



"A History We Can Neither Accept nor Deny: Feeding and Purging the Spirits in Maya Angelou's *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*"

Douglas Taylor^{1,2} 

Published online: 9 June 2020

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2020

Abstract

This essay examines Maya Angelou's 1980 memoir *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*. From 1962 to 1965, Angelou was part of a community of African American writers, artists, intellectuals, and activists who settled in Ghana as its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, seemed poised to usher in a new era of pan-African unity. Hoping to situate her identity within this dream of global pan-Africanism, Angelou narrates her relationship to Africa through the trope of diaspora-as-family. Her use of this metaphor, however, is complicated by her growing awareness of the involvement of Africans in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as both victims and participants. While other scholarship on *All God's Children* focuses on Angelou's supposed inability to achieve a diasporan identity, I argue that Angelou is successfully able to come to terms with the trauma of the middle passage by listening to the "voices" of her enslaved ancestors (as they emerge within her own consciousness), and participating in an indigenous Ewe mourning ritual that she inadvertently precipitates. As a result of these experiences, Angelou comes to realize that while narration is important to the formation of both identity and community, African-descended people living in the Americas must first grapple with a historical trauma that exceeds the limits of narration. It is only when Angelou realizes this that she allows herself to be receptive to the spectral voices of her enslaved ancestors and the power of mourning to forge community across divides of time and place.

Keywords Maya Angelou · University of Ghana · Pan-Africanism · Diaspora · Black Expatriate Authors · Julian Mayfield · Efuia Sutherland

✉ Douglas Taylor
douglas.taylor@csueastbay.edu

¹ Cal State East Bay, Hayward, CA, USA

² Oakland, CA 94610, USA

Maya Angelou was one of a group of about two hundred African American expatriates who chose to make Ghana their home in the decade following Ghanaian independence. According to Angelou, apart from Drs. W.E.B. DuBois and Alphaeus Hunton, who had been personally invited to Ghana by President Kwame Nkrumah to work on the *Encyclopedia Africana*, the black expatriate community comprised four groups (904–05). The first group was made up of teachers and farmers, some with children, who established themselves in the countryside (905). The second group comprised black Americans affiliated with the American government (905). The third group was part of a small business community (905). And the fourth group, of which Angelou was a part, considered themselves to be exiles or “political émigrés” (905). According to Angelou, the members of this last group were fiercely “dedicated to Africa, and Africans at home and abroad,” but they were “gaping with hungers” (904–05). In leaving the USA for Ghana, they hoped to heal the traumas of the Middle Passage, slavery, and Jim Crow segregation, and internalized racism by finding acceptance and a new life in an independent African nation. Maya Angelou, who lived in Ghana from 1962–65 where she worked as an administrative assistant here at the University of Ghana, explores the yearning for healing, reconnection, and acceptance among this circle of black intellectuals in her 1985 memoir, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (<https://africasacountry.com>) (Jacobs 2018).

While there are many ways one could approach Angelou’s memoir, an important thread running through the text is Angelou’s attempt to narrate the relationship between continental Africans and Africans of the diaspora through the metaphor of family. As familiar as such a metaphor may be to those sympathetic to the pan-African project, Angelou repeatedly stumbles in her attempts to narrate the diaspora. Rather than being due to any lack of historical knowledge or linguistic facility on Angelou’s part, this essay will argue that it is the trauma of the middle passage and the trans-Atlantic slave trade that causes her to question the possibility of a diasporic community. Gregory Smithers describes what’s at stake in Angelou’s attempt to imagine a pan-African identity when he states that:

...Angelou began to question not only her romantic image of Africa, but the Africanness of her identity. She questioned the notion that there existed a unity in blackness, and wondered whether, for blacks in the diaspora, there truly is such a thing as the “African personality...” The journey to a deeper understanding of identity is perilous, indeed, and in traveling to Ghana in the early 1960s, Angelou was confronted with the possibility that Africa was not home after all. (492)

Ultimately, Angelou realizes that there can be no diasporic African “family” without a mourning of those lost in the Middle Passage, and a celebration of those who survived. Their spirits must be fed and mourned as a condition for the possibility of such community (Angelou 963, 1051).

Describing her relationship to Ghana, Angelou says that she became infatuated with Ghana the way “a young girl falls in love, heedless and with slight chance of finding the emotion requited” (902). Being in a majority black country in which people who looked like her occupied the highest offices and most elevated positions throughout the land reaffirmed for Angelou that black people were capable of interpreting the world

and themselves without the assistance of whites, and that we had both the right and the capacity for self-determination (899). “[F]or the first time in our lives,” she writes, “the color of our skin was accepted as correct and normal” (889). “We lived under laws constructed by Blacks, and if we violated those laws, we were held responsible by Blacks” (948).

There are any number of examples one could choose to illustrate the hunger for acceptance that Angelou describes in the black American expatriate community. One of the better examples might be the young couple who arrived from Chicago, claiming: “We have come to Mother Africa to suckle from her breasts” (917). Despite the many familial metaphors in Angelou’s narrative, she and her friends are the first to remind this couple that they were weaned in childhood and that the African continent is too complex to be described by a gender-specific metaphor (918). Annoyed, but still feeling a degree of empathy for this working-class couple who saved for two years in order to be able to afford their airfare, Angelou writes: “They were just two more people in an unceasing parade of naïve travelers who thought that an airline ticket to Africa would erase the past and open wide the gates to a perfect future” (919).

Not that Angelou herself was immune from these yearnings. In fact, Angelou suspects that part of the annoyance that she and her friends feel with this couple comes from the fact that they remind them of their own neediness and naiveté when they first arrived in Ghana (919). At that time, Angelou mostly satisfied her yearning for reconnection by identifying aspects of African American culture that seemed to align with Ghanaian culture. For example, commenting on her love for the Ghanaian people, she writes:

Their skins were the colors of my childhood cravings; peanut butter, licorice, chocolate, and caramel. Theirs was the laughter of home, quick and without artifice. The erect and graceful walk of the women reminded me of my Arkansas grandmother, Sunday-hatted, on her way to church. I listened to men talk, and whether or not I understood their meaning, there was a melody as familiar as sweet potato pie, reminding me of my Uncle Tommy Baxter in Santa Monica, California. (903)

Although Angelou and her friends object to the mindset of the young couple who infantilize themselves vis-à-vis “Mother Africa,” thinking only of the nourishment they might draw from their new environment, her own elation at living in an independent, majority black nation has led her to express similar emotions. Reflecting back upon some of her favorite childhood treats, she describes the various skin tones that she sees in Ghana as if they too might be consumed in order to nourish her own hunger for a place that feels like home. Through memory, or perhaps what Toni Morrison, in her novel, *Beloved* has called *re-memory*,¹ Angelou attempts to join her impressions of the Ghanaian people with the memories she has of family back in the USA, suggesting a kind of trans-Atlantic familiarity and *familiality* that reverses the violent disruption of the Middle Passage. Within this extended diasporan family, Angelou fashions herself as “the prodigal child” who:

having strayed, been stolen or sold from the land of her fathers, having squandered her mother's gifts and having laid down in cruel gutters, had at last arisen and directed herself back to the welcoming arms of the family where she would be bathed, clothed with fine raiment and seated at the welcoming table. (903)

As critical readers, it is important that we question the aptness of Angelou's allusion to the "Parable of the Prodigal Son." Is Angelou so eager to attribute meaning and significance to the possibility of a "return" to Africa that she overlooks the ways that this story does not apply to herself or other black Americans?

The biblical story of the prodigal son is a very patriarchal story. It involves two brothers competing for their father's approval. As such, it has much in common with the story of Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, and Jacob and Esau to name just a few of the biblical stories that in which brother is pitted against brother. These stories resonated with the Ancient Israelites because of the law of primogeniture, which dictated that, upon the father's death, his firstborn son would receive twice his brothers' share of the inheritance. There are no mothers and daughters present in the biblical version of this parable. And this is not just a matter of literary economy; it is a reflection of a patriarchal society in which the father's blessing indicated the manner in which wealth would be transmitted from one generation to the next (www.jewishencyclopedia.com) (Hirsch and Kasonowicz 2018).

There is a long history of African Americans using the Bible to interpret our historical and political situation in the USA. This can be seen in Negro spirituals ranging from "Go Down, Moses" to "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," and in sermons like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I've Been to the Mountaintop." Traditionally, in these interpretations, white slaveholders, segregationists, and racists figure as Pharaoh, the USA figures as Egypt or Babylon, and African Americans figure as oppressed or exiled Israelites. These biblical narratives appealed to African American preachers and congregants because they feature a God of justice that intervenes in history on the side of the oppressed. The more personal God of mercy and forgiveness disclosed in some readings of the New Testament may not have seemed forceful enough to contend with the oppressive violence of enslavement and Jim Crow segregation. It is, however, the parable of the prodigal son in the New Testament that Angelou turns to in this early attempt to narrate the relationship between Mother Africa and the children of the diaspora.

In Angelou's refashioning of the parable of the prodigal son to express her historic relationship to what she hopes will become her Ghanaian home, a tension emerges between history and metaphor that may be more disempowering than affirming to her and other African Americans seeking a connection to the continent. The very word "prodigal," of course, implies waste, extravagance, and imprudence. In referring to herself, and by extension all African Americans, as a "prodigal child," who has "strayed, been stolen or sold from the land of her fathers," Angelou confuses things that perhaps shouldn't be confused. While it makes perfect sense to refer to Black Americans as having been "stolen or sold" from the land of their fathers, it does not make sense to refer to them as having "strayed" as Angelou does here. And while Angelou, to her credit, introduces a mother to this previously all-male narrative, it is solely in reference to the claim that the prodigal child has "squandered her mother's gifts." Assuming that those gifts refer to African cultural traditions, again, it does not

seem accurate to paint the victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as having squandered what was taken from them. Of course, the point of this whole passage is that the prodigal child has “at last arisen and directed herself back to the welcoming arms of... family,” but in taking on the blame for things that were beyond her control has she paid too high a price for this reunion?

It may seem like hair-splitting to focus on an ill-conceived metaphor in a relatively brief passage from Angelou’s memoir. The metaphor is not a good fit, but no metaphor is perfect, and readers don’t have to do much work to get the general sense of what Angelou is aiming at. There are, however, several other moments in the text in which Angelou seems plagued by a similarly humiliating self-doubt that make it unlikely that the dissonance between history and metaphor here are purely accidental.

For instance, when a receptionist at the Ghana Broadcasting office responds to her inquiry about a job with cruel condescension. Based on physical appearance, Angelou remarks, they could have been related, yet the scorn with which she treats Angelou is more reminiscent of the racism that she has encountered from whites back in the USA (914). Troubled by this observation, Angelou queries:

Was it possible that I and all American Blacks had been wrong on other occasions? Could the cutting treatment we often experienced have been stimulated by something other than our features, our hair and color? Was the odor of... slavery so obvious that people were offended and lashed out at us automatically? Had what we judged as racial prejudice less to do with race and more to do with our... ancestors’ bad luck at having been caught, sold and driven like beasts? (914).

While Angelou’s self-figuration as a prodigal child at least enabled her to reconcile with an African extended family through repentance, here, the possibility of familial connection with a Ghanaian woman with whom she “could have been sisters, or... cousins far removed” is impeded by rejection, shame, and the self-doubt that accompanies a history of enslavement, a history Angelou refers to as one that African Americans can “neither accept nor deny” (914).

The specter of enslavement emerges again following a dinner at the home of her employer at *The Ghanaian Times*. Her employer and his wife are perfect hosts. He is Fanti. She is Ewe. They playfully joke with one another about their tribal differences. Whether it is this joking that influences Angelou is unclear, but her mind drifts to thoughts of her ancestors:

I loved to imagine a long-dead relative trading in... [the] marketplaces, fishing from that active sea and living in those exotic towns [i.e., fifteenth century Accra and Sekondi], but the old anguish would not let me remain beguiled. Unbidden would come the painful reminder—“Not all slaves were stolen, nor were all slave dealers European.” Suppose my great-grandfather was enslaved in that colorful town by his brother. Imagine my great-grandmother traded by her sister in that marketplace.

Were those laughing people who moved in the streets with such equanimity today descendants of slave-trading families? Did that one's ancestor sell mine or did that grandmother's grandmother grow fat on the sale of my grandmother's grandmother? (924)

Had her ancestors been enslaved by a “stronger and more clever” tribe? Did they refrain from enslaving others because they could find no one weaker than themselves? Is it better to be a descendant of victims or victimizers? (924). These are not questions that Angelou willingly entertains. They represent what she refers to as “ugly” and “hideous” thoughts that force themselves upon her (924). Angelou's use of the words “brother” and “sister” in her reflections on fifteenth-century Ghana insert a paradox into her metaphor of diaspora-as-family. In what sense can a man who enslaves your great-grandfather be considered your brother? In what sense can a woman who trades your great-grandmother in the marketplace be considered your sister?² Angelou hopes that getting to know her Fanti employer and his Ewe wife who use tribal differences to demonstrate love will help to dispel these fears, but it's hard to imagine how this could function retroactively. While comedies sometimes use marriage as a way of achieving an imaginary resolution to real social conflicts, the conflict between Angelou's vision of an African diasporic family and the historical reality of African participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, are too dark a subject to lend themselves to such treatment.

Not surprisingly, thoughts of Angelou's ancestors resurface again during a visit to the Cape Coast. Unlike many African Americans who made the Cape their first destination, Angelou says that she intentionally avoided the area for more than a year. Finally, when she does go, it is only to stop for gas. Or, at least, this is her intention. However, after leaving town, she finds herself overwhelmed by emotion and has to pull to the side of the road where she allows a procession of captive Africans pass through her imagination. Questions like the ones she asks before spontaneously come to mind:

What did they think and feel, my grandfathers, caught on those green Savannahs, under the baobab trees? How long did their families search for them? Did the dungeon wall feel chilly and its slickness strange to my grandmothers who were used to the rush of air against bamboo huts and the sound of birds rattling their grass roofs? (963-64)³

Only this time instead of seeking a means to ward off what she has previously referred to as “ugly” and “hideous” thoughts by imagining comedic resolutions of inter-tribal conflict, Angelou decides to let the questions come unimpeded. “There would be no purging, I knew unless I asked all the questions. Only then would the spirits understand that I was feeding them. It was a crumb, but it was all I had” (963). Here, Angelou achieves a crucial insight. She realizes that the purpose of these questions is not to solicit information, but to summon experience. While we may be perfectly capable of reconstructing and disseminating a great deal of the information surrounding the historical events that constituted enslavement and the middle passage, trauma, by definition, involves a kind of psychological and emotional excess that cannot adequately be narrated nor conceptualized within language.⁴ Instead of deploying yet another narrative frame for

these events as Angelou does with the parable of the prodigal son, Angelou resists any attempt to tell the story of the enslaved, and instead allows thoughts and images of her ancestors to pass through her imagination unimpeded. She refers to this process as feeding and purging: feeding the spirits and purging herself. Angelou's choice of words raises important questions: What do we owe the victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade? And how can we remember them without being consumed by those memories? Angelou suggests that we feed them by listening to their voices and their stories, and we purge ourselves by being receptive to the emotional impact of those stories.

Feelings associated with this incident reemerge for Angelou after a visit from Efua Sutherland, Director of Ghana's National Theater. Sutherland and Angelou had been introduced by the African American writer, Julian Mayfield, and became what Angelou called "sister-friends," so Angelou was not surprised when Sutherland pays her a visit. Very quickly she realizes that this is not just a social call. Sutherland is deeply upset about a story that she has read in the news about an Ashanti man who died two days before and whose body had not been claimed from the morgue. Although any death is a tragedy, Angelou initially has a hard time understanding why Sutherland has become so upset over the death of a stranger until she explains:

Never in Ghana has a body lain unclaimed for two days. That is why the newspaper reported it. It should have been on the front page. Headlines. Africans must be shocked into realizing what is happening to them. To us... We have begun to think like Europeans. Sister, mind you, our gods will become angry. I would be afraid to anger Jesus Christ, but I confess, the thought of angering African gods absolutely terrifies me. (1035)

Later, after Sutherland leaves, Angelou reflects:

I thought of the African gods whom Efua was loath to anger and decided that they must have been bristling with rage for centuries. How else explain the alliance with African greed and European infamy which built a slave stealing-selling industry lasting for over three centuries. Weren't the African gods showing their anger when they allowed the strongest daughters and sons to be carried beyond the seas horizon? How much had they been provoked to permit disease and droughts and malnutrition to lay clouds of misery on the land? I agreed with Efua. I certainly would not like to see the gods of Africa anymore riled up than they were already. (1036)

Initially, when reading this passage, one might expect that Angelou's reference to African gods "bristling with rage for centuries," referred to a righteous anger at the horrors of the slave trade. Disturbingly, Angelou instead, imagines this anger as a form of punishment directed at the victims of the trade. As before, Angelou allows questions about enslavement to spontaneously arise. However, one gets the feeling that these questions are merely a disguise for deeper theological speculation. Specifically, what kind of God or gods would allow such a massive violation of human life?

Earlier in the text when Angelou's son, Guy, is involved in a car accident that results in him having broken his neck, arm, and leg, Angelou is so distraught that she writes:

Had I been less timid, I would have cursed God. Had I come from a different background, I would have gone further and denied His very existence. Having neither the courage nor the historical precedent, I raged inside myself like a blinded bull in a metal stall (890).

One has to wonder whether a similar combination of timidity and rage causes Angelou to foreclose speculation about how to reconcile slavery and the middle passage with belief in a just God or gods, and to instead have recourse to a kind of apologetics that blames the victims of this historical atrocity. Like the interpretive frame from the parable of the prodigal son that Angelou uses earlier, this way of attributing meaning to the slave trade may be more disempowering than affirming to the descendants of the enslaved. At the very least, one would expect any adequate theology of black liberation, whether Christian or indigenously African, to conceptualize the anger of a God of justice to be directed against oppressors and not the oppressed. As black liberation theologian, James Cone, frequently argued: the God of the Bible is a god of the oppressed.⁵

It's not until Maya Angelou takes a trip to the southeastern part of Ghana and meets a group of Ewe market women that she discovers an adequate way of confronting the specters of enslavement. While there, Angelou is mistaken by an Ewe woman for the daughter of a friend. The woman is insulted when Angelou attempts to explain first in Fanti, then French, and then English that she doesn't speak Ewe. It is only when Angelou's guide, Mr. Adadevo, explains to the woman that Angelou is an American Negro that she understands. But then, the woman is so stricken with grief that she laces her fingers together, places them over her head, and rocks from side to side moaning. The woman takes Angelou from stall to stall in the market, where every Ewe woman to whom she is introduced responds with the same gesture. Hands over head, fingers interlaced, and moaning while rocking from side to side. The women offer Angelou gifts of tomatoes, onions, peppers, yams, cocoa yams, and cassava, and Angelou is so moved by their emotion and their generosity that she implores Mr. Adadevo to explain. "This is the way we mourn," he tells her (1048):

The first woman thought you were the daughter of a friend. But now you remind them of someone, but not anyone they knew personally... This is a very sad story, and I can't tell it all or well... During the slavery period Keta was a good sized village. It was hit very hard by the slave trade... In fact, at one point every inhabitant was either killed or taken. The only escapees were children who ran away and hid in the bush. Many of them watched from their hiding places as their parents were beaten and put into chains. They saw the slaves set fire to the village. They saw mothers and fathers take infants by their feet and bash their heads against tree trunks rather than see them sold into slavery. What they saw they remembered and all that they remembered they told over and over.

These women are the descendants of those orphaned children. They have heard the stories often, and the deeds are still as fresh as if they happened during their

lifetimes. And you, Sister, you look so much like them, even the tone of your voice is like theirs. They are sure you are descended from those stolen mothers and fathers. That is why they mourn. Not for you but for their lost people. (1049-50)

That which cannot be narrated or conceptualized within language can still be mourned.

Mr. Adadevo's claim that he cannot tell the story all or well is not a function of imperfect memory and storytelling ability; it is a function of the traumatic nature of the tale itself, an acknowledgment of its extremity. From these Ewe market women, Angelou learns that stories are important, but they are not enough. Although the Ewe market women have told and heard stories of their kidnapped ancestors "over and over," they do not retell them to Angelou (That is left to Mr. Adadevo); their first priority is to mourn. They do not mourn for Angelou. After all, she has survived. They mourn for their "lost people," for that part of their history that can neither be accepted nor denied. And unbeknownst to them, the gifts that they bestow upon Angelou restore the "Mother's gifts" Angelou accused herself of "squandering" in her parable of the prodigal child. Thus, their mourning heals themselves and Angelou as well, who writes:

The women wept and I wept. I too cried for the lost people, their ancestors and mine. But I was also weeping with a curious joy. Despite the murders, rapes, and suicides, we had survived. The middle passage and the auction block had not erased us. Not humiliations nor lynchings, individual cruelties nor collective oppression had been able to eradicate us from the earth. We had come through despite our own ignorance and gullibility, and the ignorance and rapacious greed of our assailants.

There was much to cry for, much to mourn, but in my heart I felt exalted knowing there was much to celebrate. Although separated from our languages, our families and customs, we had dared to continue to live. We had crossed the unknowable oceans in chains and had written its history into "Deep River, my home is over Jordan." Through the centuries of despair and dislocation, we had been creative, because we faced down death by daring to hope. (1051)

Angelou is ultimately successful in her quest for a diasporic identity,⁶ but this identity does not take the form that she initially expected. While Angelou is by no means, forced to abandoned her original conception of diaspora-as-family, she is forced to complicate it by an authentic engagement with the inexpressible horrors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Being receptive to the questions and images that spontaneously arise within her, and allowing herself to feed and mourn the stolen lives of her ancestors turns out to be the gateway that she had been seeking all along to a deeper, more authentic experience of family than any she had previously known.

Further Reading

1. The concept of re-memory first appears in Toni Morrison *Beloved* (New York: Knopf Doubleday 2004).

2. Katharina Schramm describes the ways that the conflict between the diaspora-as-family metaphor and the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade necessarily complicate diasporan “homecoming” projects when she writes:

Today, there are two important discursive moments in homecoming, both of which refer to the past. The first concerns the notion of an ancient and glorious African heritage as the basis for Black unity. It goes hand in hand with the proclamation of an “African family” which is formally articulated by Ghanaian and diasporan stakeholders alike. In this reconstruction of a common identity, differences between the continent and the diaspora are denied; or they are said to be eventually overcome in the “re-emergence of African civilisation...”. The second moment pertains to the slavery past—the ultimate rupture of previous unity and at the same time the beginning of the diaspora. To many diasporans, it is the opportunity of a return to the *slave sites*, and of connecting to that particular (diasporic) heritage, which motivates their journey. In the political discourse of returnees, slavery and the slave trade are ever-present.... We can, therefore, speak of a dynamics of unity and disintegration—the two poles of a continuum of identity claims on which the various persons involved in homecoming take on differing subject positions, depending on the context in which they act. (249)

3. According to Gregory Smithers:

There are two levels of literary memory at play here in Angelou’s narrative. First, there is the memory derived from the act of remembering and writing about her 1960s travels in the 1980s. Second, there is the memory that writers derive from their connection to a collective historical imaginary. In Angelou’s case, her historical imaginary is fired by the specter of the Middle Passage and New World slavery. Angelou filters her autobiographical recollections through these two layers of literary memory. She thus recalls how her early 1960s encounter with the place of slavery in Ghanaian historical consciousness was unsettling. Angelou’s initially romantic images of Africa and the belief that Ghana possessed a spiritual quality powerful enough to transform her soul were assaulted by the memory of the transatlantic slave trade. (491)

4. For the classic account of trauma’s inability to be adequately expressed within language, see Cathy Caruth *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: JHU Press 2019).
5. See James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1997).
6. In a very different take on this moment in the text, see Gruesser argues:

...this ending seems too easily manufactured at the last minute to resolve the problem of the book. The fact that Afro-Americans came from Africa was never in question. Angelou and other Black Americans journeyed to Africa to establish viable and ongoing connections; despite Angelou’s memorable epiphany at Keta, this is not accomplished. Like Wright, Smith, and Brooks, Angelou experiences disillusionment and alienation in Africa. However, instead of stressing the nightmare side of Africanist

discourse as her predecessors do, Angelou represses these feelings, refuses to relinquish her romantic image of Africa, and opts for the dream side of Africanist discourse. (18)

References

- Angelou, M. (2004). *The collected autobiographies of Maya Angelou*. New York: Random House.
- Caruth, C. (2019). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Baltimore: JHU Press.
- Cone, J. H. (1997). *God of the oppressed*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Gruesser, J. C. (1990 Spring 1990). Afro-American travel literature and Africanist discourse. *Black American Literature Forum*, 24(1), 5–20.
- Hirsch, E. G. & Kasonowicz I. M. “JewishEncyclopedia.com.” “Primogeniture.” *JewishEncyclopedia.com*, www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12362-primogeniture. Accessed: July, 11, 2018.
- Jacobs, S. (2018)“When Maya Angelou lived in Egypt and Ghana.” *Africa Is a Country*, africasacountry.com/2014/05/when-maya-angelou-lived-in-ghana. Accessed: July 11, 2018.
- Morrison, T. (2004). *Beloved*. New York: Knopf Doubleday.
- Schramm, K. (2006). Imagined pasts-present confrontations: Literary and ethnographic explorations into explorations into pan-African identity politics. In S. Arndt & M. S. von Brisinski (Eds.), *Africa, Europe, and (Post)Colonialism: Racism, Migration and Disapora in African Literatures* (pp. 243–256). Bayreuth University.
- Smithers, G. D. (2011). Challenging a pan-African identity: The autobiographical writings of Maya Angelou, Barack Obama, and Caryl Phillips. *Journal of American Studies*, 45(3), 483–502.

Publisher’s Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.