

## Book Review - The Black Rootedness

Book Title: *The Black Rootedness: 54 Poets from Africa to America*

Publisher: Elyssar Press

Pages: 287

Editor: Karla Brundage

Reviewer: Alfred Nyagaka Nyamwange

This extraordinary book, *The Black Rootedness: 54 Poets from Africa to America*, is indeed a journey of *sankofa*, an Akan Twi word meaning, a return to retrieve what has been forgotten or lost. The anthology melds voices, concerns, collaborations, and self-driven and joint efforts, much like the African song forms of collective, communal spirit that used to exist. The vision birthed by Karla Brundage after her travels in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, West Africa, where live performances were witnessed, is a culmination of thoughts, a cultural dialogue regardless of syntax, performance, and writing hiccups. The result is a multiplicity of identities, hybridity, interculturalism, and occurrences traversing across cultures. It features both seasoned writers with several poetry titles and new emerging voices.

One of the unique features of this collection is its Renshi poetry style, in which each partner's poem begins with the last line of their partner's response poem, thereby creating a linked conversation between the first 13 and 14 pairs that make up the volume. It is a contribution of poems from two continents, showcasing members of the creative vibes of African Diaspora and Africa, a meeting between poets from the East and West Oakland communities of the USA and poets from East and West Africa, respectively.

The first section presents poems from the Patrice Lumumba Poetry Collective in East Oakland and those from Kisii University in Kenya and affiliates of the Kistretch International Festival, an annual poetry event held in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi and on the shores of Lake Victoria, that made (EO2EA) exchanges, along with members of the West Oakland community from the USA meeting those from the Cultural Intellectual Association (CIA) of Lagos, Nigeria, in West Africa, also known as (WO2WA) exchanges.

The book has two parts. The first one features the poetic exchanges between Kisii University poets, Kenya, and East Oakland that were performed in Google Meeting workshops. Some of them include Chase Jamson, Mefiri, and Alfred's "My Song, My Life," biographical undertakings rooting readers into the deep entrails of growing up and the inclination towards ancestral roots. Landon and Josephat give us a glimpse of their home turfs, freed, broken, and empowered by love ("A Powerful Woman") and gripped by the tensions of death (Neal and Be Sean). Mimi and Stanley bespeak healing scabs and a galaxy of possibilities unconfined behind blockers, the

substantial influence, and the magnificence of beauty shaped by a matriarch. Adrienne and Kelvin personify hope and dreams, graceful aging, walking, and yearning for a home niche owned, forgotten, and yearned for.

Ladirev and Becca the Poet mesmerize us with deserted dreams, coming from patched fences, growing up amidst blessings, and shaking hands with momma's voice. Donjuan and Lewis transition through the struggles of their ancestors, Nia Wilson, and dreams of one cemented on a grave through drawing, growing up with carpet, stumps, candles, stairs, patches, and a home turf where food and culture are intertwined. Darius and Cornelius tackle the strangeness of their beingness, grappling with squalor and the blame game, dying and life lessons, dancing and twerking boots. Dee Allen and Evans delve into drugs and guns in East Oakland, and young African men rising among quaking voices, and the element of fear of tomorrow in the dust and exploitative atmosphere.

Halima and Caren broach the issue of growing up in the protective wings of Fanne Mae, the great grandmother and Bigmama, and yearning for a savior. They embark on a quest for identity, black womanhood, queenliness, sunshine, and God. Zakiyyah and John delve into the experience of sudden departures, reminiscing about bygone years filled with beautiful tunes, nostalgic aromas, country walls, and vibrant sunsets. They frolic amidst the legacies left by their grandparents. Njinga and Christopher ponder the thunderous crashing of events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, within a lockdown vista. They weep with the skies, shedding tears and calling out to Mama to intervene in the unjust pinning down of George Floyd by the police. Tessa and Lilian explore the hybrid identity of being in-between, finding a sense of belonging and fruitfulness through their connection to their fathers' dreams. They reflect on their upbringing, the pride of love, and the nostalgia of old music. Tongo and Bonface mesmerize us with their evocative descriptions of a new dawn and the resilience of the people amid greed and pride in Ubuntu dreams. They celebrate revolutionary laughter, settling into pain with a readiness to improve, applauding the nourishing mood of freedom and peace.

Part Two engages with poems between Nigeria and West Oakland. Nana and the 78th Psalmist capture the splutter of WhatsApp exchanges, showcasing ruined dreams and a desire to escape, while reading the conflicted writings situated between the ocean, mud, and the cottonwood tree, which brings relief through water. Adeyinka and Lisa speak of studying on the shoulders of Igbo warriors, transcending borders, and creating streets that invoke freedom by revisiting tragic and turbulent memories. Duana and Jeremiah reminisce about replacing life with placebo medicine, recalling the jungle of growing food, the legends of club teams, building sandcastles, and the act of turning back time. Godfrey and Amos revisit women walking in scriptures and sculptures, exploring Nubian hues, where brutality scars the promise of young men, yet they remember the vast voices and call out for a sense of home, renewal, and strength. Ifeanyichukwu and Kevin dabble in foxy origins, wrapped in the experience of coming and meeting, black men shuttling

between Oakland's finest and being branded as seagulls, journeying from West to East and coloring new life through writing and remembrance, with childhood phrases and reflections on aging and grace. Makeda and Josephmark offer hope amidst struggles, thundering in silence. Juliet and Iman present a woman's struggle with the kitchen belief that limits growth, comparing it to peeled grapes—black people eager to grow, embracing ancestral spirits and planting their own trees at home.

Koku and Ayodele dream of love without jealousy, jungles, or friction, seeking truth at the edge, outside the lines without color punctuations—the identification of "majick" at only five months old, perhaps a stroke of luck. Matthew and Iris highlight the anomalies that permeate various aspects of life, beautifully capturing the chaos of loss, describing a little black girl from Brooklyn and the stitches from her mother, the master of broken things, symbolizing personal wholeness and the pursuit of dreams.

Michael and Meg remember the ties they swallowed trapped in that body, attending to cloak, self fights to make the world different about her or in which the persona lost though illusive to die later and out there living, ready to stop dying. Rhema Sunshine and Shawna recall dear grandma in Hawaiian humidity and a mom who impacted humanity with humility. Poet E. Spoken and Uchechi recall blessings of history and inspiration in finding one's true self, rainbow-winged through tomorrow and ending hardships including rejection and feeling to be celebrated.

Victory digs into what mama told her to follow and finds love hid in a boy's palm. Wanda and Gemini revert to homecoming illusions and ancestry fires and spirits, the helium options of libations extraordinary, loving and knowing, for the Egungun and butterflies progress and the spiritual values.

The book climaxes in Gemini's Yoruba chants written in indelible marks of the native language, entitled 'Iwure alagbra.'

The book presents interactional possibilities in poets' multiforms, a collage of numerous presentational styles, intercultural potpourri. This is truly a Bakhtin melting point with cross-cultural implications, other languages, in continuous 'unfinisability' that makes poetry an ongoing process, reminiscent of past incidents with names of places, of gods and spirits scattered like confetti, making the book rich, challenging, and unlimited. It is a long journey through ages, made possible through the collection of different memories that are truly inspiring and unforgettable. It is even a miracle that Karla can weave such a work into a single volume in black and white.