heavily on Ewe oral poetry as his main source. In this phase, one reads a poem such as "Lovers' Song." This phase's central object is a journey to achieving communal and individual harmony or unity<sup>9</sup>, according to Goodwin. He explains, using Awoonor's *Exiles*, that the exiles are lost souls who have disturbed the former harmony; they have "slashed, cut and wounded their souls", leaving a 'mangled remainder in manacles."<sup>10</sup> *Desire* also concerns "the bewildered Wanderers" who "lost their way homeward."<sup>11</sup> In *Consummation*, according to Goodwin, is the search for the way of unifying the rituals of birth, circumcision, death, and eternity.<sup>12</sup> In "Rediscovery", the title-poem of Awoonor's first volume, unity in and with death is achieved:

There shall still linger here the communion we forged,  
the feast of oneness which we partook of.<sup>13</sup>

The first phase is also a process of equipping himself to be the spokesperson for the journey to self-discovery. This self discovery is what T. S. Eliot proposes when he says "What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career."<sup>14</sup>

Roscoe posits that West African writers are convinced that exciting creativity can only be achieved by returning to cultural roots lying deep in the past.<sup>15</sup> As regards this issue of turning to the past, Awoonor says "I should take my poetic sensibility... from the tradition that feeds my language because in my language there is a lot of poetry, a lot of music, and a lot of the old literary art – even though not written."<sup>16</sup> Roscoe believes that in "My God of Songs was Ill"

LIBRARY

FEB 1971



Awoonor addresses the issue of poetry and states that "betray or neglect your poetic heritage and the result will be poor art: this is the message of a poem celebrating the joy and inspiration of a renewed encounter with the ancestral tradition."<sup>17</sup> After going back to his traditions and becoming the mouthpiece of his god, Awoonor soon becomes aware that his personal god of song, the Hadzi voodoo that every Ewe musician has, is at present alone and cannot inspire him.

Such realization and desire to find his voice pushes him to the second phase of his career. The second phase was a process of bringing together in a single poem material from Ewe tradition and the European tradition in which he had been educated. In this phase of progress, two strands are set down side by side to emphasize a clash of cultures. Goodwin suggests that in this phase, writers such as General Manley Hopkins, W.B. Yeats (in mythic and political ideology as well as in the creation of a mysterious mood of cosmic immanence) and T. S. Eliot are major writers from which he draws inspiration and then a pervasive influence of the Bible can be seen in his poetry. "Easter Dawn" is an example of a poem for the second phase is cultural clash in his poetry.

Awoonor decries those poets who have abandoned their past completely for a foreign "god". He makes a point in an interview with Goldblatt that:

The setting up of a false myth in response to another false myth [colonialism]..... our ancestors were as barbarous and cruel and as devious as anybody else's ancestors. And there was no Golden Age in Africa any more than there was one anywhere else. The corruption of Africa is an aspect of its humanity. To deny that corruption – that we sold people into slavery and did all the usual horrible human things – is to suggest in a way that we were not human.<sup>18</sup>

The second phase is a period of making frantic effort in harmonizing his two selves. He battles with the cultural constructs of his past and his present which are largely Euro-centric. In such a



struggle for harmonization and unity, Awoonor finally reaches his third phase which is the cultural synthesis which permeates his third phase poetry.

The third phase is seen by Awoonor himself as a period of reaching his own voice. In this phase, the synthesis of culture is more pronounced than a juxtaposition of cultures which characterized his second phase of development. Awoonor himself concedes to the fact that he has synthesized cultures and says, "My soul is locked in alien songs."<sup>19</sup> Goodwin asserts that looking at the development of Awoonor from the first to the second phases one finds that Awoonor proceeds from a very naïve voice which was predominantly influenced by the Ewe culture. The second phase also was a mixture of cultures which were the Ewe tradition and Euro-Christian tradition. However, the third phase, as compared to the first and second phases which were full of "gaucheries, naïve sentimental passages, and awkward construction"<sup>20</sup> are no longer present. Goodwin argues that:

These evidences of poetic insecurity have almost entirely vanished from 'The Wayfarer Comes Home,' partly because of his maturity as a poet, his assimilation of his materials, his confidence in his own voice rather than that of other poets (whether Ewe or European), his control of the earlier tendency to diffuseness of subject, and his ability to find a subject and situation where he could write directly about his own condition (which he does without self-consciousness or self-pity), his role as a poet, and his dedication to the land of the Ewe and to Africa. The reverential ceremonial hush of earlier poems is largely absent now: instead there is a sharpness and clarity in the imagery such that it no longer needs to be smothered in ready-made ritual incense. Awoonor's deliberate syncretism, that carefully adopted apprenticeship, has now merged into his own authentic voice.<sup>21</sup>

At this point in his poetic development, Goodwin suggests that Awoonor uses materials from a multitude of sources such as the Bible, nursery rhymes, Christian Hymns, spirituals, political slogans, Andrew Marvell, Thomas Gray, T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, the original words of the



Ghana National Anthem, and a modern Anlo Anthem including his earlier poems for the purposes of reinforcing rather than opposing cultures.<sup>22</sup> His tone, meanwhile, is in the dichotomy between the old and the new cultures.

Again, "Buzz Powell, the jazz pianist; the crucified Christ; the childless villager; the man saddened by the venal politics of independence all merge into one, in much the same way as several of the disparate characters in *'The Waste Land'* merge into Tiresias."<sup>23</sup> Awoonor reveals about his poem that:

The Bud here, the Christ image, the person who is left almost totally bereft of any love or any support, is what we see again and again. We have seen him in the earlier part of the poem, I have no sons to fire the guns....' There is no opposition between these two – the 'I' of this section and the 'Bud' of the other. The Biblical echoes reflect the same thing. "My God gave it to me, this calabash, comes straight out of an Ewe song and coincides very well with, '...the Lord did not/let the cup pass away.' He will have to drink it. This is what I think suggests a groping, a journey towards unity.<sup>24</sup>

Awoonor contends as he compares the cultural attitudes of the Negritude and the British-colonised writers that:

A very interesting thing that I can touch on briefly is the division between this use of traditional constructs and the position held by the Negritude writers, particularly Senghor. While they are interested in the past for the sake of glorifying the past, I think our concern is for an interest in the past, which will illuminate the present, so we are not going to be locked in the past.<sup>25</sup>

The cultural synthesis seen in Awoonor does not only affect his outlook on life but his language as well. He opines that:

Now talking about English, therefore, each of us will bring into the English Language our own understandings our own transmutations of our own languages into English. So when I write English it will be different from Achebe's English. Achebe recreates Igbo in his English and, in a lot of my poetry, I recreate Ewe.<sup>26</sup>



From the discussion above on both Anyidoho and Awoonor as poets, certain conclusions can be drawn. The conclusions are that as a result of colonial influence there is a need for them to retrace their steps back to their tradition where they find it convenient to start their career from. However, in doing so, they admit the difficulty in which they find themselves. So, although they are conscious of their predicaments, they make conscious effort to recreate a new poetical order. While this attempt falls into difficult challenges, they use all the tools they have to create a poetical order and through this exercise they find their voice. It is also obvious that the English language is being used as a tool for self-discovery and self-identification and also for the promotion of the Ewe tradition of their forebears. It is in the light of these explanations that this thesis seeks to explore some of the specific cultural elements they present in their poetry, examine the extent of the cultural juxtaposition and cultural synthesis in line with the post-colonial theories in their works.

So far, we have been discussing the various views expressed by some critics and authors on the poetry of Awoonor and Anyidoho. The various stages through which their developments have passed have been noted. It is necessary at this stage to provide a definition of the word "culture" and show its significance in the thesis as a whole.

### **The definition of Culture**

At this point, the word "culture" shall be defined and a position for this thesis on culture shall be proposed to give a focus to the discussion. One realizes that many culture theorists have propounded different meanings as definitions of the word "culture". The word "culture", from the Latin *cultura* stemming from *colere*, meaning "to cultivate", is "an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and



social learning."<sup>27</sup> The English poet and essayist Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) says the word "culture" is an effort to get to know "the best that has been thought and said in the world"<sup>28</sup> and explains that it is the pursuit of perfection. He explains that culture is:

the pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.<sup>29</sup>

This concept of "culture" is comparable to the German concept of *bildung* which is explained as the effort in pursuing total perfection by knowing all that concerns a people or group in a given society and the best ideas that have been transmitted from generation to generation.

The statement cited above thus means that culture is a behaviour or practice that has been repeated over and over for so long that it has become acceptable by all members in a given community or society as the norm. However, what has been said and practiced does not make culture static but rather dynamic because as ages pass and new ones come, new ideas and thoughts are added to the stock notions of the best practices.

The notion that culture is pinned on best practice and passed from generation to generation has, however, been fiercely contested by Frederic Harrison and Bright as well as the Liberals of Britain and USA. The Liberals and like-minded men think that culture is "frivolous"<sup>30</sup> and a "useless thing"<sup>31</sup> because they believe that it is the economic empowerment of a nation and not religion and morality, which are at the heart of cultural development. But Arnold explains cogently that national culture is not measured by the country's wealth but by its moral and



religious soundness. He describes the Liberal as "Philistines."<sup>32</sup> In criticizing the Philistines, he rhetorically asks:

Consider these people, then, their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tones of their voice; look at them attentively; observe the literature they read, the things which give them pleasure, the words which come forth out of their mouth, the thoughts which make the furniture of their minds; would any amount of wealth be worth having with the condition that one was to become like these people by having it?<sup>33</sup>

And he describes those who sacrifice for the social good as "Hebraists" and "Hellenists". He says that the "governing idea of Hellenism is spontaneity of consciousness;" that of Hebraism is "strictness of conscience."<sup>34</sup> For Arnold, culture is aimed at achieving "sweetness and light."<sup>35</sup> Sweetness and light mean moral and spiritual soundness which propel individual and national development.

Arnold contends that culture has the capacity for solving the moral and social dilemmas in human societies because culture can only be born out of religion, especially, Christian religion which is a product of Hebraism and the Greek "immense spiritual significance inspired by the central and happy idea of the essential character of human perfection."<sup>36</sup> According to him, even though religion is good, some people have taken its language in the wrong way and this has affected the capacity of culture to reform those who are supposed to undergo moral and social reforms.

Arnold, arguing for the influence of religion, which he believes underpins culture formation in politics, supports Rev. Edward White that "When all good men alike are placed in a condition of religious equality, and the whole complicated iniquity of Government, Church patronage is swept away, more of moral and ennobling influence than ever will be brought to bear upon the action of statesmen."<sup>37</sup> Arnold and White believe that it is only through sound culture that



politicians will do what is right but as long as the culture of the nation is premised on wrongdoing or misconceptions such as those of the liberals, men shall continually do the wrong things in society.

In the same way, Fanon contends that the entire existence of human experience is anchored on culture. He posits that knowledge of culture being the anchor of human existence influenced the colonial powers to eliminate the very nature and character of the colonised in order to replace the colonized with a new self image. This means that the colonial power knew that what makes the colonised who they are, is the set of institutions which influence their conception of life and death, attitude, behaviour and practices. Therefore, removing the colonised from these sets of institutions and beliefs and replacing them with a new set which is foreign is a sure way of changing the identity and the world of the colonised. Fanon states about the colonialist that "by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it."<sup>38</sup> His point, of course, is to buttress the fact that people are identified by the common thoughts and life of the entire people in a community or nation and the colonialist would ensure such people are removed from what identifies them. After the colonial hegemony in African states, the subjugated realizes that "there is nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory and solemnity"<sup>39</sup> as he retraces his paths to self discovery. Again, Fanon criticizes the misrepresentation of the colonised culture by the foreign European power and says it is most unfortunate for the African cultural experience because the European colonialist sought to remove the identity of the African people or implant a new identity by coaching the colonised in Euro-centric culture.

Supporting Arnold's position on culture is Sarpong. Sarpong believes that culture is



...the integrated sum-total of behavior traits that have been learned, and have not only been manifested and shared by the members of a society, but also been passed on from one generation to another in an uninterrupted succession. It is of importance to note that culture is learned and that it does not depend on inborn instincts or flexes, or any other biologically inherited forms. It is almost wholly the result of social invention.<sup>40</sup>

He reiterates the fact that culture is not a one time experience of a people but a progressive development that meanders its way into all generations and defines paths for all the people in a given community. This notion suggests how people in a given society can be identified with certain common practices. When a baby is born, the child comes into the world with a *tabula rasa* which feeds on the stock notions already designed and accepted by the community; and the effect is that the child's behaviour and perception of things build around what he or she comes to meet as observable practices. This does not mean, however, that the acceptable norms and practices cannot be expanded but it is the starting point of behavioural formation and perceptual development until such a time that the community finds such behaviour and practices inimical to socio-human development.

However, the observation by Arnold that culture is a product of sound religious environment is not shared by Sarpong. According to Sarpong, the community, until it experiences a radical revolution would not change its belief systems especially in a closed society, where culture is thought to be "general."<sup>41</sup> All the members of a closed society have more or less the same "ideas, beliefs, values, techniques, ~~language~~, practices, way of dressing, food"<sup>42</sup> and so on. The difference of opinion on culture for both Sarpong and Arnold is how culture is formed.

Sarpong believes it is the long held practices and beliefs about death, life, occupation, religion and so on that form the basis of culture; but Arnold believes that a sound religious environment and quality education bring to the fore the best practices of the human experience passed on from



generation to generation. They differ on the source of sound culture because while Arnold writes with a strong influence from Christianity, Sarpong seeks to report what his research in the Ghanaian society has revealed. Nonetheless, sound culture can be achieved when enlightened people examine carefully the practices and norms that direct their paths and when they decide on the best practices and norms that are development oriented.

Said also adds to the discussion on culture. In his discussion of culture, he makes the point that "cultures come to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them' almost always with some degree of xenophobia."<sup>43</sup> The main point one can deduce from Said's view is the sense of belonging among a people or a group. The "us" and "them" phenomenon is a distinction between people who identify themselves with certain commonalities. The "us" and "them" shall be discussed extensively under colonialism and its effect later. At this point it is necessary to make the point that culture is a means of distinguishing one group of people from another. This can be done through certain distinctive features associated with the group in terms of behaviour, belief systems in death, life, after life, rites of passage and so on. Said's view is in support of both Sarpong and Arnold who believe that culture should identify the people in a given community and also bind them for a common cause.

Raymond Williams also opines that culture is synonymous with civilization. He argues that in Germany the word "culture" was borrowed from French with the spelling "*cultur*"<sup>44</sup> and from "*kultur*."<sup>45</sup> In the abstract sense, culture is "a general process of becoming civilized or cultivated."<sup>46</sup> He also considers it as "a description of a secular process for human development"<sup>47</sup> as defined by historians of the Enlightenment. However, Williams's argument springs from different angles. He examines the different usages of the word "culture" and underscores the fact that Herder says in a given society it will be difficult to ascribe a "unilineal



process"<sup>48</sup> of behavioural pattern to the entire population. He says Herder makes it clear that such assumption only promotes European cultural imperialism which makes culture mechanical and not that which was developed in the Romantic period where there was a sense of dynamism as a result of economic and political or religious groups who may have peculiar commonalities different from the rest of the population.

However, Herder's concern has been resolved. There is what has been described as sub-culture for specific groups with common practices and "high-culture" which describes those in the arts and so on. His discussion concludes that due to the arguments around the word "culture", there are three common senses in which it is used. These are:

the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development from C18; the independent noun whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group or humanity in general from Herder and Klemm and the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.<sup>49</sup>

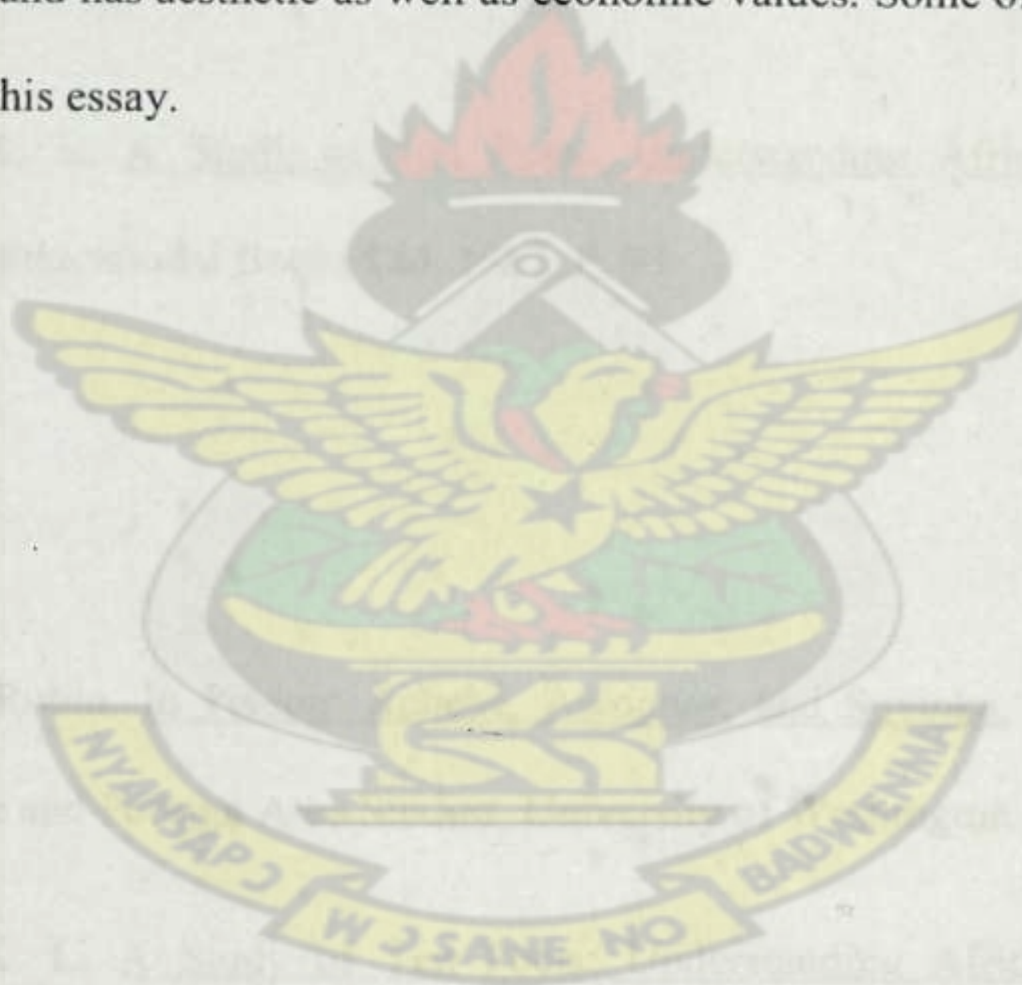
According to Williams's analysis, the discourse on culture is a controversy but the underpinning fact is that culture identifies a people or group in a certain social stratum, economic bracket and nationhood. This view of culture is shared by virtually all the proponents.

In conclusion, culture is important in determining the behavioural and developmental practices, whether social, human, academic or intellectual, of a group. It also emphasizes that culture is trans-generational, that is, not an exclusive preserve of a particular generation. It is a shared value and belief of a people from a generation to another generation. Finally, it is the identifying or binding factor in a given community the breach of which is sanctioned by the recognized authority within the society. The candidate shall therefore premise the discussion of this thesis on Sarpong's view of culture because his definition looks at the totality of culture which is all that



defines a person – rites of passage, political institution, food, ancestral belief system and many others are all recognized.

From the discussion above, it is evident that all people or groups have their own unique cultures and Ghana is no exception. It is generally believed that Ghana's traditional past, that is, its belief system, has metamorphosed as a result of colonial experience. Pre-colonial Ghana is a religious society, has a moral philosophy, and political authority through chieftaincy, belief in life and after life. It also believed in humanity and brotherhood, communalism and individualism, the family, human rights and has aesthetic as well as economic values. Some of these belief systems shall be discussed in this essay.





## END NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Akogbeto, C. Patrice. Bilingualism in the Creative Writing Process: A Comparative Analysis of Kofi Anyidoho and Agbossassou. Accra: Department of English, University of Ghana, 1999. p. 31

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 39

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 37

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 37

<sup>5</sup> Goodwin. K. L. A Study of Ten Poets: Understanding African Poetry. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1982. P. 93

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 94

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 94

<sup>8</sup> Morell. A. Robin. In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka. Seattle: Institute for Comparative and Foreign Area Studies, University of Washington, 1975. P. 147

<sup>9</sup> Goodwin. K. L. A Study of Ten Poets: Understanding African Poetry. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1982. P. 94

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 94

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 94

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 94

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 94



- 14 Roscoe. A. Adrian. Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature. Cambridge: University Press, 1971. P. 9-10
- 15 Ibid. p. 10
- 16 Ibid. p. 10
- 17 Ibid. p. 11
- 18 Goodwin. K. L. A Study of Ten Poets: Understanding African Poetry. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1982. P. 96-97
- 19 Ibid. p. 98
- 20 Ibid. p.105
- 21 Ibid. p. 105-106
- 22 Ibid. p. 98
- 23 Ibid. p. 95
- 24 Ibid. p. 95
- 25 Morell. A. Robin. In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka. Seattle: Institute for Comparative and Foreign Area Studies, University of Washington, 1975. P. 148
- 26 Ibid. p. 155
- 27 Wikipedia
- 28 Arnold. Culture and Anarchy. Ed. Wilson. London: Cambridge University Press, 1966. p.6



- 29 Wikipedia
- 30 Arnold. Culture and Anarchy. Ed. Wilson. London: Cambridge University Press, 1966. p. 48
- 31 Ibid p. 48
- 32 Ibid p. 52
- 33 Ibid p. 52
- 34 Ibid p. 132
- 35 Ibid p.54
- 36 Ibid p. 55
- 37 Ibid p. 16-17
- 38 Fanon Frantz. The Wretched of the Earth. London: The Chaucer Press, 1963. p. 168
- 39 Ibid p. 169
- 40 Sarpong, Peter. Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974. pp. vii-viii
- 41 Ibid p. viii
- 42 Ibid p viii
- 43 Said, E. W. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993.p. viii
- 44 Williams, Raymond. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1976 p. 89
- 45 Ibid p. 89
- 46 Ibid p. 89
- 47 Ibid p. 90
- 48 Ibid p. 88
- 49 Ibid p. 90



## CHAPTER TWO

### SOME ASPECTS OF GHANAIAAN CULTURE IN THE POETRY OF

#### AWOONOR AND ANYIDOHO

This chapter of the thesis concentrates on how Anyidoho and Awoonor present some aspects of Ghanaian culture in their poetry. The aspects of Ghanaian culture to be discussed are religion, social settlements and the Ghanaian society, the family system, chieftaincy, the rites of passage and ancestorship. Symbols, imagery, diction and other linguistic features are used by Anyidoho and Awoonor to discuss the various cultural values in their poetry.

First of all, among the cultural aspects to be discussed is religion. The Ghanaian society is intensely religious as is the case of other African societies. According to Gyekye;

Religion is the awareness of the existence of some ultimate, Supreme Being who is the origin and sustainer of this universe and the establishment of the constant ties with this being – influences, in a comprehensive way, the thoughts and actions of the people.<sup>1</sup>

He adds that the “African lives in a religious universe: all actions and thoughts have a religious meaning and are inspired or influenced by a religious point of view.”<sup>2</sup> The Ghanaian has “an idea of a true God, and ascribes to Him the attributes of Almighty and Omnipresent; they believe He created the universe, and therefore vastly prefer Him before their idol-gods; but they do not pray to Him or offer sacrifices to Him.”<sup>3</sup> The idea of the Supreme Being is everywhere in the Ghanaian society, and He is called different names by different ethnic groups but qualities ascribed to Him are almost identical. The Akans call Him *Onyame* or *Onyankopon* whiles the Ewes call Him *Mawu* and the Gas *Nyonmo*. This Being is seen by the people as “Great, Bright



and Shining, Unique, and Unsurpassable or Powerful.”<sup>4</sup>In the Ghanaian thought, God is “magnanimous, holy, a hater of evil and creator.”<sup>5</sup>

Sarpong posits that the religious thought of the Ghanaian is essentially “theocentric and theistic.”<sup>6</sup> This means that the Ghanaian sees God as the center of all happenings and accords Him that reverence. However, despite the presence of Christianity and Islam in the Ghanaian society, “traditional religions in Ghana have retained their influence because of their intimate relation to family loyalties and local mores.”<sup>7</sup>

Traditional religion is “a natural religion, independent of revelation”<sup>8</sup>unlike a revealed religion like Islam or Christianity in which an individual receives a revelation and becomes its founder. Each form of traditional worship is limited to the tribe from which the form of worship emerged in spite of its commonalities. Some forms of worship are peculiar to a group such as a tribe, community or locality, smaller sections of a community such as family or company and then that of the individual. “The Tano River is a deity for the Ashanti”<sup>9</sup>and community or local deities are numerous across the country. Ghanaian Traditional believers have an idea of God but they believe that He cannot be reached directly so they use lesser gods to reach Him.

The Supreme Being is usually thought of as remote from daily religious life and is, therefore, not directly worshipped. There are also the lesser gods that take “residency” in streams, rivers, trees, and mountains. These gods are generally perceived as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and society. ~~Ancestors~~ and numerous other spirits are also recognized as part of the cosmological order.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from the lesser gods, traditional religious believers recognize the fetish priest as a mediator between the natural world and the spirit world.

Traditional priests--given their association with specific shrines--are regarded as specialized practitioners through whom the spirits of the gods may grant directions. Priests undergo vigorous training in the arts of



medicine, divination, and other related disciplines and are, therefore, consulted on a more regular basis by the public.

Because many diseases are believed to have spiritual causes, traditional priests sometimes act as doctors or herbalists.<sup>11</sup>

Believers in the traditional mode of worship invoke the gods for varied reasons. Some of the reasons are for healing, vengeance, protection in times of war.

The idea discussed above is what Anyidoho and Awoonor present in their poetry. Traditional religious ideas are seen in the following poems: *My God of Songs was Ill*, *Exiles*, *The Cathedral*, *The New Warmth*, *The Weaver Bird*, *The Purification*, *I Heard a Bird Cry*, *Night of My Blood*, *The Years Behind*, *More Messages*, *At the Gates*, *Do not Handle It*, *This Earth My Brother*. In these poems one would be amazed at the dexterity with which these poets discuss the traditional form of worship as well as the idea of the Supreme Being. Religion is presented through diction, imagery, symbolism and other figures of speech. First of all, the idea of the smaller deities is expressed through some symbols and the spelling used by Awoonor and Anyidoho. Often, the word "gods" with small letter refers to the lesser gods. The use of the small letter "g" to identify the lesser gods is meant to distinguish them from the Supreme Being. In the poems *Fertility Game* by Anyidoho and *At the Gates*, by Awoonor, there are examples of this use of the word "gods". From *Fertility Game* it reads:

I have held my passion in check for you  
holding it fast against the storms      against thunder  
held it firm against the haunting smiles of the gods.

Here, the persona is bringing the spirit realm into human love affairs. The persona tells her lover that there are those who are equally interested in her, but she has refused their advances even against the revered gods; she still waits for her lover. These lines only intensify the lover's love for her lover by making it clear that even the gods cannot do anything about her love for her lover.



The persona again shows the attitude of the gods by describing them as having “haunting smiles.” The love showed by the gods shows that the gods are benevolent and welcoming. The word “haunting” suggests the intensity and beaming nature of the smile. Of course, god of love should be graceful as love itself is a beautiful thing to express.

Awoonor's *My god of Songs was Ill* presents two important images. These are the “fetish priest” and “fetish hut”. The priest is obviously the intermediary between the people and the spirit realm of the lesser gods. The priest does all the sacrifices to appease the gods when a member of the congregation breaches a rule. The priest also acts as one who brings a message from the gods to the people. He receives a message from the spirit world and transmits it to the people.

That is why the persona in *My god of Songs was Ill* is waiting for the priest to arrive in order for the persona to have his god of song healed. The “god of song” could mean the persona's ability to sing or as has been suggested, that it represents his desire to retrace his poetical background. It means that the persona has lost his ability to sing and he waits for the priest to heal his voice. This reverence for the priest stems from the fact that the priest has access to the spirit world and is also the mouthpiece of the gods. The “fetish hut”, on the other hand, is the place where the priest meets with the clients. The adherent is required by convention to receive an invitation before he enters the hut otherwise he may see or experience something untoward. In some situations, the client enters the hut with his or her backside. One may deduce that the client enters with his or her backside so that the priest can examine him or her closely since ultimately he or she is going to turn to face him. The persona is invited into the hut eventually but is requested to enter with his backside. This is a common mode of entering the shrine. It could mean that the priest is still invoking the gods and would not want the adherent see what he is doing until such a time that the priest feels that the adherent would not be frightened.



When one enters the hut, there are several images and paintings that represent different aspects of the kind of god that one is consulting. When the person is invited into the hut and commanded to enter with his backside, he enters and places his “god of song” which is the aching part of his body, on the “stool”. The stool is an important symbol in traditional worship. It is what the guest sits on in the hut or even the priest himself also sits on the stool. It represents the fact that the patron is welcome to the shrine. When the client is not given a stool, it could mean either that he is not welcome or that the priest has not been mandated by the gods to welcome him. The stool again represents homeliness. It means that the patron is recognized in the hut and acknowledged by the priest.

Another important symbol in traditional worship is the object of sacrifice and the object on which sacrifice is made. Usually, cocks and cattle are sacrificed on an altar. The “cock” and the “cow” in Awoonor’s *Exile* and *The Purification* are described as “sacrificial.” The word “sacrificial” is an important adjective so far as traditional worship is concerned. Traditional worship involves blood just as Christian religion or Judaism. The scriptures read; “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul.”<sup>12</sup> In Judaism, blood is an important component of cleansing the sinner. It is the same in Christianity too. The New Testament teaches that through Jesus’ death “... we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>13</sup> So, the traditional believer goes to the fetish hut with a cock as an object of sacrifice for one of the following reasons: forgiveness of sin, as payment for healing.

When the cock or cow is slaughtered, its blood is sprinkled or used in a cleansing ritual aimed at appeasing the gods. Judaism and traditional belief in the use of the blood of animals for cleansing is the same, however, it is not the same in Christianity even though blood is also



required for cleansing. Though the three religions mentioned use blood for cleansing the sinner, their objects of sacrifice are different. In Christianity, the blood shed by Jesus, the scriptures say, is appropriate for the remission of sin and atonement.

The “sacred altar” is also very significant because it is an important symbol in making obeisance to the gods. The altar on which sacrifice is made is properly considered “sacred”. This means that one cannot use it for any other purpose apart from the religious one. Any other use apart from its official one is considered a sacrilege and the gods can be invoked to inflict punishment on the individual or group who abuse its use. The altar is the place where the animal is killed and the blood is either poured or sprinkled to atone for sins or appease the gods. This is often a raised earth in the form of a hill. This signifies the high point of the spiritual ritual intended to bring wholeness to the individual. It is here that the gods receive their share of what actually belongs to them – the sacrifice.

Further graphic presentation of traditional religion is found in *The Anvil and the Hammer* where the persona says, *the trappings of the past.../woven with the fiber of sisal and/Washed in the blood of the goat in the fetish hut.*

In the last line above, the persona depicts the nature of traditional worship where a goat is sacrificed and its blood sprinkled in the fetish hut to either atone for a sin or as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. This depiction brings to the fore the nature and approach to the worship of the deities by Ghanaian traditional believers.

The blood signifies the atonement, cleansing and purification. This is akin to the Christian religion where the blood of Christ atones for sins and purifies as well as sanctifies those who believe and accept his message as the savior of the world.



The significance of the blood is that it takes away one life for the replacement of another's by atoning for the sins of the other. "...it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."<sup>14</sup> It is evident from the poems mentioned above that the recurring use of the words "hut", "blood", "cow", "goat", "shrine" and others in the poetry of Awoonor shows how traditional religion is entrenched in the persona's and the society's outlook on life.

Another aspect of traditional worship worth discussing is the domicile of the gods. The gods are thought to dwell in rivers, trees, lakes, mountains, stones and many other places. Awoonor's *The Cathedral* presents one of the places where the gods dwell. "On this dirty patch / a tree once stood." The "tree" is a symbol of traditional worship. Here the persona decries the fact that the tree has been replaced by a "cathedral" which represents Christianity. The tree is also considered as the place where the god lives and such a place is often used as the shrine or the fetish hut. The *Night of My Blood* mentions "dark waters" and "ancient trees." These are also used to depict the dwelling places of the deities. "Worship stone" in *Do not Handle It* and "tree of the homestead" in *My Uncle the Diviner-Chieftain* are some examples. The gods are thought to dwell in these objects because of the belief that the gods ought to be close to their worshippers. These are often at the back yard or a forbidden place where only the priest and selected elders go to perform ritual sacrifices.

One also sees the functional classification of the gods in Awoonor and Anyidoho's poetry. These gods are classified as "cure god" in *My God of Songs was Ill*, "fire-god" in *The Years Gone Behind*, "evil god", "Smallpox god" in *I Heard a Bird Cry* and so on. The functional



classification helps those who invoke the gods to know which god to call upon and for what functions.

The cure god certainly cures diseases while the smallpox god inflicts smallpox on people. The fire god is invoked during war times due to his fury and ravaging anger. The evil god is invoked to inflict evil on any individual or a group that does what is wrong to another person or group and sometimes to a whole community. These classifications again help the adherents of traditional religion to be conscious of the kind of god to invoke and for what purpose. The belief is that if one invokes the gods for the wrong reason that individual could be punished before he is forgiven.

Also, practitioners of traditional religion use their own musical instruments and accoutrements in invoking the deities. In *They do not Sound for Me* one finds "fetish drum", "gongs" "dance", "rattles"; and in *At the Gates* one finds the word "calabash." Also, the phrase "priest's bell" occurs in *The Purification*. These are some of the instruments used in the shrine or the fetish hut for the performance of religious functions, be it sacrifice, invocation or the keeping of other instruments of worship. The "fetish drum" as the name implies is played for the priests to dance; and the priests have a peculiar dance suited for a particular deity. The "gongs" are used in a slightly different way from the drums even though they ultimately aid the dance. The gongs are used for specific melodic rhythm and for the evocation of certain spirits as they change the dance pattern of the priest.

The calabash has several uses in the hut. It is used to pour libation, serve concoction and also to keep other instruments for worship. These accoutrements are necessary so far as they play such a significant role in the religious practices of the people such as the invocation of the deities.



Finally, Anyidoho and Awoonor show far reaching respect for traditional religion. The persona in *Night of My Blood* by Awoonor decrying the acts of the terrorists says the terrorists are “tearing down the glories of a thousand shrines ....” The “thousand shrines” is a hyperbole which indicates the widespread practice of traditional religion among the Ghanaian people.

The word “terrorists” obviously represents the Europeans and it also suggests their forceful replacement of traditional beliefs with Christianity. It also suggests the idea of destruction. Awoonor criticizes the destruction of traditional worship in the Ghanaian society. Again, Anyidoho and Awoonor exhibit that idea of the presence of the Supreme Being in the affairs of men in *At the Gates*. The persona says:

I will drink it; it is my god who gave it to me  
I will drink this calabash  
For it is God's gift to me

The lines above present the two aspects of the sense of the Supreme Being and the presence of the lesser gods in the thought of the traditional Ghanaian. The persona claims to have received a drink from “god” and “God” and that he would drink it. The use of “god” is in reference to the lesser gods who are thought to be the intermediaries between man and the Supreme Being and “God” who is the ultimate provider. To the traditional religious Ghanaian, everything received comes from God, the Supreme One, but the lesser gods are the conduit through which the Almighty reaches out to his people.

In conclusion, one sees from the above discussion that the traditional Ghanaian is intensely religious and this permeates his or her daily life and general behaviour. Pre-colonial Ghana had a high sense of divinity; the presence of the Supreme Being and the lesser gods and the society acknowledges both. However, the point must be made that the Supreme Being is thought to be far from the reach of ordinary men and therefore the use of the lesser gods as intermediaries.



Religion in pre-colonial Ghana is intense. It shapes the moral and social order of the Ghanaian society. Just as Arnold believes that religion could be the major influence on cultural development; so the traditional believer in Ghana believes that the gods have a role to play in shaping the behaviour and morality of the Ghanaian people. Awoonor and Anyidoho have demonstrated their appreciation of the pre-colonial religious inclination of their people through poetry.

So far, the significance of religion to the traditional Ghanaian has been the focus. The attention shall shift onto social settlement and the Ghanaian society. It is to explain the communalistic and individual tendencies in the Ghanaian society. Again, it is to explain the shared communal and individual responsibilities using literary features.

Social settlement and the Ghanaian society in pre-colonial Ghana is very important and this is amply presented in the following poems by Kofi Awoonor: *Night of My Blood*, *The Cathedral*, *The Anvil and the Hammer*, *The Weaver Bird*, *The Purification* and *I Heard a Bird Cry*, *Rediscovery* and *Night of My Blood*, *A Dirge*, *At the Gates*, *All Men My Brothers*, *Desire*, *The Purification*, *The Gone Locust*, *The Longest Journey*, *My God of Songs was Ill*, *The Years Behind*, *My Uncle the Diviner-Chieftain*.

Pre-colonial Ghana was intensely communalistic although one does not dismiss individualistic values. The social environment in pre-colonial Ghana was based on the assumption that "A man must depend for his well-being on his fellow man."<sup>15</sup> This assumption drove pre-colonial social life of the Ghanaian. Gyekye writes that:

Communal values are those values that express appreciation of the worth and importance of the community, those values that underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes, and behavior that ought to exist between individuals who live together



in a community, sharing a social life and having a sense of common good. Examples of such communal values are sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, and social harmony.<sup>16</sup>

Other communal values are “mutual helpfulness, and concern for the well-being of every individual member of the society.”<sup>17</sup>

Gyekye further explains that the “African society places a great deal of emphasis on communal values.”<sup>18</sup> “Community” therefore, “is a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds – which are not necessarily biological - who share common values, interests, and goals.”<sup>19</sup> An Akan maxim on which the assumption of community living is based is, “A person is not a palm-tree that he should be self-complete.”<sup>20</sup> It is believed that an individual is not self sufficient unto himself to self-sustain his activities. The pre-colonial Ghanaian society was a strong advocate of communal living and the following Akan maxims express the thought quite succinctly: “One finger cannot lift up a thing”.<sup>21</sup> Also, “If one person alone scrapes the bark of a tree for use as medicine, the pieces fall to the ground.”<sup>22</sup> Again, “the left arm washes the right arm and the right arm washes the left arm.”<sup>23</sup> Finally, “If all the people were to carry the heavens, no one individual would become humpback.”<sup>24</sup>

In the Ghanaian society, when an individual is exhibiting the tendencies of extreme individualism, it becomes a major concern for the society and the community frowns on such behaviour.

This social network and settlement in the Ghanaian society is discussed by Awoonor and Anyidoho. Anyidoho's *Akasanoma to Akua* uses “our children die of *kwashiorkoric* pains” to present the idea of shared responsibility in the Ghanaian society. In this traditional society,



everyone belongs to the other. One's child is another's. The "we" feeling is very strong and the persona expresses this idea when he says:

Still our children die of *kwashiorkoric* pain  
So I abandon words to harvest dreams of mythmakers  
Spending seasons digging up our old farmlands now  
...We burn the thorn to memory and to ash.

The above lines use the plural pronouns "our" and "we" to show that sense of belongingness which Maslow considers as one of the essential needs of man. The sense of belonging in the Ghanaian society is important because it protects the people and keeps the society intact. The shared responsibility is taken everywhere, in the home, farmland, property owning. The belief is also that "the fingers of the hand are not equal in length."<sup>25</sup> This means that as members of the community they inter-depend on individual talents and capacities for mutual gains, hence, the Akan maxim, "Life is mutual aid."<sup>26</sup>

In the same way, Awoonor discusses communal society in his poetry. The persona in *The Cathedral* uses the phrase "the last fires of a tribe" as a reflection of the communal conception of the Ghanaian people. The "tribe" presents a communal idea and the persona makes no mistake in speaking about this important value among the people. The communal conception is also captured in the persona's use of the plural pronoun "we" and "ourselves" in *The Anvil and the Hammer*, *The Weaver Bird*, *The Purification* and *I Heard a Bird Cry* as well as "our" in the *Rediscovery* and *Night of My Blood*. It shows the collective responsibility the Ghanaian society places on itself. This brings out their sense of belonging to one another and their readiness to share in a common ideal or live together with certain general attitudes. These pronouns also suggest that communal societies of Ghana reflect the way they respond to issues affecting them. This sense of responsibility moves them to go to one another's aid in times of disasters or



difficult challenges or even during important ceremonies such as naming, puberty rites, marriage, death and funerals.

This responsibility to support one another is seen in *A Dirge*. The persona mourns the death of a departed mother. Out of utter shock and pain, the persona begins to call on the other relatives from "Ashiagbor's house". The persona uses the pronouns "we", "our", "us" as well as the phrase, "our fathers", "our tears", "on our knees", "our guns" and finally, "our mother" to emphasize the collectiveness of the Ghanaian society. "We the children..." identifies the family from which the persona comes. The communal sense among the Ghanaian people promotes communal welfare, places responsibility on the "haves" to support the "have nots" thereby reducing the intensity of lack in any member of the community, especially if the person is of the family stock. "Our father's" indicates their association with their forebear on whom they call for support and to explain the phenomenon of death which has caused their utter shock and profound misunderstanding of the saying that "the hippo cannot turn the canoe." This saying is probably meant to suggest the notion that certain misfortunes are unacceptable and could not happen but the children question this assumption as they find their mother dead.

"We the children", "on our knees", "our mother" and "our guns" could suggest an acknowledgement of the fact that the Ghanaian society is a typical communal settlement due to the shared root and its ability to do things that are common to one another. The same idea is found in *At the Gates* where the persona says:

The dwellers in the gates  
Answer us; we will let that war come  
They whom we followed to come  
Sons of our mothers and fathers  
Bearing upon our heads nothing.



In the quote above, the persona, apart from using “us”, “our” and “we” makes an important use of the words “mothers” and “fathers” and these give a more general recognition of not just a family but the entire community made up of different families with shared values and common aspirations.

Further, the persona in *All Men My Brothers* by Awoonor also rhetorically asks; “What shall we build, my brothers?” And further points out that, “Temples and shrines and sacrificial slabs/whereon we will make our offerings/long rejected....” This brings to the fore the idea of communal possession of certain valued objects and the ability to reach a consensus before a project is undertaken in order to make everyone part of the development process. The persona furthermore urges his people; “let us build”/ “another body in our own image”. This means that the persona is not imposing anything on the community; rather, the persona is seen reasoning with his colleagues by making proposals that could eventually lead to a consensus and shared vision. It is significant to note that the words chosen by the persona go a long way to foster unity, togetherness and shared responsibility.

However, within this intense communal set up is the value of individual responsibility to the community. One cannot overlook the fact of individualistic tendencies among Ghanaian people. Gyekye believes that “African cultures generally recognize that the naturally social human being also has individuality, personal will, and an identity that must be exercised.”<sup>27</sup> This individualistic value is expressed in the Akan maxim:

“The clan is like a cluster of trees which, when seen from afar, appear huddled together, but which would be seen to stand individually when closely approached.”<sup>28</sup>

The persona once again uses “I”, “me”, “you” and “my” to drum home this individualistic value.

The poem *Desire* by Awoonor presents a persona who has taken personal responsibility for his



society to investigate a phenomenon occurring in the community. This is a responsibility to save the entire community from an impending calamity but it cannot be done by the whole community at once so the persona intermediates.

The persona has an encounter when he receives the “coloured cowries” from the “village clown” in which the persona hears vibrations of one’s soul. The persona walks among corpses who ask him questions about his real intent and desire. He understands that “at the journey’s end there is a resting place.” Also significant to mention is the choice of “them”, “their” and “you” to distinguish between the dead and the living. This suggests a sense of separation between the dead and the living.

Presenting individual responsibility in a communal setting, the persona in *The Purification* brings to the fore the idea of fishermen at sea who have shared responsibilities but are individuals as well. The persona tells a colleague, “...I shall stay at the net’s end/ While you go down/I shall be under the tree.” This is significant because it stands to reason that if the people are not taught to be individually responsible for the social good, the tendency for some to hide behind other hardworking individuals to run away from social development is high. Again in *The Gone Locust* the persona presents himself as a watchman for the community. The persona observes the intrusion of the “locusts” that come from “the east in clouds;” The persona observes that when the locusts come in they devastate the “green tops of the trees” and in no time, the entire community is reduced to a “desert” which symbolizes lack and starvation. In fact, this responsibility to be a watchman for the community significantly helps the individual members to provide the social and communal development required by the people.



In *The Longest Journey*, the persona suggests that although the community may have collective responsibilities, death comes to them individually. Death does not take the whole community instantly. Death takes individuals to the grave. Also, the society may share in one another's pain and anguish over some misadventure but the individual going through the difficulty bears the intensity of the pain alone.

This is put succinctly in;

Make me a cane so that I can walk,  
Can carry my crippled soul across the stile  
and enter the room where they are feasting all night.  
In the doorway I found a heart bruised  
By the strictures of life.

The persona pleads for a cane to suggest that he is probably aged and cannot walk briskly as a young person would. In the Ghanaian society such individuals are helped by their guardians. On his way into the room where feasting is going on all night, he finds "a heart bruised by the strictures of life." It is obvious that while some are feasting all night, someone else is going through the pain of disappointment and other problems of life. Life has not been too fair to that individual the persona meets. The "strictures" represent anything that puts some level of limitation on human development.

The poem, *My God of Songs was Ill*, also presents the same idea of individual responsibility in a communal settlement in Ghana. The persona has a sick "god of songs" and he goes to the fetish priest for a cure. The poem begins with a command to someone to go and tell some people about the persona's ability to cross the river using an empty canoe. Here again, the opening line, "Go and tell them..." suggests the involvement of a group of people but the persona quickly resorts to the use of "I" and "my" to indicate his personal responsibility for the health of his "god of songs."



Individual responsibility is very relevant in the Ghanaian society as a cultural value. Although the community may provide for certain universal needs such as protection, sense of belonging and many others for all members of the community, and individual members must contribute to sustain such universal needs.

In *The Years Behind*, one comes across the idea of a “feast” which is obviously about a group of people but the persona calls on his “fathers” to sew the old days for him so he can wear them for the impending feast. One still sees the communal and individual responsibility trumpeted in this particular poem. The persona in *My Uncle the Diviner-Chieftain* shows a lot of individual tendencies where he says, “Then I came home. You stood on the compound/of our fallen homestead.” From the discussion above, one sees how the Ghanaian values communal living amidst the appreciation of individual responsibility and the duty which society places on the individual. It is significant to highlight the fact that the pre-colonial settlement and social life of the Ghanaian is intensely communal but one cannot overlook individual responsibility. Again, the traditional Ghanaian society could, before the advent of the European colonial power, be described as a more unified environment.

The basic principle on which the society is hinged is quite defined culturally. Individual members of a community also identify with each other communally.

Having discussed ~~the social settlement~~ in the Ghanaian society, I shall proceed to discuss the family system. The family system is a cultural value held in high esteem among Ghanaians. The Ghanaian society accepts the nuclear family system consisting of father, mother and children but it values the extended family more.



The extended family includes father, mother, children, grandparent, uncles and aunties, nieces and nephews and if there are any adoptions, the adopted children are integrated and for that matter a part of the family system. Gyekye says that,

It is a matter of common knowledge that when one speaks of the family in an African context one is referring, not to the nuclear family consisting merely of husband, wife and children, but to the *extended* family, which comprises a large number of blood relatives who trace their descent from a common ancestor and who are held together by a sense of obligation to one another.<sup>29</sup>

This family value is clearly seen in the poetry of Awoonor. He presents the value of the family through the use of diction. In the following poems: *A Dirge*, *Hymn to My Dumb Earth*, *My Uncle the Diviner-Chieftain* and *They do not Sound for Me*, one should appreciate how the Ghanaian society esteems the family system.

In *A Dirge* the persona belongs to the family of "Ashiagbor." In this sense, the entire family associates itself with the name Ashiagbor. The persona uses the expression "we the children..." and this connotes the blood relation. The living therefore identifies closeness with the deceased as expressed in *A Dirge*. When there is a loss of a member of a community, the pain shared will not be equal among the members of the community. The intensity of the pain shared by members on a member's death depends largely on the closeness one has to the dead.

Because the children of Ashiagbor's house belong to the same family, the loss of their mother is a shared one. One sees that the persona and his siblings are all intensely involved in the funeral. That is not to say if someone is not a member of the family he or she would not support the family which has lost a member. Certainly, the commitment of a blood relation would be deeper than that of just a community member who does not directly come from the Ashiagbor



household. As already noted, the Ghanaian values communal living, yet, one sees how the persona emphasizes individual family tendencies among the Ghanaian people.

*Hymn to My Dumb Earth* also presents a persona who bemoans the fact that he does not have children. He says;

I have no sons to fire the guns  
No daughters to wail  
When I close my mouth  
When I pass on  
So I shall go beyond and forget.

In the lines above, the persona is mourning himself/herself to death because he has no one to succeed him when he dies. In the Ghanaian society where childbearing is seen as the apex of expectation in marriage, if one does not give birth during marriage, it becomes difficult for the marriage to enjoy peace. The persona envisages his imminent demise. He is troubled by the fact that if care is not taken, he will lose his lineage. The persona speaks of the firing of guns. The firing of guns is part of the respect shown to the dead before the burial. However, firing guns could connote bravery. Bravery is associated with males among the Ghanaian societies. That means that the man who awaits his death wishes he had sons to be like him, brave and courageous while his daughters do the wailing at his funeral.

He says that as a result of the lack of children, he will “go beyond and forget” about what his toil yielded. Now, the persona lives to await his death. He describes his frustration euphemistically as “go beyond.” The persona knows that sooner than later he will depart this earth and he is concerned with what will happen to his family. This family value is important because the immediate family assumes responsibility for the family’s loss as one sees in *A Dirge* where the persona seeks answers from his fathers.



The title *My Uncle the Diviner-Chieftain* also depicts the family value system in the Ghanaian society. The title reflects the persona's direct or biological relationship with his uncle. The persona in this poem cries over his uncle's lack of children. This is because the lineage of every member of the society is through the family to which he or she belongs.

The persona tells of how the uncle is abandoned by the "young ones", the children his uncle never had as well as the sons he dreamt filling up his "earth-space". The "earth-space" could symbolize his role as a leader in the community or his responsibilities as an uncle to his nephews. The persona fears that his uncle's demise may affect the family name and succession plan. The "father's name" could denote the family name by which every member of the family is recognized but it could also connote the honour, power and prestige of the family within the given community. These are some of the reasons for which the family name is valued by Ghanaians. The family name helps an individual in identifying with a particular family. Again, it is meant to have a blood affinity to a particular group of people and, also, it promotes interdependence among people of the same family stock.

*They do not Sound for Me* presents the role of the family during a funeral celebration. The family, as has already been indicated, takes primary responsibility for the deceased.

The initial preparation for the funeral, the funeral performance involving the burial and all other rituals as well as the placing of a member of the family to assume responsibility of the family, are all ensured by the immediate family. The persona shows how the funeral of the departed is taken over by the "initiates" who are sounding the "fetish drum" and singing many songs. However, when the persona wants his own people to sound the drum for him, they refuse. The persona describes those people who are supposed to make a sound for him as "children of my



mother". "Children of my mother" indicates that the persona has a blood relation with them. They share a common mother but not necessarily a common father. "Children of my mother" could also mean other blood relations from his mother's lineage who are cousins. Awoonor shows his understanding of the family system of the Ghanaian and the role it plays in a profound way in his poetry. The family system therefore is an important factor in the Ghanaian society because in pre-colonial Ghana marriage would be contracted based on family and not individual lines. Maintaining a good family name and credibility is very crucial in traditional Ghanaian society.

Having examined the family system in Ghana from the poetry of Awoonor and Anyidoho, we shall turn our attention on to chiefship which is quite significant in the Ghanaian society. Chiefship reflects the political power to which judicial and sometimes religious obligations are associated. Chiefship and political values among the Ghanaian people are significantly found in the poetry of Awoonor. Gyekye states that "The chief of the African state is, traditionally, both the political head and the religious head. The taboos relating to his conduct and mannerisms are all intended to remind him and his subjects and others that the position he occupies is sacred."<sup>30</sup>

Gyekye further states that:

In most African states, the chief is elected or chosen from among the members of the royal family, the family that by history and custom was recognized and accepted by the people as such. But because in most states the authority of the chief usually derives, functionally, from the people, there is a close relationship between ruler and ruled in matters of the exercise of regal (political) power.<sup>31</sup>

Chiefship is therefore a traditional political system valued by Ghanaians. In *I Heard a Bird Cry*, the persona uses the phrase "linguist stick", a symbol of authority of the chief used in summoning offenders to the palace or inviting people the chief wishes to consult with in his



palace. This linguist stick is used by the spokespersons in several palaces to summon people to the court of the chief. In the poem, one sees how the adamant persona tells of how he and his colleagues ignored the authority of the chief in the community after they had retaliated by killing the “mad dogs” that come to their house to bite people.

It reads:

We are on a journey  
Somebody give me velvet  
And I will put down the bark  
And wear a gold chain  
And walk a chiefly walk  
For all to see.  
Mad dogs came and bit people  
In our house, in our own house  
We killed them, threw them on the dunghill  
And ignored the linguist stick when it came.

The poem above depicts two important aspects of the role of the chief in the Ghanaian society.

The persona first of all asks for “velvet” to be provided for him so he could do away with his “bark.” The “velvet” is a symbol of royalty whereas the “bark” is for the commoner. The persona wants to appear as a royal. Obviously, the persona wants to appear royal even though he is not one. He says further that he would put on a “gold chain” and “walk a chiefly walk.” This is to present chiefdom as an institution which has a certain outlook among the Ghanaian people.

Chiefdom is respected among the people of Ghana. Chiefs have a particular way of dressing to symbolize the wealth and philosophy of the community over which they rule. Their mode of appearance in public is of much concern to the subjects who see their chief as representative of the entire community. He represents the image, wealth, honour and power of his people.

The second important idea expressed in the lines above is the role of the chief in the Ghanaian society. The “mad dogs” a metaphor of some miscreants in the community of the persona had



bitten the persona's own people in the persona's house, but the persona and his men killed them. Definitely, in such a community, confusion will break out. So the chief sends his linguist with the symbol of his authority (linguist stick) to the persona's house to summon him to the palace. But the persona and his household ignore the chief's summons. Here, one sees the responsibility of the chief in preserving peace and justice among his people. He summons the persona and his household because he wants to restore peace in his jurisdiction as a leader. The chief is presented as one with judicial powers. The chief's authority as seen by his people is that which could bring direction to his people. They must accept his judgment and the use of his discretion. In situations where the chief is ignored by a summoned subject, the refusal attracts a sanction. Normally, such a refusal would attract banishment or severe punishment to serve as a deterrent to other members of the community who may embark on similar misbehaviour. It is worthy of note that because of the position of the chief in the Ghanaian society, one may not dare to refuse to see the chief upon his summoning to the palace because it is considered an insult to the dignity and honour of the entire people.

Another significant aspect presented in the poem is the succession plan of chieftdom in the Ghanaian society. In most Ghanaian societies, the rules of succession are quite clear. The chief is to rule until his demise; but if he is incapable of ruling as chief due to a challenge of any kind, the crown prince takes over the reins of leadership. However, in Ghana, the succession plan is quite different for the two main ethnic blocs – patrilineal and matrilineal. In the matrilineal system of family, the nephew succeeds his uncle who is the chief and in the patrilineal the first son succeeds his father. In this particular poem, the persona belongs to the patrilineal family system and so the first male child would succeed his father as the crown prince.



One sees how the persona reflects this succession idea in his use of communal philosophy about the succession line in chieftdom:

Though they said  
The prince should not hasten for the stool  
And the young leopard  
Should not be in a haste to walk.

This means that the prince who is to rule his people does not assume responsibility when the chief is in active service. The prince must wait until it comes to his turn to be crowned chief. The crowning will legitimize his role and any matter of judgment or leadership will not be challenged unduly.

However, the rules have exceptions. The persona implores the prince to take responsibility for the protection of the community because he announces that, *There are noises in the air./The young leopard should stand up against the tree./ And the prince should run for his father's stool.*

The prince is here called upon to assume responsibility probably because the chief may be sick or too old to lead his people to the war front. The “noises” means disturbances in the community and the prince, likened to the “young leopard” is here metaphorically compared with the father. Chiefs are presented in comparative terms among Ghanaian people. The people often compare their chiefs’ strength, attitudes, leadership and fatherly nature to animals, trees and so on. Here, the prince is called a young leopard because the king is likened to the character of a leopard. The leopard is swift on its preys. The prince is called upon to act swiftly on his enemies. The enemy is likened to a “tree.” A tree is solid and strong and can be felled with an axe or a machine; so for the prince to be asked to face up the tree as a young leopard, it means the community acknowledges the strength and the capability of the threat they face and requires a swift leader to overrun their enemy.



However, it is important to examine the word “run” as used by the persona in relation to chieftdom. If there are standard practices of succession to the throne, why should the prince run for his “father’s stool?” It could mean two of many reasons. The prince is cautioned to run for his father’s stool because either the chief is dead and there is the possibility of usurpation by an illegitimate person trying to assume responsibility or that the prince is lax in succeeding his father. Probably, the persona calls upon the prince to “run” for the “stool” because the potential of any form of usurpation could consequently affect the peace and stability of the community.

Finally, Awoonor presents chieftaincy as having an ancestral linkage. This means that it is an institution passed on from generation to generation. This ancestral idea is seen in;

... the godlike ram of sacrifices,  
the only tree of the homestead now, occupant  
and regent of an ancient honor house.

This ancestral linkage of the chief is corroborated by Gyekye who writes that, “The stool (throne) he occupies is believed to be an ancestral stool. This belief is the source of the great dignity, respect, and veneration with which he is always treated.”<sup>32</sup>

The persona uses terms such as “regent”, “ancient honor house”, and a phrase like “the only tree of the homestead.” All these three references present the idea of royal succession tracing its root to the ancestors. The “ancient honor house” brings the idea of the ancestral linkage.

This goes to support the assertion already discussed above that the chief must come from a particular royal line or be of royal blood in order to be able to succeed the dead or weak chief.

This idea is crystallized in “the only tree.” “The only tree” therefore suggests that the successor is the only true royal available for ascending the stool. Again, the persona gives a hint about what is done to get the chief installed. There are “sacrifices”, the persona says. Because



chiefdom is steeped in ancestral linkage, sacrifices are made to invite the ancestors to help the newly installed chief so he can rule his people well.

Chieftaincy is very significant in the traditional Ghanaian society for the reason that it represents the moral, social and cultural philosophy of the people. The chiefs are rulers, lawmakers and judges as well as leaders in their society. It must be mentioned that the chief is a cultural and customary custodian of his people and works to ensure that what has been bequeathed him and his subjects by his forebears are not unduly exploited and abused by foreigners. He protects his people and keeps them united for a common cause.

Even though chiefship is very important in the Ghanaian society, the rites of passage cannot be overlooked in this thesis. However, the rite of passage to be discussed at this juncture is death in the Ghanaian society. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"<sup>73</sup> says the Holy Bible. This is the Christian belief about life and death, but the traditional Ghanaian society also believes in death although it does not welcome it in the least however inescapable it is. Meanwhile, the traditional Ghanaian society believe that death is caused by agents other than sickness. Death severs the ties between the living and the dead. When death occurs, extensive ceremonies and rituals are performed in the Ghanaian society to seal the break in linkage between the living and the dead. Sarpong makes the point that when death occurs "the person is washed up and in a manner proper to his sex, age, and status."<sup>34</sup> After such elaborate ceremonies, the dead is buried and a funeral is organized.

In Ghana, "the funeral days are the days set aside to remember the dead in a special manner"<sup>35</sup>, according to Sarpong. It is often three days after burial. In the Akan society, it is a custom to



observe the eighth day, fortieth day, eightieth day, and anniversary of a person's death as days of mourning.

Sarpong further states that, "traditionally, the days for funeral are Mondays and Thursdays, because they are said to be propitious days,"<sup>36</sup> but Saturdays have been added because it is only on Saturdays that workers are free to attend funerals. "Days of funerals are heralded in many ways, drumming and singing being the commonest ceremonies,"<sup>37</sup> opines Sarpong. The financial burden of organizing a funeral is the absolute responsibility of the family upon whose shoulder the dead falls directly. However, members of the community are free to support the funeral both in cash and in kind and during the vigil, the entire community is expected to be present.

Death and funeral are highlighted as a traditional value system by Awoonor and Anyidoho in a beautiful way in their poetry. Anyidoho's *The Homing call of Earth* presents the idea of death.

The persona says:

So now I come back home to Earth  
I will remake my little peace with death sink my fingers deep and deeper still  
in this early morning dampness of our soil  
I'll take my sandals off plant my feet among these ashes left by the season's many  
bushfires

The persona uses euphemism extensively in the lines above to lessen the pain death brings to the immediate family and close associates as well as the community he hails from.

The persona recognizes that it is time to part with the living world into the world of the dead and does not hesitate at all. This attitude presents the inescapable nature of death to humanity. It is important to establish from the lines above that when one dies, the body becomes a mass of flesh rotten into sand. This is the impression the persona creates in the line, "...dampness of our soil."

The persona in these lines uses euphemism to make the pain of death lighter. He says he comes



back home to Earth to show how he surrenders to death. Indeed, it shows how humanity is powerless before death. No one escapes the invitation of death and the persona recognizing that says he will make his peace with it and sink his finger deeper and deeper because he knows it is unavoidable. This is how the Ghanaian perceives death – it is inescapable.

In the same way, *A Dirge of Joy* also presents the idea of death. The persona concedes that death is inevitable but must not be invited when it has not come by itself. Through rhetorical questions, the persona finds out whether it is important to mourn when there is no reason such as death. *Honeycomb for Beechildren* also presents how a funeral is organized in the Ewe community. The persona says that each time “adidi” sings he has to put his hand on the funeral drum. The beating of the drum means that “adidi” represents death and whenever it is heard it means someone has died and therefore the mourners must be assembled and dispatched to the various family relations to announce the death of the departed. The persona also uses the image of a crab crawling at the call of the mermaid to present how fast the human soul is easily overpowered by the more powerful spirit of death. Because it is not easy to explain the phenomenon of death, the traditional Ghanaian society has as usual presented it in a mythical way. That is why the persona calls it “adidi” and uses the baby crab which moves very fast to explain how the human spirit moves out of the body to make peace with death.

Awoonor's *Dirge* brings to the fore all the issues related to death and funeral in the Ewe society and by extension in the Ghanaian society as a whole with just a few differences in terms of rituals in different parts of Ghana. The personae go out to fish and upon return realize that their mother has passed on to eternity. The death evokes pain and a sense of loss to an extent that they cannot even cry. The lack of power to cry is the result of shock. They probably did not expect her to leave them so soon. She was probably strong before they left for fishing and so her death



is a real surprise. However, regardless of the pain, they must do what is right. What is right is that they have to show a sense of loss and pain and brace themselves for the ceremonies and eventually the funeral.

The idea in *Dirge* ties in well with Anyidoho's *Honeycomb for Beechildren*. The idea is that of the suddenness of death and the inescapable nature of humanity from death. The personae in *Dirge* are seized with shock and pain which has baffled them.

Awoonor's *The Consummation* is also an important poem in which the idea of death is expressed. The persona wonders why he cannot join the ceremonies and rituals of his death. One also sees the departed given a resting place and this is expressed in "the wind blows on the graves/sweeping the sparky debris way:" In traditional Ghanaian society, the dead is buried and not cremated as in other cultures. This is upon the assumptions that the individual can reincarnate and also the dead could pass for an ancestor whose help would be required on certain occasions. In *The Journey Beyond*, the persona courts "kutsiami" – an Ewe mythological ferryman on the river that separates the dead from the living to be benevolent to the persona when he dies and is to depart to join his forebears. This is in recognition of the fact that death is for every living human being.

Again, the persona wants to arrange for his own ceremonies and rituals before his death. Although this is not usually the case in the Ghanaian culture there is a semblance between this and what happened in the Jewish culture when Simon set up his burial site which was later given out to bury Jesus. It is possible for some individuals to make specific request on the kind of funeral they want to have organized for them.







from where the people "may remind the departed to send them gifts or ask them to help the living in some way."<sup>42</sup>

Veneration of departed ancestors is a major characteristic of all traditional religions. The ancestors are believed to be the most immediate link with the spiritual world, and they are thought to be constantly near, observing every thought and action of the living. Some ancestors may even be reincarnated to replenish the lineage. Barrenness is, therefore, considered a great misfortune because it prevents ancestors from returning to life.<sup>43</sup>

This view is quite evident in the poetry of Awoonor. One finds in Awoonor's poetry how the persona consistently calls upon the departed souls to come to the aid of the people as a result of one ill or the other. Sometimes too, the ancestors are invited through the pouring of libation to a feast or to help the living to defend themselves. All this is evident in Awoonor's choice of words. In the *Cathedral*, the persona says:

On this dirty patch  
A tree once stood  
Shedding innocence on the infant corn:  
Its boughs stretched across a heaven  
Brightened by the last fires of a tribe  
They sent surveyors and builders  
Who cut that tree  
Planting in its place  
A huge senseless cathedral of doom

to suggest the extinction of a people who had once lived and worshipped in the traditional mode.

This is significant because it suggests the idea of the dead and what they have left behind for the living. In the same way, the persona in *The Anvil and the Hammer* calls upon the ancestors to help the living. The people are in danger of losing their long held beliefs so the persona says to their ancestors, *Sew the old days for us, our fathers./That we can wear them under our new garment*



The phrase “Our fathers” is in reference to the ancestors who are invited to help the living not to do away with their “old days”. The “old days” could suggest the cultural practices of the people who have lost their culture for the “forging house of a new life.”

The contrast between “old days” and “new Life” presents the struggle of the persona who believes that the only people who can help him out of the predicament are his ancestors. These ancestors have bequeathed the “old days” representing the traditional cultural practices to him, the persona, who is confronted with the choice between the old and the new. For the ancestors to be called upon to help fight a predicament is one reason why the ancestors are revered in the traditional Ghanaian society.

*The Journey Beyond* also brings to the fore the concept of ancestorship and tradition. In this poem, the persona pleads with “Kutsiami” (the mythological ferryman in Ewe) to ferry him to the land of the ancestors.

The howling cry through the door posts  
carrying boiling pots  
ready for the feasters  
Kutsiami the benevolent boatman;  
when I come to the river shore  
please ferry me across  
I do not have tied in my cloth the  
price of your stewardship.

The persona in the poem above speaks to the ferry man to convey him to the ancestral world, and he shows appreciation for his (Kutsiami) stewardship. Although this poem suggests the Ghanaian practices and thoughts on the dead and how a funeral is organized, one sees the idea of ancestorship strongly presented here.

The persona is dead and is going to join the ancestors but he speaks of his appreciation for the ferry to the next world. The idea that the dead are still alive in the form of spirits and ghosts



makes Ghanaians venerate ancestors by giving the dead many items to take along with them when they are going to be interred.

This explains why the persona believes he has money to pay for the service of the ferryman. The ancestors are believed to possess certain qualities as a result of their previous life among the human society and that is why the Ghanaian reveres them.

Significantly, in *I Heard a Bird Cry*, the persona says that he will stride towards the sacred hut with the fetish bell in his hands where he will call on the ancestors to render his complaint.

I too shall carry the fetish bell  
And start towards the sacred hut  
I will shout and call the ancestors  
And tell them, tell them  
That when the evil snake came  
And bit me on Modui hillock  
I looked for a stick to kill it  
But I never found one.

The persona is alive but bitten by an “evil snake” and he says that he tries finding a stick to kill the snake but cannot find one so his hope lies in the ancestors whom he believes can exact vengeance on his enemy. Interestingly, the snake bit the persona on the Modui hillock, “a hillock on the outskirts of Anyako, a town across the Keta lagoon. It is the marking spot for Anyako’s cemeteries since the town is virtually an island.”<sup>44</sup> The idea is that when the snake bites the persona on the Modui hillock, he runs to the fetish hut with the fetish bell in his hands to call on the ancestors in whom his trust is solid that he will be helped to avert the disaster or avenge the enemy.

The “snake” is a biblical allusion. The persona takes one’s mind as far back as the story of the “serpent”<sup>45</sup> in Genesis 3 that lured Eve into doing evil against God. The snake is evil and the



persona cannot all by himself kill it but with the help of the ancestors, the persona is sure to get vengeance for his pain or defeat. This takes the entire battle into the spiritual realm.

The “stick” which the persona could not find is the tool for vengeance but because the persona does not find one, he goes to the fetish hut to summon the “ancestors” who now replace the stick to exact retribution. One must note that the ancestors are invoked in the “sacred hut.” This means that the ancestors are considered holy among Ghanaians and they could only be summoned at sacred places such as the fetish hut. The metaphoric description of the “bird” whose wings are weak according to the persona brings to mind the acknowledgement that the persona has not much power to fight his enemies. Therefore, it makes the persona’s invitation to the ancestors more relevant and significant. The Ghanaian society’s veneration of the ancestors is seen in the way they are invoked to help in one thing or another. They are also invoked during perilous times or at festivals and ceremonies such as naming and enstoolment or enskinment.

In addition to the point discussed above, *The Years Behind* also presents the persona who calls on his “fathers” so that they might bring the good things in the old days to him. This plea is as if to say that the persona has lost or is losing something worthless but he does not want to part with it.

So, at this time the persona could only call on the ancestors who he believes have the solution to his predicament. Meanwhile, the persona states what his anguish is all about:

My life’s song falls low among alien peoples  
whose songs are mingled with mine;  
and the tuneful reverberate is reborn,  
Reborn on the tabernacle of my father’s temple.

The persona’s “father’s temple” could mean the fetish hut or the shrine and he finds that the temple which has been replaced with something else is filled with the songs of alien people who



have managed to do away with the songs of the indigenous people. This is why the persona calls on the "fathers" to sew the old days for him so he can wear them. The persona does not want to abandon the practices of the past in spite of the new songs introduced by the "alien people".

To be able to withstand the pressures of the alien people, he must seek the help of the "fathers" or ancestors.

Again, it is evident that even where the persona is wondering about a predicament that has befallen them in *A Dirge*, the persona still makes reference to "fathers". To a great extent, the persona's ancestral value is ingrained in him. The persona in the poems so far examined shows a similarity in how he invokes the ancestors every now and then to either summon them for one thing or the other or to complain to them about an incident that the persona is unhappy about. The persona calls on the "fathers" to challenge their theory about the "hippo" not being able to overturn the canoe especially in *A Dirge*. The persona says, "Our fathers, the hippo has overturned our canoe" but in the preceding line the persona has already indicated that, "They say the hippo cannot overturn the canoe." Here, the persona is not necessarily summoning the ancestors but rather making a complaint to them about a predicament.

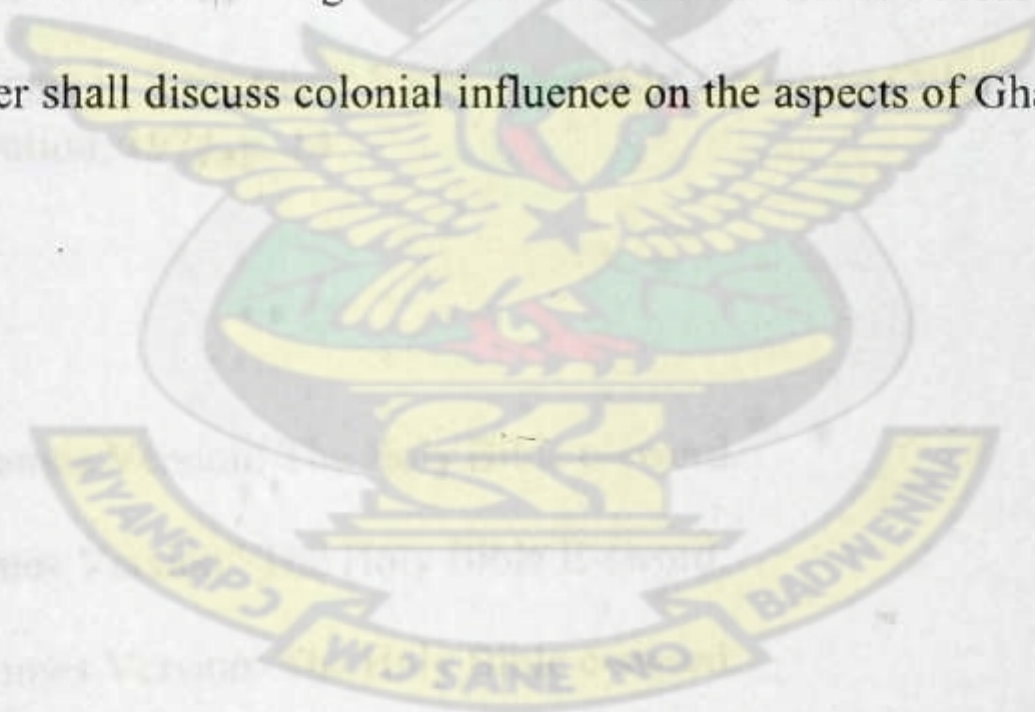
The title of the poem suggests that the predicament is death. The persona and his family are overwhelmed by the death of a relative and the shock makes them question the saying that "the hippo cannot overturn the canoe". To them, the supposed impossible has happened and that is why ~~they call~~ on the fathers or ancestors for help. Ancestorship and tradition are important cultural values among the people of Ghana and it is amply expressed in the poetry of Awoonor.



It is important to sum up on ancestorship that the Ghanaian society recognizes ancestors for the belief that since they (ancestors) have lived among humans before, the ancestors could identify with their situations better and help them when they are called upon.

In conclusion to this chapter, it is evident that the Ghanaian society, before the advent of the colonization, has certain cultural values which were strictly observed.

These cultural values are religion which was traditional, social settlement and the Ghanaian society which believed in the communal and individual living, the family system which is akin to the extended system although the nuclear is not neglected, chieftaincy which also represents political and judicial authority, the rites of passage especially death and funeral and ancestorship. However, these cultural values have undergone certain transformation as a result of colonization. Therefore, the next chapter shall discuss colonial influence on the aspects of Ghanaian culture as depicted in the poems.





## END NOTE

1 Gyekye, Kwame. The Unexamined Life: Philosophy and the African Experience. Legon:  
Sankofa Publishing Company, 2004. p. 3

2 Ibid p. 3

3 Wikipedia

4 Sarpong, Peter. Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture. Tema: Ghana  
Publishing Corporation, 1974. p.10

5 Ibid p. 10

6 Ibid p. 12

7 Wikipedia

8 Gyekye, Kwame. The Unexamined Life: Philosophy and the African Experience. Legon:  
Sankofa Publishing Company, 2004. p. 5

9 Sarpong, Peter. Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture. Tema: Ghana  
Publishing Corporation, 1974. p. 14

10 Wikipedia

11 Wikipedia

12 Lev. 17.11 King James Version: The Holy Bible e-sword.

13 Col. 1.14 King James Version" The Holy Bible E-sword.

14 Lev. 17.11 King James Version: The Holy Bible e-sword.

15 Gyekye, Kwame. The Unexamined Life: Philosophy and the African Experience. Legon:  
Sankofa Publishing Company, 2004. p. 34

16 Ibid p. 35

17 Ibid p. 35

18 Ibid p. 35

19 Ibid p. 35

20 Ibid p. 37



- 21 Ibid p. 37
- 22 Ibid p. 37
- 23 Ibid p. 37
- 24 Ibid p. 37
- 25 Ibid p. 45
- 26 Ibid p. 47
- 27 Ibid p. 47
- 28 Ibid p. 47
- 29 Ibid p. 75
- 30 Ibid 109
- 31 Ibid 109
- 32 Ibid 109
- 33 Heb 9:27. The King James Version: The Holy Bible. E-sword.
- 34 Sarpong, Peter. Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974. p. 29
- 35 Ibid p. 30
- 36 Ibid p. 30
- 37 Ibid p. 30
- 38 Gyekye, Kwame. The Unexamined Life: Philosophy and the African Experience. Legon: Sankofa Publishing Company, 2004. p. 162
- 39 Ibid p. 161
- 40 Ibid p. 161
- 41 Sarpong, Peter. Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974. p. 33
- 42 Ibid p. 33
- 43 Wikipedia.



44 Awoonor. Unitl the Morning After. Accra: Woeli Publishers, 1987. p. 32

45 Genesis 3. The King James Version: The Holy Bible, E-sword.





44 Awoonor. Unitl the Morning After. Accra: Woeli Publishers, 1987. p. 32

45 Genesis 3. The King James Version: The Holy Bible. E-sword.

KNUST





## CHAPTER 3

### THE COLONIAL INFLUENCE

The previous chapter examined some aspects of Ghanaian culture but this chapter is to examine the colonial influence on some of the aspects of Ghanaian culture discussed in chapter two. The scope of this chapter is to examine how formal education has been the main tool for the transformation of the Ghanaian society. The influence exerted by education has affected the outlook and philosophy of the two poets in question and by extension, all educated African elites. Again, this chapter shall also examine the concept of hybridization which is a direct consequence of colonialism according to the colonial and post-colonial theorists. The conclusion of this chapter shall therefore be that colonial influence has largely been through education. The irony, however, is the same education became the main tool for enlightenment which led to the overthrow of colonial power but not its structures. Nonetheless, though colonialism has been overthrown, it has left behind a cultural marriage which has diluted the traditional way Ghanaians viewed life.

Though Awoonor has said that "the Weaver Bird" is about the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah's Administration yet, it also highlights the idea of European occupation of the African continent and, to a less extent, British rule in Ghana. British power is metaphorically described as a "weaver bird" who comes in subtly to plant her hegemony over Ghana with the message of Christ, making Ghanaians do away with their cherished traditions and customs.

The weaver bird built in our house  
And laid its eggs on our tree.  
We did not want to send it away.  
We watched the building of the nest  
And supervised the egg-laying.



And the weaver returned in the guise of the owner.  
 Preaching salvation to us that owned the house.  
 They say it came from the west  
 Where the storms at sea had felled the gulls  
 And the fishers dried their nets by lantern light.  
 Its sermon is the divination of ourselves  
 And our new horizon limit at its nest  
 But we cannot join the prayers and answers of the  
     Communicants.  
 We look for new homes everyday,  
 For new altars we strive to rebuild  
 The old shrines defiled by the weaver's excrement.

The above poem is a graphic presentation of the European invasion and the effect of their occupation on the African continent as well as the Ghanaian society. The poem speaks of the lost identity, lost culture which comprises morality, religion and the general way of life. The persona says he and the others are looking for a new home which means new identities because they do not feel they belong to the new order of life. The persona, in the first line indicates that "The weaver bird built in our house." The "our" acknowledges, in the tone of the persona, how he believes the weaver bird is a usurper. The weaver bird took possession of a place that did not belong to it. The place for building the weaver bird's house belonged to people other than the bird. The use of "built" also suggests that the weaver bird established itself in its newly found place. In effect, the colonial experience has changed the Ghanaian society dramatically and the persona in the above poem describes the situation as defilement from the "weaver's excrement". The use of the olfactory imagery presents an idea of contamination and the appalling situation in which the colonized was subjected to. The "weaver's excrement" means that the stench emanating from the excrement is smelled everywhere. The scent from the excrement could mean that the colonial influence was felt everywhere. On the other hand, it is an acknowledgment that the colonial influence is very strong on the colonized. Such influence is widespread. It is in the areas of education, culture and even settlements.



One of the colonial influences is seen in the system of education bequeathed to Ghana. Ghana, like the rest of Africa, was introduced to literate culture from its oral culture in the C18th that is much later than the Western world. Ong argues that the "basic orality of language is permanent."<sup>1</sup> The argument by Ong means that nothing can completely take away the orality of language but it must be made clear that written literature has established itself strongly in colonial and post-colonial Ghana. The main form of communication, be it in the arts or business transaction or everyday conversation, is in the mode of oral language in pre-colonial Ghana. Again, Ong who considers proverbs as a repository of knowledge in preliterate culture posits that:

proverbs from all over the world are rich with observations about this overwhelmingly human phenomenon of speech in its native oral form, about its powers, its beauties, its dangers. The same fascination with oral speech continues unabated for centuries after writing comes into use."<sup>2</sup>

However, colonialism came with it a writing culture. The European writers began to introduce writing into the educational system and they also documented the situation of Ghana without paying attention to the unique characteristics of the socio-cultural environment they found.

Regardless of the pre-colonial cultural environment of the Ghanaian society in which there was oral preservation of knowledge and philosophy through folklore, music and drama, the colonial power, as its general tendency, considered the society uncivilized, barbaric and savage. One cannot avoid wading into the ~~concentration~~ on post-colonial literary discussion due to its enduring entrenched nature in the psyche of the people especially through its educational system.

Issue has been raised as to why colonialism has been a subject of African literature and why colonial institutions seems to be such a central component of a literature which was expressively



produced as a critique of the European domination. The response has been that the imposition of European rule on the African continent cannot be discussed without the trauma and drama that accompanied it. The kind of institutions left behind by the European powers have drastically transformed the Ghanaian society to the extent that Adu Boahen remarks: "Never in the history of Africa did so many changes occur and with such speed as they did between 1880 and 1935... The pace of this drama was truly astonishing, for as late as 1880 only very limited areas of Africa had come under the direct rule of Europeans."<sup>3</sup> It must also be noted that modern African literature is a product of colonialism. According to Fanon,

On the unconscious plane, therefore, colonialism did not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle, loving mother who protects her child from hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness which is its very essence.<sup>4</sup>

On the effect of education, Fanon says that "the native intellectual has thrown himself greedily upon western culture."<sup>5</sup>

The early colonial writers exemplify Fanon's assertion. De Graft's *The Gene* reads:

Time went to dine with science  
And rose reline from draughts of human blood,  
A crimson ulcer flaming on his chromosome.

This is the hush hour before the holocaust;  
You  
And me  
And you –  
Victims patiently waiting  
To be slaughtered upon decadent altars  
For worlds already septic in the womb.

Who will redeem the future?  
Time is a hermaphrodite,  
And the ulcer burns crimson on her chromosome.<sup>6</sup>



*The Gene* is a kind of poem which seeks to use the high language of biology, disasters and traditional religious symbols to send a message to the literary community about the poet's intellectual distinction. This is the result of colonial influence on education. The persona uses words such as "chromosomes", "holocaust" and "decadent altars" to indicate his mixed background as one influenced by European ideals. The use of the word "chromosome" sends one's mind to biology and to how a child is formed and the use of "holocaust" presents the image of disaster in which countless numbers of ordinary people are killed in a war. Meanwhile the "decadent altars" refers to immoral sacrifices. The "decadent altars" brings an astonishing understanding of the formation of man and the disasters men have to endure and the kind of deaths they are subjected to in life.

The persona in De Graft's *The Gene* is quite symbolic of the colonial influence on education which ultimately transformed the intellectual development of the Ghanaian society.

The colonial influence also created what Said describes as the "us" and "them" syndrome in most colonized places. It was done through education and settlement patterns. The new educational system created what Fanon calls the "new African Bourgeoisies." The "us" referred to the colonized and "them" the colonialist. After colonialism, the "us" and "them" is a means of distinguishing between the educated elite and his high taste for foreign products as well as his purchasing power and the indigenous uneducated African who is torn between following the path of his compatriots, the educated elite or the path of the traditional generation. This colonial way of stratifying the Ghanaian society has persisted to date.

The educated elite lives in "cities" and "towns" with all their infrastructure and amenities provided while the uneducated ones live in the traditional settlement in which the community



shares all the available resources. Education has also divided our society in a way that the educated has all the opportunities for good living and the uneducated has to work as labourers for them. This tendency has brought about the European individualistic concept in the Ghanaian society and has, over the years gradually, eroded the Ghanaian family system which is the extended family.

Awoonor's *Hymn to My Dumb Earth* talks about the colonial influence on the educated Ghanaian. The persona presents himself as an intellectual, who has knowledge of everything such as religion, revolution, nationhood, the philosophical theories of Malcom X and the security services. Intellectualism is very typical of the colonial influence because the colonized elite shows himself an intellectual in order to keep up a certain level of intellectual competence and compete with his European counterparts. The persona uses words such as "cathedral" "choir", religious symbols of Christianity; "anthem", a national unifying symbol of a people in a nation; "redeemed gangster", a revolutionary leader such as Malcom X who tried to break the yoke of black subjugation in America, "UN" a symbol of international politics and so on. One also sees the persona's understanding of Marxism;

The interpenetration of opposites,  
The negation of the negation,  
The transformation of quantity into quality.

The persona presents himself as an intellectual who knows a lot more of every given subject and this is typical of the colonized elite and it is also a point of maturation for Awoonor as has been discussed in the literature review.

This attitude of knowing so much contributes to the division between the educated elite and the illiterates which further entrenches the "us" and "them" concept.



Anyidoho's *American Fevers* also presents us with an accentuated colonial elite who is exposed and wants to show some distinction in his thought and outlook on life. The persona has travelled outside of his home country to America, and he is recounting his personal experience of his new environment. As a Ghanaian elite influenced largely by colonial thought about the western world, he goes there with much anticipation of a better life. He gets to Texas and his disillusion begins. This kind of frustration is expressed in colonial poetry due to the kind of education the elite has received from the colonial lords. This kind of disillusion and cultural imperialism triggered the agitation for independence in colonized worlds such as French-Africa, British-Africa and Dutch-Africa. The disappointment, frustration and shock among the colonized about their half-baked knowledge which seeks to remove them from themselves and implant in them a new identity through colonial education is what has been a major subject for the post-colonial intellectuals who are gradually redefining the perimeters and scope of the colonized identity.

A typical example of redefining the post-colonial educated elite is the poets under discussion. The poets under discussion have, as a result of education, developed a particular outlook and philosophy of life. This outlook and philosophy is premised on Nkrumah's speech at the formal opening of the Institute of African Studies, Legon where Research Fellows and those in the arts had gathered:

In studying the arts, however, you must not be content with the accumulation of knowledge about the arts. Your researches must stimulate creative activity; they must contribute to the development of the arts in Ghana and in other parts of Africa; they must stimulate the birth of a specifically African literature, which, exploring African themes and the depth of the African soul, will become an integral portion of a general world literature. It would be wrong to make this a mere appendage of world literature...

In this way, the Institute can serve the needs of the people by helping to develop new forms of dance and drama, of music and creative writing, that are at the same time closely related to our Ghanaian traditions



and express the ideas and aspirations of our people at this critical stage in our history. This should lead to new studies on our cultural development.<sup>7</sup>

It is upon this inspiration from the first President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, that the outlook and philosophy of Awoonor and Anyidoho are based. In the second paragraph of Nkrumah's speech is the admonition that new forms of drama, dance, music and creative writing should be developed to serve the needs of the people of Ghana and Africa at large. This is what drives the two poets under study. According to Anyidoho, oral traditions influence the writings of several poets in the black world and Awoonor is no exception. Awoonor is widely known for bringing to life the "Ewe oral tradition."<sup>8</sup> Atukwei Okai is also among those poets who believe that because of the melodic and rhythmic nature of their poetry they should always "perform to live audiences."<sup>9</sup>

These poets, Awoonor and Anyidoho, have reconstructed for their respective communities among the Ewes a kind of poetry that hinges on their oral traditions such that the people can easily identify with them as was proposed by Nkrumah. In their poetry, one sees the rhythm and melody used in making it sonorous and soothing to the ears.

Anyidoho's *Fertility Game* is a classic example of the kind of poetry that is based solely on the Ewe oral tradition and requires drama and dance to make it livelier. The poem begins:

*Come back home      Aghenoxevi      come back home*

A week today at carnival time  
Young men of the land will gather  
For the wrestling duel of songs and dance,  
Maidens will sharpen their tongues and  
Carve praise images of dream lovers and  
I have a gourdful of praise names laid aside for you



*Come back home      Agbenoxevi      come back home*

The chorus, '*Come back home      Agbenoxevi      come back home*', is repeated by the audience in a live performance throughout the entire poem. The subject of the poem is about love during a festival in which there is a wrestling contest among the young men who consider themselves strong enough to engage in fisticuffs. At this ceremony, young maidens come around to sing praises for the victors or victor. Again, the young maidens sing during the entire contest to keep the event lively and active. It is relevant to state that Anyidoho uses poetry as a medium to preserve the traditions and culture as well as the oral form of the arts for the people of Keta in Eweland. In this song, the maiden sings to call back his lover who has presumably travelled out of town to return because it is almost time for the carnival where young men would meet amidst songs and dance to fraternize and celebrate. It is also a period where lovers meet and partners are found.

Awoonor also shows the same tendency in the poem *Hymn to My Dumb Earth*. The chorus is "Everything comes from God." Even though this poem is not one of the collections of the Ewe songs, its creation is based on the concept of oral tradition in which there is music and dance.

The poem opens:

The rivers burst; the land was covered  
with blood.

Everything comes from God

The rhythmic effect is seen in the sound created by the burst river. However, the fact that imagery of blood is not coterminous with a river raises some suspicion as to what the persona hears. It also raises the audience's suspense as they wait to see the final resolution.

That suspense is broken when they hear that everything comes from God. They are not enthused about the resolution because the river bursting blood filling the earth is not what they expected. While the audience think of breaking the suspense, the persona moves on to another subject



which then moves into several other topics and then concludes with "Everything comes from God" again. "Everything comes from God" is repeated several times to keep the fervor of the recitation and the interest of the audience at its peak throughout the chant. The image, "chameleon faeces", raises several questions about the persona's mood, attitude and general composure.

The affairs of this world are like the  
Chameleon faeces  
Into which I have stepped.

The outlook and philosophy of these poets in bringing freshness upon the orality and literary writing of the Ghanaian arts is to help their people identify with their works while using literary language to make it more universal.

The general outlook and philosophy of the poets discussed above introduces us to the subject of hybridism which is the main focus of this paragraph. A major colonial effect on the poets is cultural hybridization. As the colonized seeks to redefine his identity, it is obvious such search for identity is a difficult one. For instance, McKim Marriott makes a symbolic analysis of the dilemma that befalls the colonized in the cultural choice and the search for identity. He states that:

Lying somewhere between these extremes of either surrendering to European civilization or fabricating an African counterpart are several alternative policies evident especially in the states of former British Administration. Instead of the full French dress of Sekou Toure and Felix Houphouet-Boigny, one finds in the wardrobes of Kwame Nkrumah and Sir Abubakar Balewa a mixture of tribal robes and business suit. Nigeria exemplifies a splitting of orientation between the strongly European inclinations of the civil service elite and the continuation of indigenous aristocratic traditions by the former agents of indirect rule – the native chiefs.<sup>10</sup>

A major cultural shift in the lives of the colonized stares at the faces of the colonised. The colonized has multiple choice; to choose to hook to his past traditions, to do a whole embrace of



new culture for identity and sense of belonging or to hybridize. In most cases, it has not been an easy choice even for the pan-Africanist such as Nkrumah and his compatriots. Anyidoho says that "the urge to embark on the ultimate journey into the lost self is insistent"<sup>11</sup>; and Baker Jr. also posits that:

To understand our origins, we must journey through difficult straights. And in the end we may find only confusion. Most of us take refuge in the safe harbor of dreams, envisioning glorious years of the distant past or the near future. Perhaps only poets, or writers confined to a situation that offers no alternatives, can and do make the effort at return.

The black writer, having attempted the journey, preserves details of his voyage in that most manifest and coherent of all cultural systems – language. Through his work we are allowed to witness, if not the trip itself, at least a representation of the black voyage that provides some view of our emergence.<sup>12</sup>

Again, the difficulty has created what has been described as the "whiteness of black,"<sup>13</sup> a "fascinating and yet disturbing exploration of the tragic domain of the racial rainbow coalition."<sup>14</sup> This means that the black who has suffered colonial domination, among other difficulties, has to contend with double mentality: one that is inclined to western ideals and the other that is underpinned by the cultural values already exposed to in life. This tragedy is espoused in Guillen's *Ballad of the Two Grandfathers* where he attempts at uniting his two ancestries just as the case of the colonized.

He writes:

Two shadows who I alone can see  
my two grandfathers are always there with me  
Don Federico calls to me  
and Taita Facundo is silent  
both dream in the night  
and walk and walk  
I unite them.<sup>15</sup>



This is the predicament of the colonized. The most obvious choice for the colonized has been to unite the two identities which are undoubtedly a heritage. Nkrumah and Mazrui are advocates of unifying the heritages of the African past and narrowly, the Ghanaian past.

Anyidoho and Awoonor also show this hybridism in their poetry. Awoonor deliberately divides his poetry into divisions in which one serves the interest of his traditional past and the other presents his imposed present. In Awoonor's *Until the Morning After*, he subtitles his poetry as follows: *from Rediscovery, from Night of My Blood and African Memories* which contain poems related to his traditional past. These poems present his background as a member of the Anlo tradition in which he uses symbols and imagery from his traditional background. One sees in these poems his tacit condemnation of European impositions, especially religion. Awoonor's personae show strong attachment to his traditional religion, communal settlement as opposed to European individualism, chieftaincy as a political institution as opposed to western democracy and his belief in ancestorship where ancestors are called upon by those who venerate them to help in times of need.

The other subtitles: *American Profile, from The House by the Sea, Homecoming... Poems from Prison and New Poems* present symbols and themes that are quite alien to the African traditional past. In these collections, Awoonor uses literary theories such as romanticism and metaphysical images to present his various themes. These collection of poems show his third phase of development as a poet. At this point in his career, he exhibits a lot more intellectual depth various subjects in which his allusions and images are more universal.



Anyidoho also presents the same hybrid nature. He does it quite differently from Awoonor. He tends to entitle his poems in a way that easily brings out his intension and the scope of his subject. Anyidoho mixes his imagery.

He combines both traditional images with universal imagery such that one finds it exhilarating reading his poetry. For example, the poem, *Akasanoma to Akua*,

My fears become visions  
my visions give birth to words  
my words become the toddler's joy  
stumbling through our village lanes our sandy shores

highlights the point discussed above clearly. One sees "toddler's joy", a universal image which represents innocence and purity and "village lanes our sandy shores" which presents Keta, where the poet originates. Anyidoho shows this mastery in most of his poetry; and where Awoonor does this, he does that to juxtapose the two cultures although he does not deny his hybrid nature. In any case, Said argues that "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic."<sup>16</sup>

Anyidoho also contends that not "until we develop a fully literate culture, the oral tradition shall continue to be the central part of our literatures, and shall remain the basic point of reference for writers, especially those who would aim at reconnecting with the society at large."<sup>17</sup> This is the philosophy and assumption on which these poets build and present their poetry.

In conclusion, the post-colonial life of the Ghanaian has become a hybrid culture and education has been the main channel through which this culture has developed. This hybrid culture, however, has left the post-colonized in a state of double-consciousness which is to be discussed in much detail.



## END NOTE

1 Ong, Walter. Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word. New York: Methuen  
& Co., 1982. p. 7

2 Ibid p. 9

3 Gikandi, Simon. African Literature and the colonial Factor. London: Cambridge  
University Press, 2004. p. 55

4 Fanon Frantz. The Wretched of the Earth. London: The Chaucer Press, 1963. p. 169-170

5 Ibid p. 176

6 Awoonor & Adali-Morty. Messages: Poems from Ghana. London: Heineman  
Educational Books, 1971. p. 1

7 Anyidoho, Kofi. The Pan-African Ideal in Literature of the Black World. Accra: Ghana  
Universities Press, 1989. p. 17

8 Ibid p. 32

9 Ibid p. 32

10 Geertz, Clifford ed. Old Societies and New States. Glencoe: The Free Press of Glencoe,  
1963 p. 49

11 Anyidoho, Kofi. The Pan-African Ideal in Literature of the Black World. Accra: Ghana  
Universities Press, 1989. p. 33

12 Ibid p.32-33

13 Ibid p. 35

14 Ibid p. 35

15 Ibid p. 36-37

16 Said, E. W. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993. p. xxv

17 Anyidoho, Kofi. The Pan-African Ideal in Literature of the Black World. Accra: Ghana  
Universities Press, 1989. p. 32



## CHAPTER 4

### THE POST-COLONIAL CULTURE CONFLICT

As already stated, the hybrid culture has created in the colonized a double personality. The colonized and post-colonized is aware of two different cultures which are bequeathed to him or her. Awoonor's *Comes the Voyage at Last* is "a work that is poetically constructed on a principle of a double historical consciousness."<sup>1</sup> In this work, one sees how Awoonor presents a colonized persona who wades through the storm of hybridism to the search for a personality that is not divided or without internal struggle for self identity. This double-consciousness is what Anyidoho believes has been bequeathed to the entire black world. He believes that the colonized has a mixed culture in different forms and he describes that as an imposed self. He says this imposed self remains in "the condition of fragmentation"<sup>2</sup> because it is a result of "centuries of being forced into alien selves"<sup>3</sup>. The colonial experience of the Ghanaian has presented an unreal identity to him or her. On the one hand, the post-colonized believes in the new identity superimposed by the imperialist and, on the other hand, the post-colonized is running back to what his forbears left for him.

Awoonor's *The Anvil and the Hammer* presents the dilemma bequeathed to post-colonial Ghana. The poem opens with a confusing tone, "Caught between the anvil and the hammer / in the forging house of a new life / ~~transforming~~ the pangs that delivered me / into the joy of new songs". The persona presents himself as trapped between two opposing forces with no control over each of these forces. The images, hammer and anvil, used by the smith to shape ornaments into desired shape make sense in that the persona is saying he, like the object of the smith, does



not have any choice but to be molded by its maker. Here, the maker is both the traditional cultural belief system and the European culture imposed through imperialistic tendencies.

He goes on to bring his past into the picture. He says, "Washed in the blood of the goat in the fetish hut / are laced with the flimsy glories of paved streets." He shows by this admission that he is conscious of both of his heritages. However, he calls on his fathers to "sew the old days" for himself and his colleagues "that we can wear them under our new garment/ after we have washed ourselves in / the whirlpool of the many rivers' estuary." Obviously the tone of the persona is typical of the cry of the colonized who is trapped and is very much aware of his condition.

This double consciousness is seen again in *We have Found a New Land*. In this poem, the persona concedes that in his new place of abode his past still matters to him. He is aware of his new environment and not oblivious of his past. In his new self which others are eager to join, the persona admonishes them to be careful because their songs are dying on their lips. This means that the community is losing its joy and fulfillment. He describes the new land as "hell-gate" because the entire environment is alien although he sees familiar faces. The persona tells those eager to join them that "you cannot dress like that" and as he says this to them, tears well up in his eyes. This means that the persona is not really happy about his new state where his allegiance is to two different cultures that are opposed to each other. He also admits that,

And in the ~~new land~~ we have found  
The water is drying from the towel  
Our songs are dead and we sell them dead to the other side  
Reaching for the Stars we stop at the house of the moon  
And pause to relearn the wisdom of our fathers

The persona seems to be disappointed about his new state of being. He says that the excitement which he had in joining the culture seems to fade out. The use of "water" and "towel" bring out the point about the excitement, fluidity and joy he had in accepting the new culture which he



now describes as hell. However, his disappointment deepens when he recognizes that all that glitters is not gold after all. The persona thinks he is reaching for the stars in his new culture. He is entering the realm of enlightenment which he symbolizes with the "star"; but as he climbs to that realm, frustration greets him such that he and his colleagues have to stop at the "less" illumined spot (moon) to relearn the wisdom of his fathers. This is the consciousness which the post-colonised has experienced in his daily life as one side of him pulls him towards European "civilization" and the other side to the traditional "un-civilization".

Apart from the double-conscious nature of the colonized, colonization leaves the colonized in a state of dilemma. The dilemma is a fatal difficulty the colonized finds himself or herself grappling with each day. The fatal difficulty is the struggle to accept or reject the cultural imposition of his colonial lords. Most of the colonized and post-colonised have not been able to come to terms with the realities of their heritages and there is a frantic effort to return to their homeland. Awoonor and Anyidoho are obviously caught in this dilemma in the struggle for identity; be it poetical or perceptual.

Awoonor's *Exile* presents this schizophrenic tendency in the colonized. The persona in this poem pleads with the moon to shine on his and his colleagues' way home. The symbol of night used here by the persona suggests his state of loss in the dark path. In the night, it is only the moon and stars that can provide illumination for the individual seeking to find his way home. Home, as used by the persona, presents a place of welcome and belonging. In other words, the persona has journeyed to a place where he is not welcomed and does not feel he belongs. However, the persona concedes that the "return is tedious" but the exiled souls have gathered at the beach. The image of the sea could mean that there is a difficulty in finding a path home or that the entire shore is not conducive enough. But the following line is more painful:



Moon, moon shine on our way  
 Shine bright for us to go home  
 The return is tedious  
 And the exiled souls gather on the beach  
 Arguing and deciding their future  
 Should they return home  
 And face the fences the termites had eaten  
 And see the dunghill that has mounted on their birthplace  
 But their journey homeward done on the sea-scape's roar  
 Their final strokes will land them on forgotten shores  
 They committed the impiety of self-deceit  
 Slashed, cut and wounded their souls  
 And left the mangled remainder in manacles  
 Before the sacred altar, alongside the sacrificial cock  
 Whose crow woke the night sleepers at dawn.  
 The moon, the moon is our father's spirit  
 At the Star's entrance the night revelers gather  
 To sell their chatter and inhuman sweat to the gateman  
 And shuffle their feet in agonies of birth  
 Lost souls, lost souls, lost souls that are still at the gate

The persona says, "Arguing and deciding their future". This is the painful path for all subjugated people, especially, Africans. The journey back to real self is very difficult and this has been acknowledged by most theorists of post-colonial literary culture. The persona in the *Exile* ends his confusion by reiterating the fact that the lost souls are locked out at the gate. He says; "And shuffle their feet in agonies of birth/ Lost souls, lost souls, lost souls that are still at the gate."

Another poem is *The Cathedral* in which the persona decries the imposition of European religion on Ghana at the expense of traditional religion. The persona expresses such frustration in his tone in *the Cathedral*.

On this dirty patch  
 A tree once stood  
 Shedding incense on the infant corn;  
 Its bough stretched across a heaven  
 Brightened by the last fires of the tribe.  
 They sent surveyors and builders  
 Who cut that tree  
 Planting in its place  
 A huge senseless cathedral of doom.



The persona utterly rejects the establishment of Christian religion symbolized by the cathedral. He describes the cathedral as, "A huge senseless cathedral of doom." By this description, the persona compares the cathedral to the "tree" whose bough stretched across a heaven. In effect, the persona shows his preference for the traditional religion to the Christian religion which is a product of the builders and surveyors. The persona is definitely disgusted at the fact that the cathedral was not built close to and beside the tree but the tree was completely cut from its place only to plant in its place the cathedral. This line suggests how traditional religion was completely denigrated by the Europeans to make its patrons shift to the new religion imposed on them. *The Cathedral* ties in quite well with, *What Song shall We Sing*, though with a little difference.

In *What Song shall We Sing*, the persona shows his confusion as to where his allegiance should be. Already, the persona has described the cathedral as senseless in *The Cathedral*, and so in *What Song shall We Sing*, the persona considers the adherents of Christian religion as "street boys." Nonetheless, the persona tells his compatriots, "here come the travelers with the new song / Let us learn the new songs from afar." There is a seeming concession by the persona that due to the overwhelming power exhibited by the European religion, he has to join the new religion which he has unreservedly condemned in *The Cathedral*.

He again demonstrates rejection and acceptance of the Eurocentric culture with a cry in *I Heard a Bird Cry*. In a solemn tone, the persona tells his ancestors,

That day we killed the sacred ram  
And the thunder drums sounded  
I was there.  
I put down my white man's clothes  
and rolled a cloth.

The persona's attitude suggests that for a while he had forgotten about the traditional past of his people. He says, in a reminiscent tone, "that day..." / "I was there." He is suggesting how he has



lost touch with his past but still remembers the events and incidents. He says that when he heard the drums, he let down the white man's clothes. This could mean he momentarily remembered who he is and responded accordingly. This is the kind of confusion associated with the colonized: to accept the new religion and its culture or to stick to his old ways. There is obviously a stretch or a pull for the post-colonized allegiance be it subtle or obvious. The struggle sometimes leads to a double personality which seeks to address the double interests of his heritage. This is what Anyidoho reflects upon in his treatise The Pan African Ideal in Literatures of the Black World. His reflection on this subject leads to a serious assumption that is quite troubling.

He says:

To reconstruct memory is to invoke possibilities and accent permanence. How do a people forget? What are the conditions that erase cultures? What is it in the makeup of a people that allows them to belittle their own traditions and make small of themselves and their history? Why do a people (an entire people) forget? ... The Middle Passage was the key, turning the memory lock. The ocean was a destroyer, a supreme separator of the body from soil, spirit from soul, mind from source.

What happens to the mind that in one second is in complete command of one's own destiny; free to work, build, play, love and make use of one's own creative juices; and in less than a blinking eye is reduced to a number on a sea captain's ledger, redefined out of human family, diminished to a state of personal property to be bartered or sold worldwide as a *slave*? The long road to amnesia begins when a man is forced to witness the rape of his women; the dismantling of his family and nation; the forced sprinkling of his children worldwide and the occupation of his land by foreigners... how does a woman survive the castration of her men...?

The crowning blow was to be unloaded in strange ports among even stranger people and systematically traumatized into a different and ugly way of life.

In order to survive, one had to give up something, and if that something was not the body, the only explainable substitute was the mind.<sup>4</sup>



Anyidoho again narrates Nascimento's *Sortilege* in which its protagonist, Doctor Emmanuel, a black lawyer, determined to hold onto his imposed perception of the world and of himself through white eyes is eventually redeemed through black mystery of the African heritage religion of the Candomble or Macumba. Emmanuel's final words are "Now I'm free. Forever. A black man free from kindness. Free from fear. Freed from your charity and your compassion. You can have these civilized rages too, white men."<sup>5</sup>

Equiano's slavery experience summarizes the point being made by Anyidoho and Nascimento about parting with the self of the post-colonized. Equiano says, "Every leaf and every whisp'ring breath/ conveyed a foe, and every foe a death."<sup>6</sup> By death, Equiano suggests the death to one's own past and traditions. One is removed from himself or herself.

He says again, "Thus was I like a thundering deer"<sup>7</sup> to point out his predicament. The image, deer, points to the fact of someone running away from something. The post-colonialized is always trying to discover himself or herself because of the double image. This dilemma is what one finds in the cultural interest of every colonized.

The solution to the cultural dilemma of the colonized has been proposed by Marriott as follows:

"To ignore the background of its own indigenous tribal cultures, while emphasizing perfect adherence to the foreign model"<sup>8</sup> or that of Ghana in which it,

exhibits the policies of a nationalist intelligentsia taking over power suddenly in opposition to traditional leadership and legitimizing its position by rapid new borrowings from foreign sources: a new state culture is created by translation from Russia Socialism ("Black Star Square"), Judeo-Christian messianism (Nkrumah the "Redeemer"), and the symbols of former colonial power (a renovated Christianborg Castle, and so on,<sup>9</sup>



and the uniquely Ugandan experience "where much of European culture has been embraced without conflict under the fiction that it and its agents are mere instruments of the continuing Baganda tribal state."<sup>10</sup>

Anyidoho's *Go Tell Jesus* and *This World must Go* are examples of some of the difficulties the post-colonialist must endure. The persona in *Go Tell Jesus* asks a myriad of questions about God and his message as well as the messengers. He also raises questions about doctrinal issues of Christianity. Presumably, what the persona has learned about Christianity is not what he sees practiced by the adherents. In the poem, the persona sends someone to inform Him that his messengers are confusing him (the persona) about the status of men, "Men are equal or/ Men are un-equal?" This is a fundamental question in human experience especially in Christianity.

There is the argument for equality in the scriptures but it does not eliminate the idea of hierarchy in our social fabric. Probably, the hierarchical structure taught by the scriptures is to prevent a situation where the society would be ungovernable. In the family set, for instance, although scriptures promote equality at home, it also promotes hierarchy in which case the man is the head of the home. The persona raises a legitimate question because the doctrine of equality has not been clarified and therefore he says "his messengers have come / but have forgotten his words."

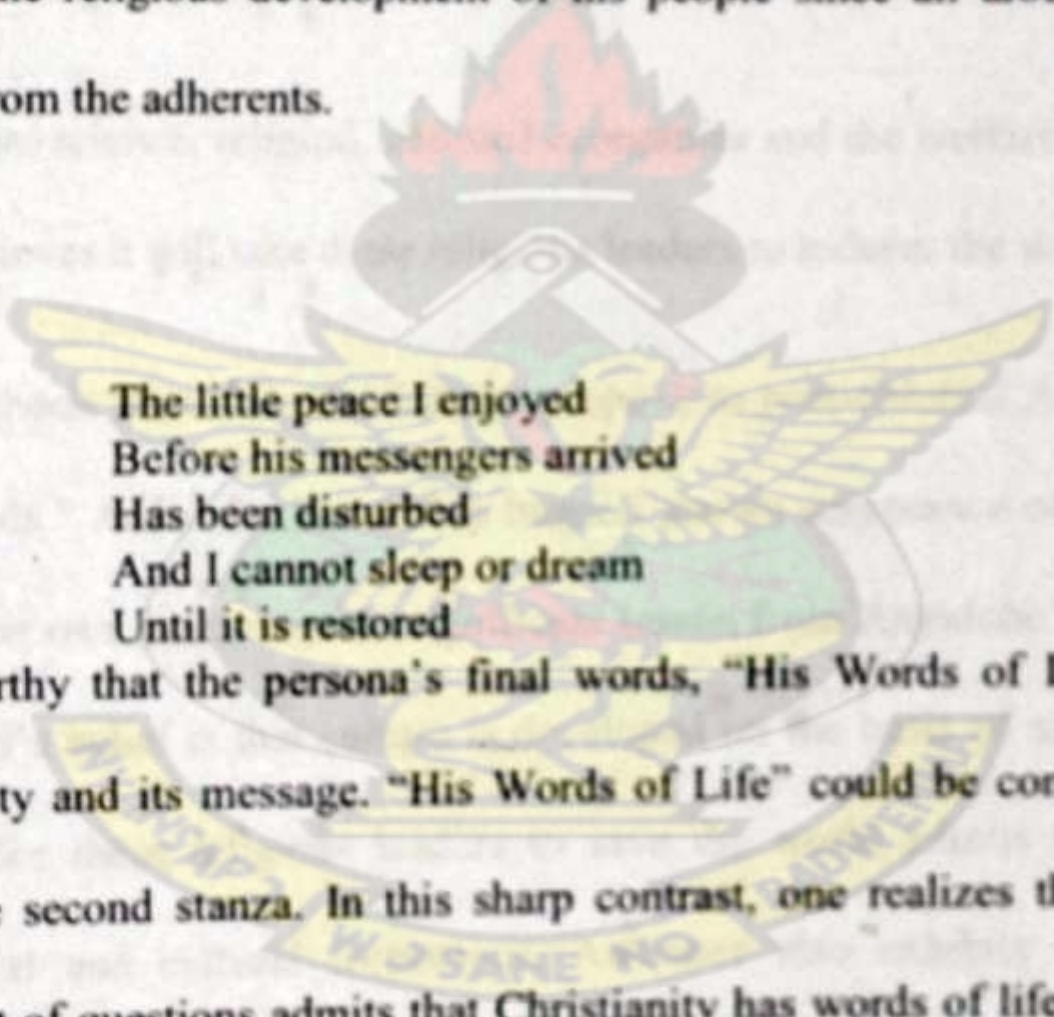
The persona again questions the means through which God can be reached. As a traditionalist, he knows that the ~~Supreme God is beyond the reach of men~~ but Jesus comes to say that through him God can be reached. This is a major question for the traditionalist who knows that God is beyond the reach of mortal men. He questions the fate of the ancestors who did not know about Christ before their demise. In the midst of this seeming confusion, the persona knows, however, about judgment after death. He asks, "Will all of them be/ damned?" This question is equally important



because messengers of the Christian tradition have been unable to explain convincingly the fate of those who lived before the birth and death of Jesus Christ to the "outsiders" – non-adherents. This is a kind of church question that still bothers non-Christians, especially in traditional religion.

The persona once more questions the attitude of Jesus himself. The persona wants to know why He (Jesus) did not tour the world to spread his own message but left it in the hands of a chosen few only for them to confuse the message. In effect, the persona expresses his dismay at what Christianity holds for the religious development of his people since all around him, he sees nothing but confusion from the adherents.

He says:



The little peace I enjoyed  
Before his messengers arrived  
Has been disturbed  
And I cannot sleep or dream  
Until it is restored

However, it is noteworthy that the persona's final words, "His Words of Life", suggest an admission of Christianity and its message. "His Words of Life" could be contrasted with "his words of death" in the second stanza. In this sharp contrast, one realizes that the persona's attitude after his tall list of questions admits that Christianity has words of life for its adherents and that this should be the guiding light and the basis for the messengers' message.

Anyidoho expresses another important attitude which buttresses the point already made above about the post-colonised, that is, the attitude of rejecting and accepting eurocentric religion. *This World must Go* is important in showing the persona's religious plurality. This religious plurality is seen in his acceptance of Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. Speaking with a desperate voice for redemption for this present generation and its wanton confusion, the persona calls on



three towering religious figures that he believes could help correct the situation of this world. These religious figures are Buddha, Moses and Jesus. The persona believes that these religions and their founders have the capacity to restructure the society in which he lives.

He addresses some of the issues confronting his world. He says that humanity has been trapped and that humanity sells itself for things that do not count. He further says that the self is broken and he describes the world as a "nuclear wasteland." The persona, at this juncture, calls for redemption because, to him, those who are to provide direction for world development have all been misled and their messages distorted.

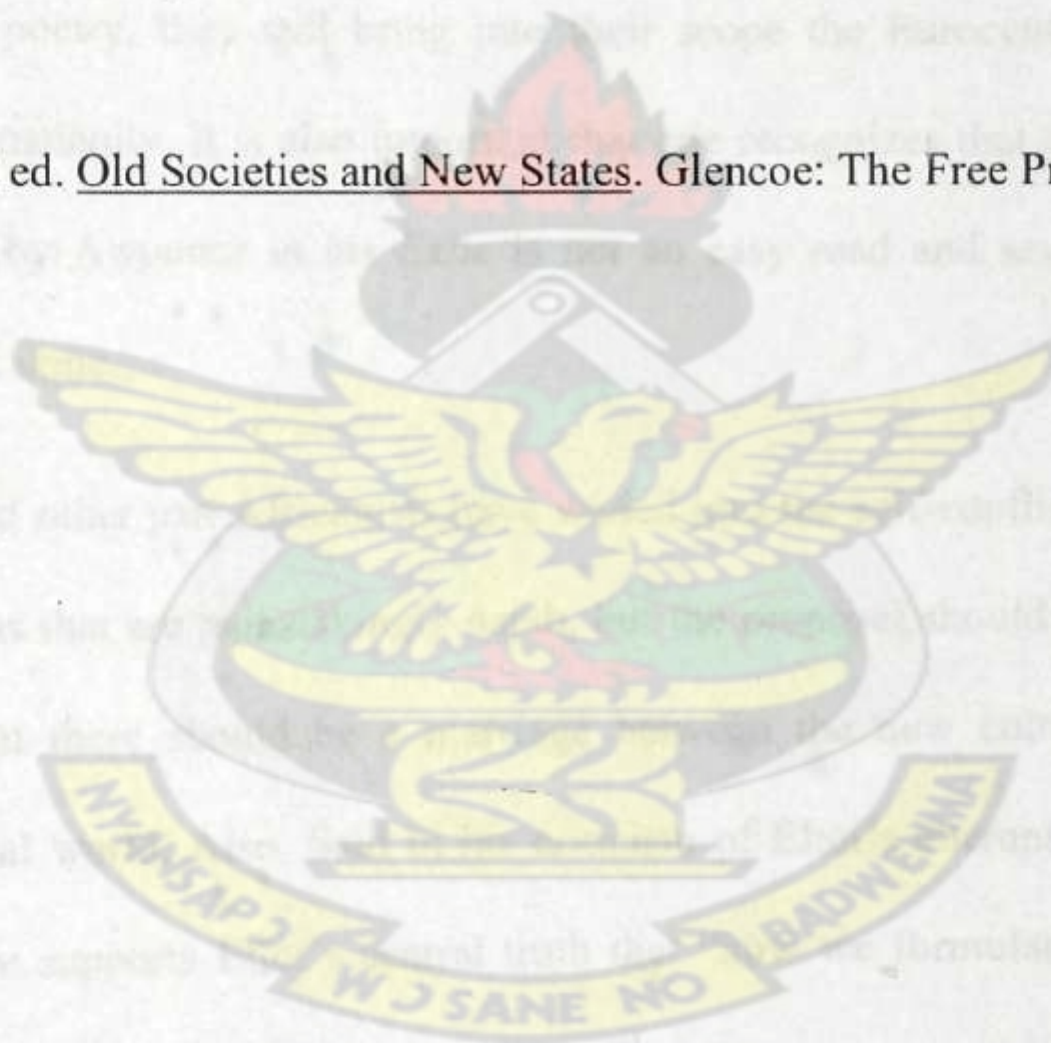
According to the persona, science, religion, national economies and the welfare systems have all broken down and he believes it will take these religious leaders to redeem the world.

This is the kind of synthesis Nkrumah and Mazrui propose to post-colonial Africa and Ghana—the marriage of the "gods." Anyidoho has within himself shown acceptance of religious beliefs that are much alien to his own past. Another significant lesson from Anyidoho's attitude is what Arnold believes. Arnold's belief is that culture is developed on the basis of sound religion and Anyidoho, in his call for these religious leaders to save the world admits that religion is a powerful tool for social and cultural formations. Awoonor also exhibits this tendency of accepting his heritage regardless of his harsh criticism of Christianity in *The Cathedral* and other poems.



## END NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> Anyidoho, Kofi. The Pan-African Ideal in Literature of the Black World. Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1989. p. 40
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid p. 33
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid p. 19
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid p. 9-10
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid p. 28
- <sup>6</sup> Baym *et al.* The Norton Anthology: American Literature 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1979. p. 358
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid p. 359
- <sup>8</sup> Geertz, Clifford ed. Old Societies and New States. Glencoe: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963 p. 49
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid p. 50
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid p. 50





## CONCLUSION

From the discussions above, it is safe to make the following conclusions: that Awoonor and Anyidoho have used poetry to promote and preserve their cultural heritage. However, it is also significant to note that the colonial influence has left that nervousness which has led Anyidoho, Awoonor and the post-colonized into the state of double consciousness. This double consciousness has developed in them a cultural dilemma often associated with all colonized. Much as Awoonor and Anyidoho promote and preserve their traditional, religious and social outlook through their poetry, they still bring into their scope the Eurocentric conception of religion, especially Christianity. It is also important that one recognizes that the journey to self rediscovery suggested by Awoonor in his *Exile* is not an easy road and several post-colonial theorists have admitted same.

However, Nkrumah and other pan-Africanists have waded into the self-conflict argument. They have proposed solutions that are painstakingly harsh, but the proposal should be closely looked into. They suggest that there should be a marriage between the new cultures since all are heritages of the colonial world. Also, Said in his criticism of Eliot's attempt to synthesize the past, present and future supports Eliot's central truth that "how we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding and views of the present."<sup>1</sup>

It is relevant to accept the fact that the colonial experience in Ghana, like the rest of Africa, has left a deep cultural wound in the self-identity of the colonized which has taken a long time to heal. As to whether there is any solution in sight, a conscious effort has to be put into reconstructing the past with regard to future aspiration and self image. It is in this light that Awoonor's third phase development in poetry reaches out to cultural synthesis. He, as a result of



the cultural synthesis, has procured his own identity. Finally, the attempt by Awoonor and Anyidoho to collect our cultural heritage in the form of poetry is most commendable and must be supported by all intellectuals from Ghana, especially, those in the arts so that Ghana's cultural heritage will not be overshadowed by the wave of global culture through the internet and cross-cultural interactions. The preservation of this cultural heritage helps people to know themselves and to identify with one another. It also prevents anarchy which is the absence of a well defined culture of a people.

KNUST





## END NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> Said, E. W. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993. p. 4

# KNUST





## WORKS CITED

### Primary Sources:

Anyidoho, Kofi. Earthchild with Brain Surgery. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 1985.

Awoonor, Kofi. Until the Morning After. Michigan: McNaughton & Gunn, 1987.

### Secondary Sources:

Anyidoho Kofi. The Pan African Ideal in Literature of the Black World. Accra: University Press, 1989.

Akogbeto, C. Patrice. Bilingualism in the Creative Writing Process: A Comparative Analysis of Kofi Anyidoho and Agbossassou. Accra: Department of English, University of Ghana, 1999.

Arnold, Matthew. Culture and Anarchy. ed. J. Dover Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.

Awoonor, Kofi and Adali-Mortty, G. Messages: Poems from Ghana. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1971.

Crowder, Michael. Colonial West Africa: Collected Essays. London: F Cass, 1978.

Doro, E. Marion and Stultz. M. Newell. Ed. Governing in Black Africa: Perspective on New States. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

Ed. Baym et al, eds. The Norton Anthology of American Literature. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1979.



Fanon, Frantz. The Wretched of the Earth. London: The Chaucer Press, 1974.

Geertz, Clifford. Ed. Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa. London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1963.

Goodwin. K. L. A Study of Ten Poets: Understanding African Poetry. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1982.

Gyekye, Kwame. African Cultural Values: An Introduction. Legon: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996.

Gyekye, Kwame. The Unexamined Life: Philosophy and the African Experience. Legon: Sankofa Publishing Company, 2004.

Morell. A. Robin. In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka. Seattle: Institute for Comparative and Foreign Area Studies, University of Washington, 1975.

Mowoe, Isaac James and Bjornson, Richard. Ed. Africa and the West: The Legacies of Empire. New York: Green Press, 1986.

Roscoe. A. Adrian. Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature. Cambridge: University Press, 1971.

Said, Edward W. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993.

Sarpong, Peter. Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974.

Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature>.



[www.http://afrilingual.wordpress.com/2011/01/06/long-distance-runner](http://afrilingual.wordpress.com/2011/01/06/long-distance-runner).

Williams, Raymond. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. London: Fontana  
Paperbacks, 1976.

KNUST

